



# NFPs in practice

Ways to improve the implementation of national forest programmes



**M**ore than a decade ago, countries formally recognized the importance of comprehensive forest policy frameworks for achieving sustainable forest management (SFM) and agreed on a common approach known as national forest programmes (NFPs). Acknowledging the validity of diverse approaches, countries also adopted a set of principles designed to guide NFP development and implementation. Today, NFP processes are under way in more than 130 countries.

To better understand how NFPs work to practice, FAO and the NFP Facility surveyed countries in 2010. This policy brief summarizes the results of those surveys—the experiences gained and lessons learned that can improve future implementation.

## **1 A comprehensive governance framework for forest-related activities is essential for progress towards SFM.**

Several issues – such as climate change, forest law enforcement and the ‘green’ economy – have emerged that may have a direct effect on the way forests are managed and used. National and subnational forest-related initiatives have proliferated and there is an increasing need for greater consistency and coordination between them. The wide adoption of NFPs represents an opportunity to build a commonly agreed approach to the integration and coordination of initiatives. This would strengthen national forest governance frameworks and accelerate the transition towards SFM.

Most countries have established structures, assigned personnel and achieved results through their NFPs, but few NFPs have been able to coordinate all forest-related initiatives at the country level as originally intended. In many countries they are seen as strategic planning documents or as just one instrument among many. Often, inadequate resources are allocated for establishing and managing an NFP process that is sufficiently inclusive, flexible and effective. As a consequence, countries often have parallel structures and processes for different initiatives and lack effective coordination.



## 2 While many NFP processes have been effective in developing policies and action plans, more emphasis is needed on implementation and monitoring.

NFPs have been conceived as long-term iterative processes. They involve the formulation of policies, strategies and action plans, their implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and subsequent adjustment to meet emerging needs. In many countries, NFP processes have been instrumental in developing or revising forest policies and action plans. A majority of existing national forest policy statements and NFP documents have been updated since 2000.

A key shortcoming of many NFPs, however, is a lack of policy implementation, with the result that they have had low impact in the field and generated few tangible benefits. Policies arising from NFP processes are most likely to be implemented if:

- strategic ambition is balanced by realistic expectations of financial means and implementation capacity;
- there is a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, their expected contributions, and the benefits they will obtain;
- the regulatory framework is consistent with a newly agreed forest policy or is revised in a timely manner;
- there are subnational plans to translate national strategies into action while allowing local-level prioritization and ownership;
- results are achieved in the field that provide stakeholders with benefits;
- outcomes do not alienate legitimate interest groups and ensure fairness and justice.

To ensure learning, implementation must be monitored and policies evaluated. NFPs should have mechanisms for incorporating feedback into ongoing processes of policy, legislative and institutional reform so that goals, strategies and actions can be adapted over time.

## 3 To be country-owned and country-led, NFPs need sufficient capacity and authority.

In the international dialogue on forests, countries have identified national sovereignty and country leadership as a key principle of NFPs. Overall, this principle is being put into practice: most countries assert that they own and lead their NFPs.

While donors and development partners often play important roles in supporting an NFP process, there is a risk that they will also undermine it. For example, institutional arrangements to implement donor support for NFPs sometimes take a project approach, with the result that the NFP is considered a project rather than a long-term process.

Although countries have shown initiative in establishing NFPs, the agencies that head them can struggle with issues of leadership. NFPs are often led by forest administrations that lack the power and capacity to coordinate, communicate, negotiate, mediate and manage change across sectors. Important emerging forest-related initiatives, such as on climate-change, governance and tenure reform, may be located elsewhere, including in other ministries. For an NFP to give strategic direction it must provide leadership and coordination both within and beyond the forest sector. Its steering body, therefore, must have the authority, capacity and determination to lead at the national level.

Leadership models must suit the national context and be driven internally. Leadership continuity depends on the commitment of financial resources for the NFP structure, which in turn may be regarded as an indicator of a country's political will to embrace an NFP process. In many countries, the low priority afforded the forest sector means that insufficient funds are allocated for the implementation of NFPs. As a result, implementation may occur only in local pilot areas, benefiting local stakeholders but not generating tangible benefits at the national level.

Options for strengthening governance through NFPs are:

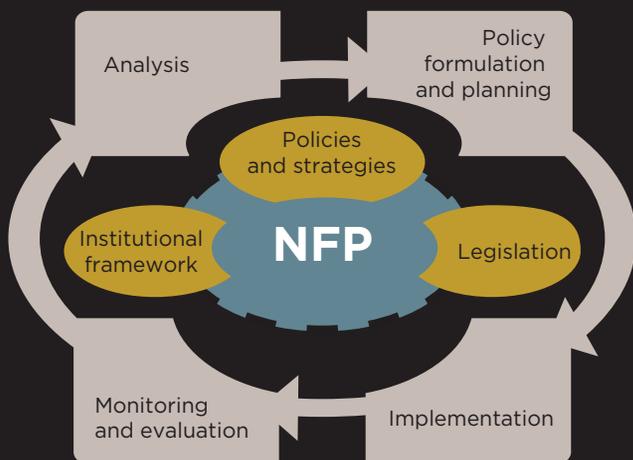
- positioning the NFP leadership at an elevated administrative or political level, such as a high-level inter-ministerial body;
- providing adequate administrative and budget planning for consultation, coordination and communication;
- creating flexible arrangements that will promote the sustained involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, including in the implementation of strategies and plans;
- promoting the inclusion of the NFP in larger frameworks and consultation processes (e.g. on sustainable development, climate change, environment and energy).

A lean, efficient and affordable NFP structure is most likely to be durable.

## What are NFPs?

NFPs are a framework for developing and implementing comprehensive forest policies in pursuit of SFM at the country level. The framework is built on specific principles that can be clustered in three groups: national sovereignty and country leadership; consistency within and integration beyond the forest sector; and participation and partnership.

The figure depicts the NFP framework as a way of coordinating the development of policies and strategies and their consistent implementation through laws and institutional frameworks at the country level.





#### 4 Involving stakeholders is critical for the legitimacy and effectiveness of an NFP.

When adopted as a commonly agreed approach towards SFM in the mid 1990s, countries stressed the need for appropriate participatory mechanisms to involve all interested parties in NFP processes. Overall, countries have made considerable progress in strengthening participation. Today, there is a broadly shared recognition of the importance of involving public and private stakeholders at all levels and an increased effort to do so.

In most countries, the participation of local groups and the private sector in forest-related decision-making is increasing. Nevertheless, insufficient access to information and a lack of organization and capacity still hinders the involvement of certain stakeholder groups – especially indigenous peoples, women and local community groups – in NFP processes. There is a need to increase stakeholder participation in the implementation of NFP-driven policies and strategies. Such involvement can be encouraged by supporting capacity-building in such groups.

In increasing participation, NFPs should ensure:

- the sufficient involvement of high-level political players – to increase the likelihood that politically sensitive recommendations derived from stakeholder forums will be taken up;
- the adequate (but not overwhelming) involvement of technicians, because a lack of technical expertise can lead to outcomes that are difficult to implement in the field;
- that other economic sectors are sufficiently engaged;
- that the potential of civil-society actors, especially indigenous groups and women, is fully realized;
- the involvement of private-sector stakeholders.





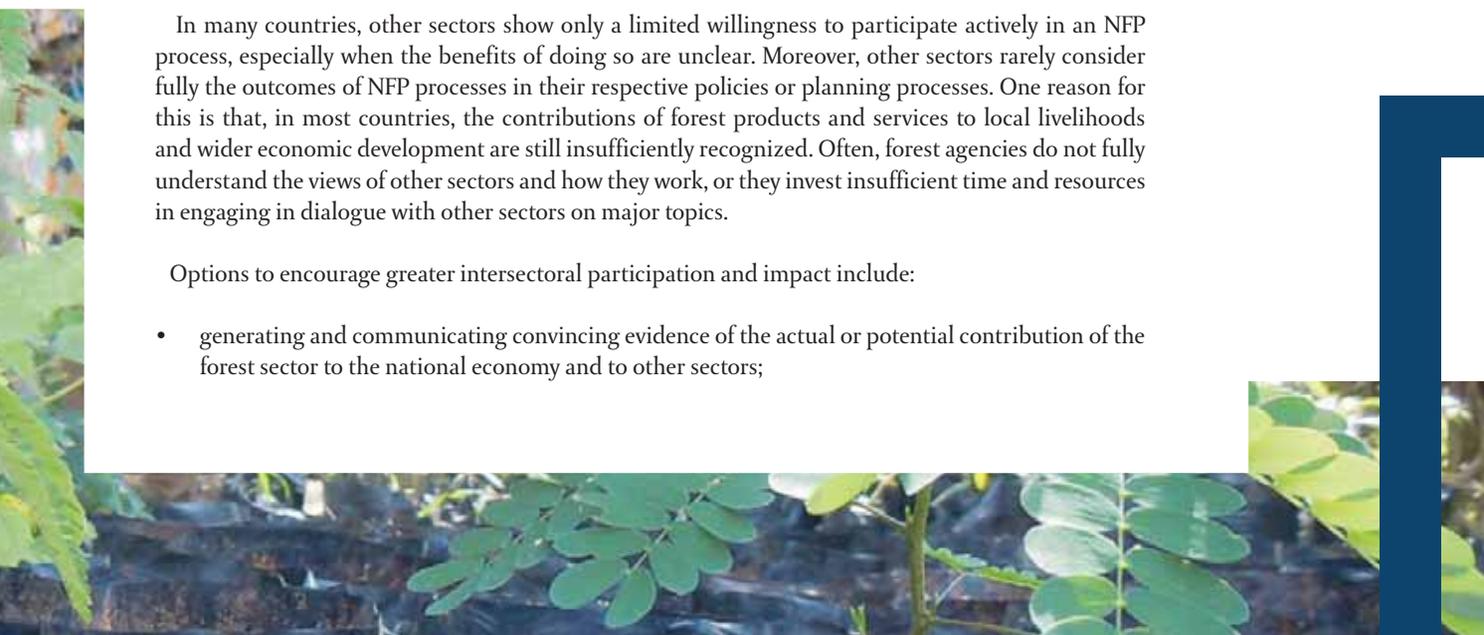
## 5 To be effective, NFPs demand a broad intersectoral approach.

The need for an intersectoral approach at all stages is one of the agreed principles of NFPs. NFPs should be integrated into wider programmes for sustainable land use involving sectors such as agriculture, energy and industrial development. This is rarely the case in practice, however, and the mandate and role of an NFP in coordinating forest-related activities across sectors is often neither clear nor widely accepted.

In many countries, other sectors show only a limited willingness to participate actively in an NFP process, especially when the benefits of doing so are unclear. Moreover, other sectors rarely consider fully the outcomes of NFP processes in their respective policies or planning processes. One reason for this is that, in most countries, the contributions of forest products and services to local livelihoods and wider economic development are still insufficiently recognized. Often, forest agencies do not fully understand the views of other sectors and how they work, or they invest insufficient time and resources in engaging in dialogue with other sectors on major topics.

Options to encourage greater intersectoral participation and impact include:

- generating and communicating convincing evidence of the actual or potential contribution of the forest sector to the national economy and to other sectors;





COMUNITARIA:  
1. Promueve el manejo y la gestión colectiva de los recursos naturales.

2. Los bosques tienen valor cultural y ayudan al cuidado

- encouraging joint activities by two or more ministries, such as to address key environmental, land-use or energy issues of common interest;
- marshalling the support of NGOs and the private sector to foster cooperation between sectors;
- involving NFP coordinators in the development of policies and strategies in other sectors that affect forests.

A strong, high-profile NFP aligned with long-term national priorities and commitments will provide invaluable support for the transition to SFM. There is a need to strengthen links to broader national development goals and other sectors.

## 6 Outlook

There is widespread consensus that NFPs play an important and sometimes essential role in improving forest governance and fostering SFM. Forests are part of the livelihoods and daily lives of vast numbers of people. An NFP, therefore, can have far-reaching effects. Among its other purposes, a widely supported and vibrant NFP will ensure that the forest sector contributes its fair share towards national goals such as good governance, democratization, decentralization and sustainable rural development ■

Further information on NFPs in Practice is available at:  
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