

The national forest programme as an element of forest policy reform: findings from Kyrgyzstan

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Economic and political transition provided Kyrgyzstan with an opportunity for a complete forest policy reform emphasizing participation and democratic governance.

Kyrgyzstan has had a unique experience of forest policy reform because within a short time frame the country was able to establish and implement all the consecutive steps of the forest policy cycle: from the elaboration of a long-term strategy and the definition of measures and actions for its realization, to the establishment of concrete tools and mechanisms for their practical implementation (see Box, page 16). This article outlines the particular characteristics of the reform process, particularly its emphasis on participation and democratic governance, highlighting the place of the National Forest Programme within the new Kyrgyz forest policy.

CIRCUMSTANCES FAVOURED A COMPREHENSIVE REFORM

A complete forest policy reform was possible because following the country's independence from the former Soviet Union the development of market relations and decentralization of State functions, including a decrease of the State budget, created conditions for privatization in many sectors of the country. The collapse of the formerly strong economic integration had degraded the economy, however, and the private sector, which was chaotically built on the basis of the former State factories and collective farms (*kolhozes* and *sovhozes*), was still weak. The equipment, means and materials (e.g. cattle, machinery) of these public enterprises were shared among numerous former employees, with no global market coherence at the end. Thus there was a need for the empowerment of new actors, including in the forest sector.

Kyrgyzstan's forests account for about

4.25 percent of the country's total area. They are predominantly mountain forests, mainly reserved for their soil protection and water regulation functions, with little emphasis on production of wood and non-wood forest products. At the beginning of the forest policy reform, privatization processes had not touched the Kyrgyz forest sector. The forests were still owned and managed by the State through a structure of *leshozes* (territorial forest management units, organized with a vertical hierarchical structure of planning, financing and reporting) remaining from the Soviet era. Reform was needed because this structure was no longer viable, for two reasons:

- The inability of the State to finance forest management activities (e.g. planning) was conflicting with the top-down planning practices.
- Economic instability and impoverishment, especially of the rural population, had increased the human pressure on forest resources and illegal activities in the forests. Increased fuelwood collection and rather unregulated timber harvesting were causing resource depletion and worsening forest condition in terms of biodiversity, forest health, and soil and slope protection. Thus a reorientation of the national forest policy was needed to define a balance between environmental, economic and social aspects of forest management.

External factors also contributed to the need for forest policy reform:

- As a newly independent country, Kyrgyzstan became active in the international policy arena and began

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Benchmarks in the forest policy reform process in Kyrgyzstan

1997–1998

Report on the Analysis of the Current Situation in the Forestry Sector in Kyrgyzstan defined potentials and constraints in the sector.

1999

Concept of Forestry Development set five strategic political goals for 20 to 25 years and ten main direction lines for their achievement. A new Forest Code was prepared as a legal framework for the implementation of the policy concept.

2001

A five-year Action Plan for 2001–2005 was conceived as an executive tool for the implementation of the Concept of Forestry Development, with concrete activities oriented to the achievement of results.

2003

An evaluation of the forest policy from 1999 to 2003 made it possible to formulate a common vision of the results achieved as well as the changes and adaptations needed to improve implementation.

2004

The Concept of Forestry Development was revised based on the results of the 2003 forest policy evaluation. The five abstract goals of the previous concept were replaced by three cornerstones reflecting the priorities of Kyrgyz forest policy:

- *The forest*, which needs to be protected through coordination of people's activities;
- *People*, who should be not only actors in forest management, but also final beneficiaries of forestry activities;
- *The State*, which needs to have new functions in order to be able to play an active part in the new framework.

The revised concept document defined ten strategic lines:

- conservation of forest biodiversity;
- definition of technical norms for sustainable forest management;
- handing over of certain productive functions and activities to the private sector;
- improvement of systems for collaborative forest management and leasing;
- rationalization of the structure of the State Forest Service on both the sub-national and national levels;
- implementation of economic reform in the structural units of the State Forest Service;
- raising of the status of State Forest Service employees;
- improvement of forest science and forestry education;
- enhanced efficiency of the system for financing of the forest sector;
- improvement of the information flow related to the forest sector and increased public awareness of activities in the sector.

This revised version served as the main policy document defining the strategy of forest sector development and the framework for other documents of forest policy and forest legislation.

The National Forest Programme was developed for the medium term (2005–2015) to define a set of activities and measures for the implementation of the Concept of Forestry Development.

2006

The National Action Plan 2006–2010 was created, outlining concrete actions for the realization of the National Forest Programme.

to participate in international and regional conventions and other initiatives for sustainable development, which created a framework of international commitments, imposing changes in the decision-making and planning processes.

- The changed geopolitical arrangements in Central Asia began to attract international donors to Kyrgyzstan, which brought with them certain conditions and requirements. The first such experience in the forest sector, a long-term (10- to 15-year) development support programme of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (1994), revealed that transformations at the local (*leshoz*) level would not be sustainable without national forest policy reform.

REFORM THROUGH PARTICIPATION

Another distinguishing feature of the new Kyrgyz forest policy process is its participatory nature, especially at the stages of policy definition, evaluation and adaptation. From the start of the process, participation was considered necessary to highlight the needs, priority concerns and potentials of the various stakeholders as well as to promote democracy by giving every person a voice and redistributing power. Participation in the definition of the new forest policy became a tool for adapting decision-making procedures to the new conditions and created a sense of ownership of decisions and responsibility for their implementation (Yunusova, 1999).

As the State was still very strong and the information coming from the various stakeholders (especially those that were not yet well organized) would not have been sufficient for the definition of the national forest policy, it was not considered possible to base the process only on bottom-up participation procedures. Thus a “mixed model” was applied combining bottom-up and top-down decision-making (Buttoud and Yunusova, 2002).

Sequence of steps in the participatory process of the forest policy reform in Kyrgyzstan

- Clarification of issues, challenges and principles
- Collection and confrontation of different positions and needs through interviews, workshops, round tables and general discussions at each step of the process, with the aim of reaching a compromise on the main points
- Field discussions in different parts of the country, for a more comprehensive view on the potentials and needs of different stakeholders, not necessarily directly linked with the forest sector
- Systematic collection of statistics and other technical data (e.g. total forest area, harvesting volume, planting) to complement the information collected through the participatory process
- Working group to reach a compromise between opposing positions while analysing all the data and information collected during the workshops, discussions, field trips and study of existing documentation, and to prepare draft documents
- Presentation of policy documents at national or international conferences for the broadest possible dissemination and legitimization of the results and to ensure government responsibility for their implementation, while also attracting new participants to the further steps of the process

The policy is thus based on the technical expertise of forestry specialists and also takes into account the positions and interests of other stakeholders. The same logic of participation (Box above) was systematically applied at all steps of the forest policy process and in the elaboration of all the policy documents (see Box on page 16).

Participation in policy definition was a new phenomenon in formerly soviet Kyrgyzstan. The participatory approach was recommended by forest policy experts who were invited by the Kyrgyz-Swiss forest sector support programme to define the methodology for the forest policy reform, and was initially perceived as an experiment introduced (and in some sense imposed) by international obligations and donors. But since democracy proceeds from participation, in the transition period the Kyrgyz forestry administration could not refuse to embrace it. Although the administrators, accustomed to top-down procedures, did not welcome the approach, their attitudes changed in the course of the reform process, so that by 2006 they

had come to appreciate, promote and even instrumentalize it (for details see Yunusova, Buttoud and Grisa, 2003; Kouplevskaya-Yunusova, 2005; Kouplevskaya-Yunusova and Buttoud, 2006).

The adoption of participation in Kyrgyzstan was a learning process. In the initial stages, stakeholders were mainly represented by forestry personnel from different levels of the hierarchy, some heads from local or village governments and representatives of other ministries and agencies. When the approach was introduced, the forestry administration was reluctant to relinquish the habitual top-down style of decision-making, arguing that non-specialists lacked the necessary competence. There were also concerns that the openness of the policy definition process could allow criticism of management in the forest sector and of the forestry administration. The new participants in policy definition were at first reserved about giving substantive input into the process, either because of doubts whether critical remarks would be accepted (mainly the forestry staff)

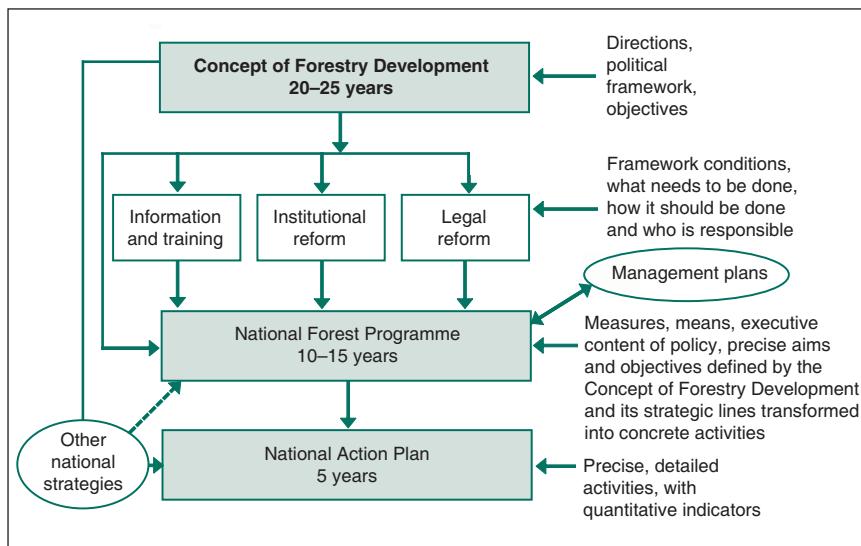
or because of detachment from forestry issues (participants who were not linked with the sector directly). As the process went on, however, attitudes to and styles of participation changed. The foresters learned to express their opinions (even critical ones) freely. New stakeholders – non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local populations, private entrepreneurs – joined the process and discovered that participation in forest policy reform is possible and can provide opportunities to change and even improve their situation.

Furthermore, by pioneering public involvement in policy form, the forestry administration gained the image of an innovator and was quickly promoted in the State hierarchy, acquiring the status of an independent service reporting directly to the president.

ROLE OF THE NATIONAL FOREST PROGRAMME IN THE FOREST POLICY REFORM

The Kyrgyz National Forest Programme (NFP) was not originally recognized as a necessary and integral part of the policy cycle (see Box on page 16), partly because the concept was not yet quite clear, especially in a situation where so many procedures and structures were changing at the same time but often copying the old schemes and approaches. In these conditions an innovation that had no equivalent in the previous system was not considered a realistic priority.

During the evaluation of the first five years of the new forest policy implementation in 2003, the gap between the 20-to-25-year strategic Concept of Forestry Development (Intercooperation Kyrgyzstan and State Forest Service, 2004) and the concrete five-year Action Plan became evident. The National Forest Programme (Intercooperation Kyrgyzstan and State Forest Service, 2005) was thus introduced into the policy process (Figure 1) as a new type of strategic planning intended for ten years and elaborated through discussions and negotiations



1 Road map of forest policy reform in Kyrgyzstan

with various stakeholders, including the local population. The NFP addresses environmental and socio-economic issues and treats the forest economy as part of regional development. It is based on the ten strategic lines defined in the 2004 revision of the Concept of Forestry Development and is to be implemented through the five-year Action Plans. The implementation of the NFP is also linked with an improved information and education system, as well as with legal reform (an adapted forest code) and institutional reform (reorganization of the State Forest Service).

Structure of the NFP document

Complementary to the revised Concept of Forestry Development, the NFP defines not only objectives and expected results, but also the responsibilities and means for their achievement, taking into consideration all the other strategic programmes existing in the country. The introduction to the Kyrgyz NFP notes that it is “a complex of the activities and measures which need to be carried out for consistent implementation of the forest policy”.

Section I specifies goals and tasks of the NFP, framework conditions necessary for its implementation (legal context and institutional reform) and the roles and responsibilities of the various State agencies linked to NFP implementation.

Section II specifies activities and expected results, constraints, means, indicators and responsibilities for each strategic line derived from the revised Concept of Forestry Development.

The conclusion recognizes that forestry activities cannot be conducted without considering the needs expressed by the various stakeholders. It recognizes that forest conservation can be organized only through the coordinated and consecutive actions of all involved parties. As a policy cycle has an iterative nature, the NFP should be subject to revisions through an adaptive monitoring system, based on indicators for evaluation and follow-up.

An addendum to the main document contains tables with a detailed explanation of activities, expected results, indicators, resources, schedule and responsible implementing agencies for each of the ten strategic lines.

Content of the NFP document

The Kyrgyz NFP document states that: “The goal of the programme is determined

by the components of the national forest policy: ensuring the sustainable development of forests through involvement of the population and local communities in the management of forests and the definition of the role of the State in the forest sector in the new environment.”

The implementation of the NFP is to reflect the following principles:

- application of the appropriate mechanisms for the involvement of all stakeholders;
- decentralization, wherever it is appropriate;
- transfer of power to regional and local structures in accordance with the legal framework determined by the country’s constitution and legislation;
- respect for traditional rights and customs, including those of indigenous people, local communities living near the forests and forest owners;
- compliance with the legislation regulating land use relations;
- establishment of efficient coordination mechanisms and procedures for the resolution of conflicts.

The objective of the NFP is to define consecutive actions and evaluate implemented activities and measures needed to realize the ten strategic lines of the revised Concept of Forestry Development in a timely manner.

The results expected from the implementation of the NFP are defined as follows:

- ensured conservation of national forests and increased forest cover (with emphasis on soil protection and water regulation), as well as conservation of biodiversity;
- sustainable management of forest resources;
- rationalization of the State Forest Service structure and general reform of the forest sector;
- enhancement of the role of local communities in the rational use, conservation and development of forest resources;



Stakeholders defined capacities, risks, priorities and indicators in NFP elaboration workshops

- improved systems for and access to information in the forest sector.

Elaboration, tools and methodology

The elaboration of the NFP was based on the same logic and the same combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches as all the previous steps of the forest policy cycle (Box page 17). The whole policy process was led by a working group comprising representatives of the forestry administration (with different levels of authority at different steps), scientists, representatives of other related ministries and agencies and representatives of the donors. This working group was specifically trained in moderation techniques (Box on this page) and was advised by forest policy experts throughout the process. The NFP's principle of partnership and participation opened possibilities for involvement of many new stakeholders, including environmental and social NGOs, local village councils and representatives of the rural population.

The working group listed activities for each strategic line and asked stakeholders to identify constraints, means and responsibilities linked with each. Capacities, risks, priorities and indicators for monitoring were defined through workshops and seminars involving the stakeholders. The working group also guaranteed an intersectoral approach by collecting information on existing

national strategies and seeking links with the NFP.

The period of the NFP elaboration was marked by an increased interest of various stakeholders in forestry and forest policy. Since the NFP had to be

consistent with the national policy framework and sustainable development strategies, including national commitments to global initiatives, representatives of governmental, parliamentary and presidential structures absolutely needed to be involved. The NFP requirement of intersectorality made it necessary to invite other ministries and agencies. In total 19 institutions participated in the elaboration of the NFP, and 14 of them have documented responsibility for its implementation. Through the process of negotiating priorities and solutions, interagency competition (e.g. between

Checklist for working groups

HOW TO LEAD TO THE DISCUSSION

Since people naturally tend to speak of problems and their solutions, it helps to combine the discussion of constraints and means of reaching predefined objectives with the definition of priorities.

HOW TO DEFINE PRIORITIES

What is a priority? It is an activity that:

- everybody says is important;
- absolutely requires a new solution;
- is a condition for beginning another activity;
- is easier to carry out than all the others.

Priorities may be defined only in the course of discussion, but greater efficiency can be obtained by using cards on a board, ranking activities or assigning priority marks.

In discussing priorities, a focus on participation will guarantee a more democratic (although less coherent) approach.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED IN DEFINING NFP CONTENT

- **Expected results:** What results do we want to achieve in ten years?
- **Means:** What do we need to achieve them?
- **Constraints:** What might be obstacles on the way to achieving them?
- **Implementation and responsible persons:** Who will do what?

HOW TO DEAL WITH THE DIVERSITY OF OPINIONS AND SITUATIONS

As there are large differences among regions and forest types in Kyrgyzstan, all differences should be brought to the table, and all negotiated proposals should be reflected in the final document.

the State Forest Service and the Ministry of Environment) evolved into collaborative relations.

Support from the National Forest Programme Facility for implementation of the Kyrgyz NFP, particularly in capacity-building, awareness raising and information sharing, provides additional prospects for making the actions proposed in the NFP document effective at the practical level.

Integrated Management Plans

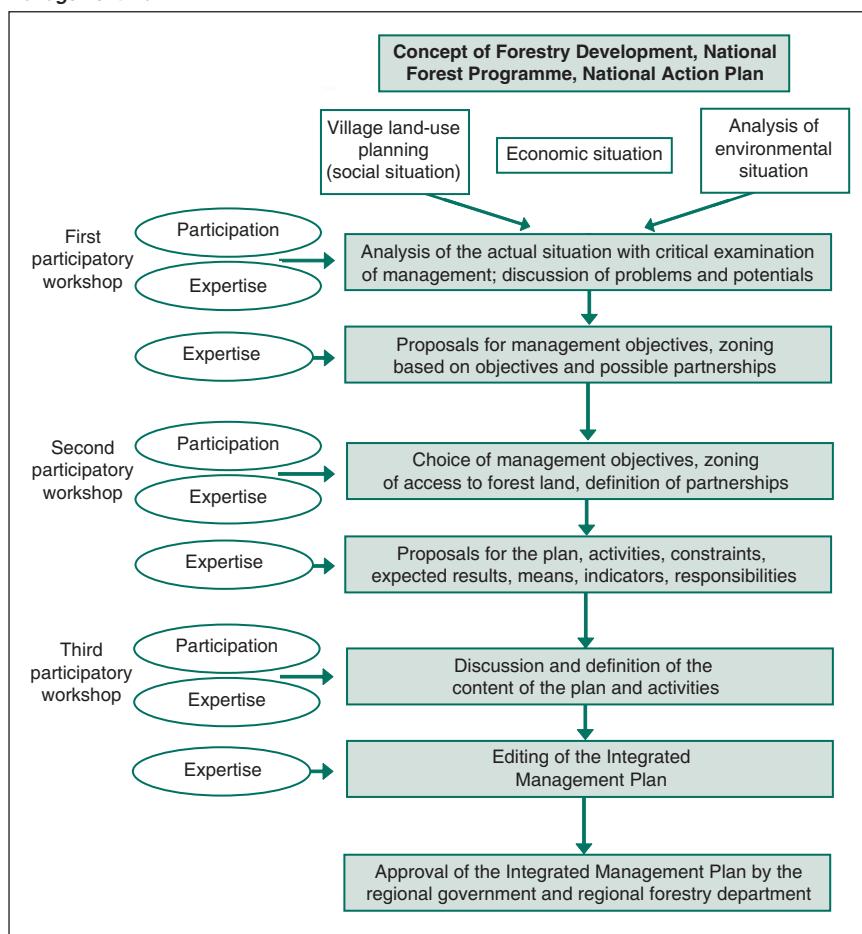
The NFP explicitly specifies the need for Integrated Management Plans as a basic tool for its practical implementation at the subnational level. The National Action Plan elaborated in 2006 specifies

the schedule for introducing Integrated Management Plans in the different forest types and regions of Kyrgyzstan. These plans link technical prescriptions for using forest land and resources with the social, economic and environmental dynamics at the regional level. The planning of local forest activities covers both the technical work of foresters and the various types of land use by villagers.

The formulation of an Integrated Management Plan follows the logic of the national policy formulation process, involving a combination of participatory procedures and professional expertise. It depends significantly on compromise among stakeholders with conflicting interests and the creation of new partnerships (Figure 2). For example:

- scientists, both local and international, have followed the process

2 Logic of the Integrated Management Plan



from the beginning, contributing to environmental, economic, social and policy aspects and to definition and adaptation of methodology;

- villagers and village councils, foresters and *leshoz* administrations have agreed about common forest activities, even though conflict resolution procedures were often required to reach a compromise;
- questions of land use and land demarcation have been resolved with the local departments of the Ministry of Agriculture and land registration services;
- the responsibility for the plans' implementation has been assumed jointly by regional forestry departments and regional governments;
- a training centre has been established and special courses organized for future forestry specialists (at Bachelor and Master levels) and current forestry staff, managed jointly by the State Forest Service and Osh Technological University and aimed at creating the knowledge necessary for the formulation and application of Integrated Management Plans.

CONCLUSION: NEW MODES OF GOVERNANCE IN THE KYRGYZ FOREST SECTOR

The NFP process in Kyrgyzstan is probably unique in the international experience: conceived as a part of a whole logical sequence of forest policy reform, based on and adapted to the specific conditions, priorities and potentials of the country, and followed through with tools for its implementation.

This process has influenced administration and decision-making in the forest sector in the following ways.

- The process introduced and was based on the participation of different stakeholders in decision-making, thus helping to redistribute responsibilities, create new partnerships and empower new actors.
- The opening of the forest policy pro-



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Formulation of an Integrated Management Plan: discussion among foresters from the leshoz (forest management unit) and the regional forest administration, representatives from several villages and village councils, and scientists (southern Kyrgyzstan)

cess to new actors introduced a need for intersectoral coordination.

- The continuation of the process at the regional level through Integrated Management Plans, which give responsibility to local populations and governments in planning and implementation, has created conditions for multilevel governance and a need for accountable expertise.
- All the policy documents elaborated during the full cycle of the forest policy reform set out requirements and mechanisms for regular monitoring, evaluation and adaptation of strategies and measures, thus enabling iteration of the process.

Thus the establishment of the NFP process has created the conditions and the demand for new modes of governance in forestry. It introduced changes in the way institutions work and the role of foresters, and necessitated parallel and complementary reforms in training and information systems, institutions and laws.

Sustainable forest management is a social, not political, vision, but it can

serve political purposes. It depends on participation, which is creating the capacity for learning and self-determination for all parties involved, but the State also has an essential role. A balance among experts, the State and other stakeholders is necessary. This is why the “mixed model” developed for the Kyrgyz NFP, which leaves some responsibility to the forest administration while engaging it in communicative behaviour, has successfully led to compromises acceptable by all stakeholders.

The main donor (the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) recognized and respected the Kyrgyz authority and people as the owners of the process, and solutions were never formally imposed.

Furthermore, policy reform is an iterative learning process which involves continuous change in the positions and roles of the different actors in the process. It took some time before the forest administration recognized that it could gain from participatory decision-making, but the results are significant.

This combination does not happen

by itself, it must be constructed. The Kyrgyz NFP process was based not only on ideas and political strategies, but also on a methodology that defined the process and its links with the field; that is why policy experts played such an important part in the process. The mixed model introduced in the process helped to avoid opposition between the State and the general public.

In general, the NFP process in Kyrgyzstan is a sign of the changes in the governance of the society and can be seen as a logical step in the political discourse, affirming democratic development and changes towards a market economy. Of course the process was not easy and did not go perfectly. There were gaps, breakdowns and deviations. For example, staff rotation and the frequent replacement of heads of department and administration (a result of the general instability in the country) made it difficult to guarantee continuity and sometimes made it necessary to start processes over again. Another difficulty was the sometimes false claim that processes were participatory even when they were not, to facilitate approval by the government and the public. Since one-way consultation is easier than real negotiation with stakeholders, some planning processes appeared to follow all the necessary participatory procedures but

then did not take the participants' ideas into consideration.

But the NFP is a living process, which has produced a rich practical experience. It has been a laboratory for collaborative learning, where each participating group has acquired new knowledge and a new vision of its own actions and roles. From a survey carried out at the end of the planning phase, it appears that the participants have embraced the first changes introduced through this participatory sequence.

In both its successes and its difficulties, the Kyrgyz NFP process provides a model for neighbouring countries in transition that need to reorient their forest policy under strong environmental and socio-economic constraints. ♦



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