

National forest programmes – a comprehensive framework for participatory planning

C. Sepp and E. Mansur

An overview of the guiding principles, iterative phases and participatory arrangements that set national forest programmes apart.

Planning frameworks are alluring. Results are often easy to obtain, namely a good plan based on sector analysis. Most organizations are well experienced in this. However, the assumption that a good plan automatically leads to good implementation can sometimes be an illusion.

The forest sector has seen a number of such planning frameworks. As early as the 1960s, interventions in forest-sector policy planning were considered worthwhile. In the following decades, many standardized planning frameworks were developed to rationalize planning and put forestry development on a more strategic track, such as the Tropical Forestry Action Programme (TFAP), national forestry action plans (NFAPs) and master plans.

Without a doubt, these frameworks were able to raise awareness on forest issues, to foster some international support for forest-sector development and to put forestry on the political agenda. Ensuing debates ignited the international dialogue on forestry and contributed to later agreements and follow-up processes arising from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992.

However, these frameworks, with their strictly sectoral approach to forest development, could not address those external causes of global deforestation that are beyond the reach of foresters. Furthermore, as they emphasized planning and failed to pay adequate attention to practical implementation at the national and local levels, they were not able to achieve the desired impacts.

Some national plans incurred frustra-

tion when the need to comply with externally prescribed procedures led to the consumption of scarce resources. Others tempted governments into hyperactivity of ambitious planning, while questions of implementation were postponed. Some of the plans led to voluminous lists of projects which later remained unaddressed because the planning did not take into account the limited financial resources of the countries or the preferences of the donors. Furthermore, planning was often felt to be donor driven or imposed from outside, with little country leadership. In some cases, a top-down planning approach dominated the agenda. A need for broader policy and institutional reforms was not adequately addressed; often, in NFAPs, isolated projects came to dominate over the establishment of strong institutional capacity and cross-sectoral links.

Lack of ownership of the process, a too-narrow sectoral approach and insufficient participation of the different – and often conflicting – stakeholders appeared to be the most important constraints.

Despite these difficulties, the underlying concept of promoting comprehensive forest policy frameworks at the national level continued to hold interest. The subsequent international forest policy dialogue considered the lessons learned from previous frameworks.

HOW ARE NFPs DIFFERENT?

UNCED brought a change in approach. Chapter 11 of Agenda 21 (“Combating deforestation”) (UN, 1992a) and the so-called “Forest principles” (UN, 1992b) favoured holistic approaches applying to all types of forests in all countries for

Cornelia Sepp is the Director, Eco Consulting Group, Oberaula, Germany.

Eduardo Mansur is Forestry Officer, FAO, Rome.



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National forest programmes encourage not only partnerships in the forest sector, but also consideration of other sectors (a farming family, Bolivia)

future forest-related programmes. This viewpoint strongly stressed implementation and encouraged consideration of other sectors as well as pluralistic partnerships in the forest sector (i.e. multiple models of ownership and management, plurality of service providers, diversity of administrative bodies, multilateral decision-making).

With many unresolved issues remaining after UNCED, the forest policy dialogue to develop an international consensus on national mechanisms for sustainable forest management continued through the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and later the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). The IPF/IFF process elaborated 270 Proposals for Action and considered national forest programmes as the most important tools for implementing these proposals at the country level (see Box; page 8). IFF recommended that countries conduct a systematic national assessment of the Proposals for Action involving all stakeholders and plan for their implementation within country-specific national forest programmes (ECOSOC, 2000). These programmes needed to be flexible

and dynamic for application in widely differing political, socio-economic and environmental national contexts.

NFPs share the background objectives of earlier planning frameworks such as TFAP in that they are intended to help promote coordination, policy coherence and efficiency. They are intended to facilitate, locally, the establishment of consistent long-term forest and forest-related policies in a country.

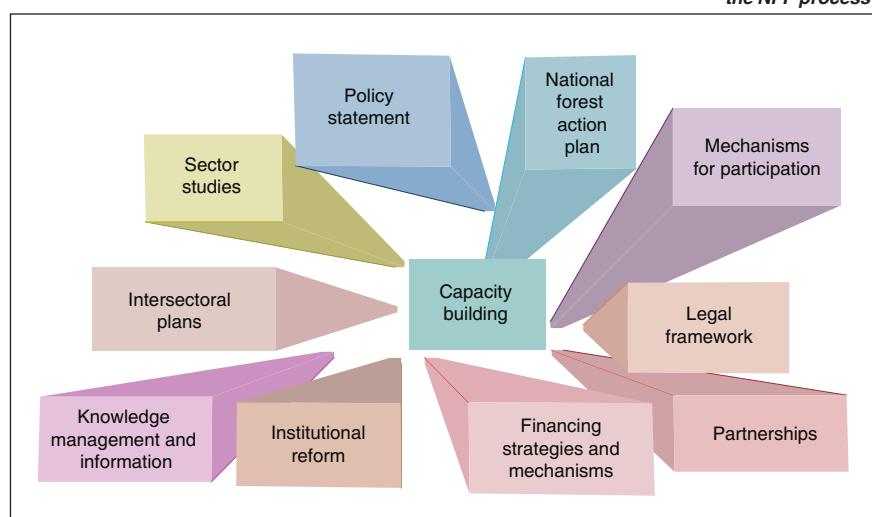
Instead of being donor driven, the NFP concept stresses national sovereignty in defining policy objectives and priorities, and establishes a consultative framework

for stakeholder participation, implementation and monitoring. As such, NFPs reflect a global consensus on how forests ought to be managed and developed, yet without being embedded in any legally binding instrument. The concept explicitly pertains to all countries and to all types of forest in tropical, subtropical and temperate areas.

If it were only for this difference in origin and scope, NFPs might pass as just another revised version of something already familiar. Yet several characteristics make them different:

- **Process orientation.** An NFP is not a mere document but a participatory process with defined outputs. It is an iterative, long-term process, composed of various elements, including the country policy and legal framework related to forests, participation mechanisms, capacity-building initiatives and others (see Figure 1). The NFP provides for learning cycles which allow experiences to be shared and for lessons to be learned in order to fine-tune the process. The active call for feedback from stakeholders makes NFPs dynamic, adaptive and negotiable.

1
Some elements of the NFP process



IPF and national forest programmes

The first Proposals for Action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF), which appeared in the IPF final report in 1997, established guidelines for national forest programmes which have helped to guide countries in the subsequent ten years. The relevant IPF proposals are reproduced here.

The Panel:

(a) encouraged countries, in accordance with their national sovereignty, specific country conditions and national legislation, to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate national forest programmes, which include a wide range of approaches for sustainable forest management, taking into consideration the following: consistency with national, sub-national or local policies and strategies, and – as appropriate – international agreements; partnership and participatory mechanisms to involve interested parties; recognition and respect for customary and traditional rights of, *inter alia*, indigenous people and local communities; secure land tenure arrangements; holistic, intersectoral and iterative approaches; ecosystem approaches that integrate the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of biological resources; and adequate provision and valuation of forest goods and services;

(b) called for improved cooperation in

support of the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests, and urged all countries to use national forest programmes, as appropriate, as a basis for international cooperation in the forest sector;

(c) stressed the need for international cooperation in the adequate provision of ODA, as well as possible new and additional funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and other appropriate innovative sources of finance for the effective development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national forest programmes;

(d) encouraged countries to integrate suitable criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, as appropriate, into the overall process of the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national forest programmes, on a step-by-step basis;

(e) urged countries to develop, test and implement appropriate participatory mechanisms for integrating timely and continuous multidisciplinary research into all stages of the planning cycle;

(f) encouraged countries to elaborate systems, including private and community forest management systems, for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating national forest programmes that identify and involve,

where appropriate, a broad participation of indigenous people, forest dwellers, forest owners and local communities in meaningful decision-making regarding the management of state forest lands in their proximity, within the context of national laws and legislation;

(g) urged countries, particularly in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, to include capacity-building as an objective of national forest programmes, paying particular attention to training, extension services and technology transfer and financial assistance from developed countries, taking due account of local traditional forest-related knowledge;

(h) encouraged countries to establish sound national coordination mechanisms or strategies among all interested parties, based on consensus-building principles, to promote the implementation of national forest programmes;

(i) encouraged countries to further develop the concept and practice of partnership, which could include partnership agreements, in the implementation of national forest programmes, as one of the potential approaches for improved coordination and cooperation between all national and international partners.

Source: ECOSOC, 1997

- **Comprehensiveness.** NFPs provide not only for forest policy development and planning but also for their implementation on the ground. They are intended to promote participatory implementation where the results of agreed objectives, policies and strategies for sustainable forest management are translated into specific actions developed by the stakeholders.

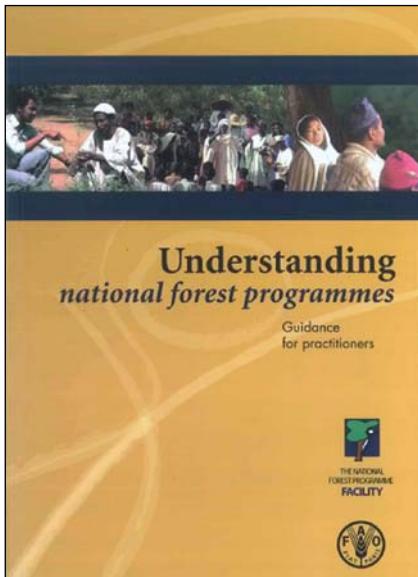
- **Inclusiveness.** An NFP is not additional or parallel to other exercises. It seeks to integrate and harmonize

existing activities – plans, policies, legislation – directed towards sustainable forest management. Any of these can be the starting point for an NFP, and each country will need to find its own.

- **Breadth.** The NFP concept goes beyond technical forestry matters in that it is intrinsically linked with matters of good governance. Forest destruction often stems from political issues. Forest issues are closely linked with issues of land tenure, subsistence

use and access rights, and in forest management related conflicts tend to surface. This means that addressing forest issues through an NFP (e.g. with the aim to reconcile access rights of the population, the private sector and the State) can be a viable solution for other underlying conflicts too.

PRINCIPLES – THE BACKBONE OF THE CONCEPT
NFP development is an open-ended, country-driven and adaptive process,



The new publication *Understanding national forest programmes* from FAO and the National Forest Programme Facility provides detailed information on NFP principles, activities, instruments and benchmarks

with no common recipe. Practitioners who want to implement the NFP concept are assisted only by a set of guiding principles that provide orientation on how to conduct the process. These principles derive from the discussions and negotiations of IPF (ECOSOC, 1997); as negotiated text, they lack precision, sometimes overlap, and are thus difficult for NFP practitioners and implementers to apply directly.

The new publication *Understanding national forest programmes* (FAO and National Forest Programme Facility, 2006) provides detailed information on what these principles mean and why they are important, the activities that can be used to implement them, the instruments that can be used in each phase of the process to ensure that they are observed, and how progress can be measured. An innovation introduced to facilitate understanding and use of the principles is their clustering into three groups (see Figure 2).

Cluster 1: Sovereignty and country leadership

In the NFP context national sovereignty means that States have an acknowledged right to manage and use the forests in accordance with their own policies. However, countries have made an international commitment to use forest resources sustainably and without harming other States or jeopardizing the common heritage of humankind or the development options of future generations. National sovereignty is closely related to country leadership and political will, which means that the country assumes full responsibility for the preparation and implementation of an NFP.

To gain political attention and commitment, it is important to demonstrate the contribution of forestry to development and poverty alleviation. Valuation and accounting of forest products and services, combined with adequate financial mechanisms to promote NFP implementation, and lobbying at all levels (international, national, subnational and local) are means to this end.

Progress in approaching the principle of national sovereignty and country leadership can be measured by:

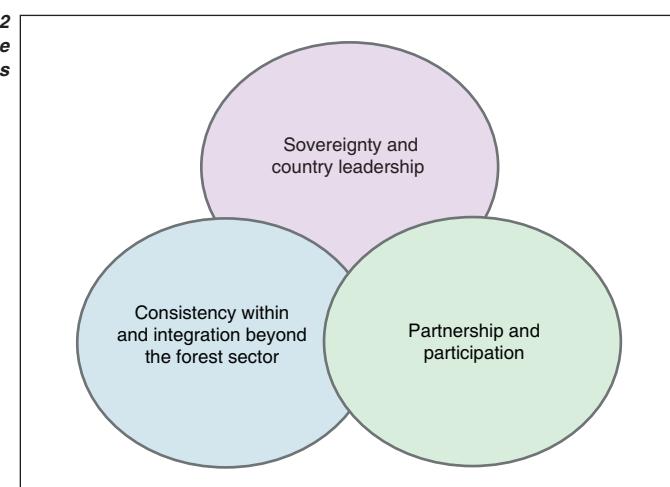
- the existence of a well disseminated, officially adopted and broadly accepted policy statement on forests;
- the existence of an appropriate institutional framework under the aus-

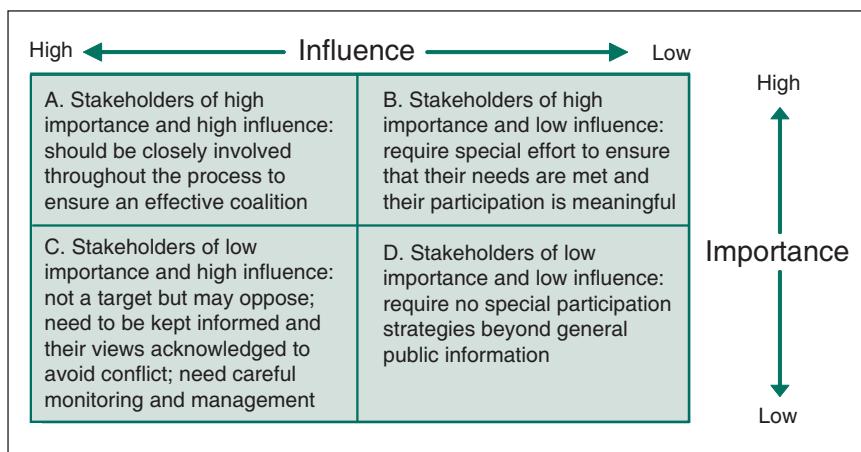
pices of national institutions, including interministerial or interinstitutional coordination mechanisms;

- human resources and finance allocated from the country's budget to the forest sector and for sustainable forest management;
- provisions for capacity building for the different stakeholders to participate effectively in NFP development;
- the quality and effectiveness of donor coordination under the leadership of a national institution;
- the country's representation in the international forest debate and the significance of its contributions to it.

Cluster 2: Consistency within and integration beyond the forest sector

To seek consistency within the forest sector means to foster synergies and to minimize contradictions in policies and negative impacts on forests through their implementation. For example, if royalties are set low, trees are treated as a low-value resource. This is incompatible with the objective that the forest sector should contribute significantly to gross domestic product (GDP). Furthermore, exceptionally low pricing of produce from State forests distorts the market for forest products and may put private forest enterprises at a disadvantage.





3

Model for identifying the influence and importance of forest stakeholder groups and facilitating their appropriate level of involvement in the NFP

The principle of consistency within the sector also involves recognition of customary laws, traditional rights and traditional forest-related knowledge.

Integration beyond the sector is relevant because forests serve various functions affecting other sectors (e.g. erosion control, water infiltration, biodiversity conservation, combating desertification) and provide goods (fruits, medicine) which serve other sectors and/or overarching development goals (poverty reduction, sustainable development). Furthermore, many factors contributing to forest degradation and deforestation originate outside the forest sector, such as conversion of forests into farmland or settlements, overgrazing or unchecked wildfires, infrastructure development (roads, dams, canals, etc.), energy generation and mining. It is necessary to seek coherence in the policies of different sectors and in their implementation to avoid negative impacts on forests. Often compromises have to be reached.

Forests also have an important place in multilateral environmental agreements, and forest-related measures often contribute to the objectives of several conventions.

Activities that can help fulfil the principles in this cluster and at the same time measure progress include:

- functional analysis of the role of forest resources for different stakeholders and sectors;

- compilation and analysis of relevant laws and regulations;
- application of an integrated ecosystem and landscape approach in which all functions of a given forest site are perceived in their relation to the landscape or ecosystem;
- introduction of cross-sectoral financing strategies for NFP activities, including transfer payments from one sector to another for products or services provided (e.g. payment for environmental services);
- recognition and support of the national forest policy in the action plans of the multilateral environmental agreements to which the country is signatory (e.g. in the national biodiversity strategy);
- representation and active participation of stakeholder groups of other sectors in forest coordination mechanisms.

Cluster 3: Participation and partnership

Stakeholders in forestry are all those who depend on or benefit from forest resources, or who decide on control of or regulate access to forests. Participation requires a certain degree of organization and capacity and is therefore mostly in the hands of organized interest groups. They may participate in NFPs in various ways: directly or indirectly, actively or passively, in supporting or opposing roles.

A first step to enhance participation of

interested stakeholders is to identify and categorize stakeholders according to their influence and importance in the process, and identify the adequate level of participation and accompanying measures for involving them (see Figure 3).

To have impact on the ground, participatory planning has to result in combined action. Partnerships may exist or be fostered at the regional, national or sub-national level (ministries, government agencies, donors, NGOs, private sector, lobby groups, local authorities, forest and other sector agencies, forest owners, traditional communities, community-based organizations, State enterprises). They are voluntary arrangements and can be either informal or binding (e.g. memoranda of agreement).

The success of stakeholder participation can be gauged by:

- the existence of mechanisms for participation that stakeholders can easily access;
- the degree of stakeholder organization for participation in the NFP process, which indicates empowerment and use of the stakeholder potential;
- the continuity of attendance and participation of stakeholders, which is a measure of interest in and ownership of the process;
- empowerment of disadvantaged groups, preventing any single group of stakeholders from monopolizing the process;
- the dissemination of adequate information by and for all stakeholders, presented in accessible language and through suitable media, adapted for different groups as appropriate;

Typical outputs for each phase of the NFP process

Analysis

- Sector review (assessment of the forest sector and its interrelations with other sectors)
- Stakeholders identified, as well as their roles and responsibilities

Policy formulation and planning

- An adopted national forest statement, detailing the political commitment to sustainable forest management as a contribution to sustainable development
- Established platform for stakeholder dialogue and participation
- Objectives and strategies for the forest sector, including a financing strategy for sustainable forest management
- Action plans and investment programmes for the implementation of the agreed measures in place
- Capacity building and information strategy in place

Implementation

- Political, legal and institutional reforms, both within and outside the forest sector
- Information and knowledge management systems
- National and international partnership arrangements and joint activities

Monitoring and evaluation

- Monitoring and evaluation reports/documentation
- Analysis and reflection for learning and adjustments to the process

- the extent to which stakeholder consultations reach consensus, and the stability of consensus;
- growing capacity, political consciousness and interest, and active involvement of stakeholders at various levels.

NFP PHASES AND RELATED

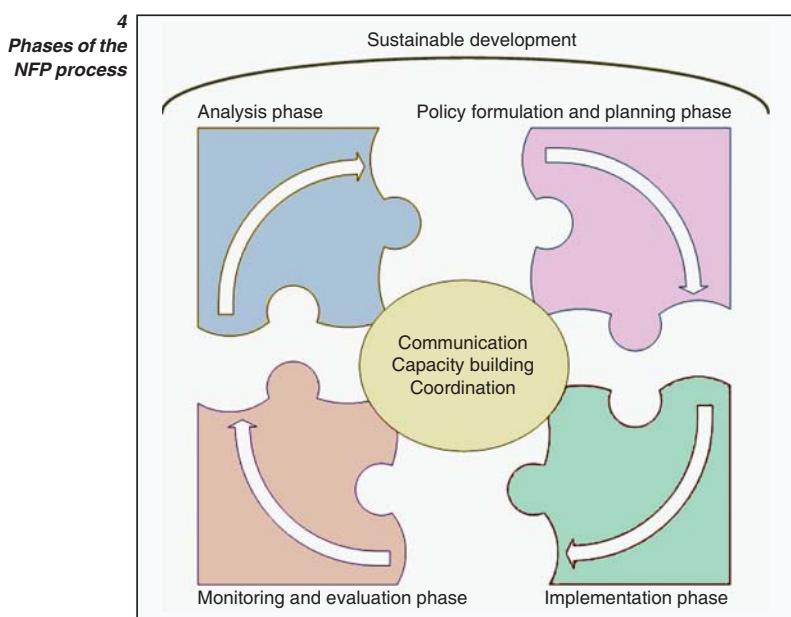
OUTPUTS

NFPs typically advance in a sequence of phases that can be continuously repeated in evolving cycles of learning and adaptation from experience (Figure 4). These phases – analysis, policy formulation and planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation – are intended to help the NFP practitioner map the NFP process in the country, as well as to assist in the identification and targeting of definite outputs. Examples of typical outputs for each phase are given in the Box above.

The NFP principles are closely related and can be similarly applied in the different phases. Stakeholder participation, for instance, helps build a multifaceted and convincing argument for consistency within the forest sector. Thus participation and partnerships are instrumental for ensuring adequate consideration of forest conservation and sustainable forest use in a country's political process. In turn, if an NFP succeeds in raising the forest sector's profile and winning support for it in national politics (which is another precondition for sovereignty and country leadership), this is a strong indication of successful participation.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR NFP DEVELOPMENT

Suitable arrangements for negotiating NFP issues are at the core of the NFP, as they make it possible to embed national sovereignty and ownership, intra- and intersectoral consistency and participation in the process. In Uganda, for example, negotiations are carried out through a national stakeholders' forum which serves as a platform for political discourse and consensus building. Other types of arrangement include the forest council, steering committee or board



mandated to oversee and guide the NFP process, on which all key stakeholder groups are represented.

A permanent secretariat and information clearing-house should also be provided. Mechanisms for information exchange among stakeholders, including those from other sectors, about the role of forests in the national economy as well as about intra- and intersectoral dependencies and impacts need to be in place through all NFP phases.

To assume leadership of an NFP in a meaningful and efficient way, national and subnational institutions (including non-governmental stakeholders) may need capacity building at the outset.

NFPs – A PROMISING APPROACH

By virtue of their principles and arrangements, NFPs differ from and are more promising than previous frameworks for strategic planning in forestry. Why more promising? Because, most importantly, their conception and design deliberately addresses the difficulties in country leadership, consensus building, multipurpose management, cross-sectoral cooperation, joint implementation and sustainability that were bottlenecks of previous planning frameworks.

Today, national forest programme principles are a common framework for internationally supported forest-sector policy development. Countries take them into account according to their specific needs.

NFPs work best in countries that have decentralized governance, public consultation and democratic participation. Yet where these are weak or lacking, NFPs may play the part of pacemaker stimulating better forest governance and sustainability. In this capacity NFPs leave previous forest policy instruments behind and have opened up a new chapter in forest-related interventions. ♦



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