



DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE FOREST POLICY





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Ten things to know about forest policy

1. A national forest policy is a negotiated agreement among stakeholders on a vision and goals for a country's forests and trees, adopted by government.
2. Forest policy goals need to address societal issues and be closely aligned with a country's development goals.
3. Initiating a policy revision requires a sound understanding of the national context as well as support at a high political level and among stakeholders. Good timing is also essential.
4. Proper preparation is important, including communication and capacity building, leadership support, and adequate information on forests and possible future trends.
5. The participation of stakeholders across all key sectors is essential, as is joint ownership of the resulting policy and shared responsibility for policy implementation.
6. Drafting a forest policy is about accommodating different and often conflicting views on how to use and protect forests. This requires good negotiation and facilitation skills.
7. Agreement among stakeholders is needed on implementation, including on the re-alignment of legal and institutional frameworks with the new policy, and on responsibilities.
8. Strong and professional communication from the outset and the building of sufficient capacity for those participating in development and implementation are crucial for success.
9. The new forest policy and a strategy to put it into practice should be adopted by government at high levels to demonstrate commitment and guide authorities.
10. An ongoing institutional arrangement that promotes and facilitates continuous dialogue is essential for the effective implementation of a national forest policy.



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The building of sufficient capacity in the development and implementation of forest policies are crucial for their success.

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What is a national forest policy?

A national forest policy is a negotiated agreement between the government and other stakeholders on a shared vision for forests. It sets out the goals for the management and use of forests and trees and outlines the strategies for achieving those goals. Effective forest policies address society's needs and development goals while balancing different stakeholder interests, many of which cut across sectors. They are concise, and they aim to be easily understood by the broadest possible spectrum of society. To enable adaptation to diverse contexts and changing conditions, they are flexible in their implementation.

Linking with national development goals

Costa Rica has transformed its approach to development from one based predominantly on extensive agricultural production and cattle raising, with an associated high rate of deforestation, in the 1960s to, today, one based on natural resources and forest conservation. Declaring sustainable development as a national objective in 1994, the government provided incentives for reforestation, forest management and preservation and established innovative systems for payments for environmental services, as well as a strong ecotourism sector.

Forests have a wide diversity of stakeholders, each with legitimate but often conflicting interests. A national forest policy, therefore, must meet many of society's needs, not just those of the forest sector.

A national forest policy can play an immensely important role in society – helping, for example, to achieve national development goals, mitigate climate change, provide a sustainable source of renewable materials, and maintain an intact environment. This is the challenge and opportunity for forest policy-makers today.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders are those people and institutions who depend on or benefit from forests or who decide on, control or regulate access to them.



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Why develop a forest policy?

If all forest stakeholders pursue their own interests and agendas independently, the potential for conflict and waste is high. On the other hand, a mutually agreed, negotiated national forest policy can:

- » provide a broadly shared sense of direction for decisions and actions related to forests
- » guide the development of effective institutional frameworks and policy instruments, including forest legislation
- » improve communication, coordination and collaboration between stakeholders, including in other sectors
- » encourage adequate and ongoing financial support for the sector
- » provide a basis for international policy discussions and technical assistance cooperation
- » help decision-making on new issues, particularly those where quick, difficult or controversial decisions must be made.

Policy and legislation

Forest policies and forest legislation are complementary tools. All legislation, including that pertaining to forests, is drafted with certain policies in mind. Forest legislation, therefore, should be based on and guided by a forest policy, not *vice versa*.

A forest law should ensure the proper distribution and enforcement of rights and responsibilities related to forests. It may set out those parts of the forest policy it is designed to implement. It may also prohibit certain conduct, provide for sanctions, and offer a solid foundation for action in the face of political change.

When to change a policy

Any sector that does not maintain strong links with the national development agenda will be sidelined. The forest sector is no exception; a national forest policy should be revised when to do so will strengthen the sector's role in the pursuit of national goals.

In initiating a national forest policy process, good timing is essential. Critical conditions include the presence of high-level support; a shared sense among stakeholders of what the process should achieve; and the availability of funds to run the process.

Factors that can predispose government to consider policy reform include a shift in the wider policies of a country; evidence that existing policies are mismatched with realities on the ground; conflicts over forest use; and international commitments and the funding opportunities associated with them.



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Natural crises that call attention to specific problems can predispose government to consider policy reform.



Post-crisis adjustment of forest policy

Emerging from a decade of political turmoil, officials of The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia realized that the country's approach to governing forests was in desperate need of revision.

Although forest resources were generally in good condition it was clear that forest management was unsustainable and that the forest agencies constituted a drain on government finances. By revising its forest policy the new government also sought to demonstrate its eagerness and capacity to undertake economic and social reform.

Once a decision is made to embark on a forest policy development process, good preparation will improve the chances of success. In particular this involves ensuring:

- » high-level leadership and support
- » the meaningful participation of all key stakeholders
- » the availability of adequate information on forests to enable the assessment of emerging needs and possible future trends.

Preparation entails the drafting of work plans, timetables and budgets and the setting up of the necessary bodies and meetings. It also requires the building of the capacity needed to manage the process and to engage stakeholders in a constructive dialogue.

Participation and negotiation

Developing a national forest policy is about accommodating different interests in the use and protection of forests – interests that sometimes conflict. Reconciling conflicting views, identifying common interests and working out mutually acceptable solutions requires good negotiation and facilitation skills. Special efforts are often needed to ensure that the voices of certain stakeholders – such as minority groups, the rural poor, women, youth and the general public – are heard.

A bottom-up, participatory, multi-stakeholder process is a powerful way to develop a national forest policy: it helps to build a sense of joint ownership of the resulting policy and ensure its relevance in times of political change. While such a process is costly, in the long term a lack of one may cost even more. Many countries use the multi-stakeholder platforms of their national forest programmes (NFPs) to help facilitate a participatory process.

Decisions on forests and trees often have wide-ranging effects that go well beyond the forest sector. Ideally, therefore, stakeholders from a range of sectors are involved in the forest policy development process. Such broad participation will give the forest policy greater legitimacy in and relevance to the national development agenda.

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National forest programmes

NFPs are a framework agreed by countries for developing and implementing comprehensive forest policies in pursuit of SFM at the country level. NFP processes and platforms are commonly used to develop or revise forest policies and to facilitate their implementation. NFPs seek to foster country leadership, broad participation, the integration of forest aspects into broader development goals, and inter-sectoral coordination.



A national forest policy can serve as a reference to guide decisions on emerging issues, such as climate change.

Matching aims and means

National forest policies may set ambitious strategic goals. To be effective, however, they also need to be realistic about obstacles and to consider ways of overcoming them.

A national forest policy sets specific objectives in the pursuit of its strategic goals. Usually, a mix of policy instruments and stakeholder action is used to achieve these objectives. The policy should be clear about who is responsible for what action: many policies now focus not only on governmental responsibilities because much can also be done by the private sector, local communities and other stakeholders.

Aims and means

When India's forest policy was reformed to encourage and facilitate farm forestry, the incentives and disincentives available to farmers were reviewed. In many states, a mix of educational and advisory efforts and financial incentives, coupled with the removal of disincentives, led to a significant increase in farm forestry.



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Adoption and communication

No matter how well it is crafted, a national forest policy is of no value unless it is adopted and implemented. It should be adopted formally at a sufficiently high political level to commit all relevant sections of government to achieving the policy's goals.

The national forest policy should also be communicated clearly to stakeholders and the general public. Experience has shown that wherever such communication is overlooked or done in only a limited way, efforts to implement the policy itself are largely ineffective. Although it may seem costly to involve professional agencies in the communication process, it is likely to be worthwhile in the long run.



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Maintaining political will and using the momentum for change through tangible follow-up action is key for implementing policy.

Maintaining momentum for implementation

Ideally, policies guide daily practice, but putting a national forest policy into action on the ground is always a major challenge. Maintaining political will and using the momentum for change generated by the forest policy development process are the keys to ensuring tangible follow-up action.

Once a national forest policy has been adopted, important steps towards implementation include:

- » aligning forest-related laws and regulations with the new policy and ensuring that institutions are able to fulfill their designated roles and responsibilities
- » developing and/or adjusting action plans and financial arrangements, including for communication and capacity building
- » maintaining a dialogue among stakeholders, such as through an NFP platform, to assist operational fine-tuning, coordination with other policies, the integration of new initiatives, learning from implementation, and the adaptation of the policy over time.

A guide to forest policy

To assist in the development of national forest policies, FAO recently published *Developing effective forest policy*. This detailed guide is designed to:

- » share the main lessons that have emerged from the experience of forest policy development in the last two decades
- » support countries in planning and conducting national forest policy processes.

The development of forest policies has no beginning or end-point. Thus, *Developing effective forest policy* should be useful in all countries, regardless of where they are in the policy process. The guide can assist countries both to revise a current forest policy and to develop and formalize a new one. It can also be used at the sub-national and local levels.

Developing effective forest policy is available at www.fao.org/forestry or by contacting Ewald Rametsteiner or Irina Buttoud, FAO Forestry Department, Rome (ewald.rametsteiner@fao.org or irina.buttoud@fao.org).

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