

Developing effective forest policy

A guide

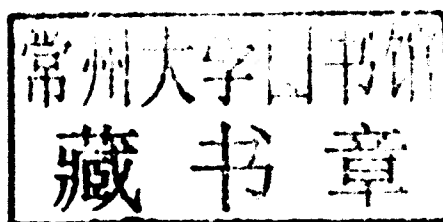


Developing effective forest policy

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Foreword

The battle against climate change cannot be won without the world's forests. Managing the transition to sustainable, resource-efficient and low-carbon economies will depend on forest resources, as will the scaling-up of renewable energy. The quality of life of both urban and rural people depends on their ability to enjoy food, clean drinking-water and recreation. In most countries forests can strongly contribute to all of these.

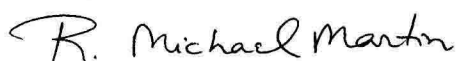
Recognizing the value and importance of forests for society and establishing sound policies to ensure this value is protected, maintained and enhanced is the task of policy-makers. Unlike in the past, when forests were often delegated to technical experts to be managed, policy-makers and stakeholders from different backgrounds now look at forests with renewed attention.

Developing policies that work in practice is difficult. It requires embracing many different and often conflicting interests of increasingly diverse stakeholders, and reaching long-term agreements that these stakeholders adhere to, as it is in their own interest. Where this process succeeds, capturing emerging trends and opportunities and linking closely with the development ambitions of the country, a new path for the management of forest resources can be established.

Many countries develop or revise forest policies to keep abreast of changing circumstances and to enhance the value of forests to society, including through support by FAO. The experience from countries and FAO shows that substantial changes have occurred since the publication of FAO's *Guidelines for forest policy formulation* in 1987, profoundly affecting not only the contents of forest policies but also the way forest policies are developed or revised.

Developing effective forest policy is published to share some of the main lessons that have emerged from these experiences, aiming to support countries in planning and conducting forest policy development processes. Based on a review of practical experiences, it outlines the rationale and purpose of a national forest policy and experiences related to the different elements a forest policy development process usually comprises. This should help senior officials in government administrations and the representatives of other stakeholders, including civil society organizations and the private sector, in developing or revising their national forest policy.

Through this publication and related capacity building support, FAO hopes to contribute to the development of forest policies that, foreseeing emerging trends, are able to affirm and enhance the value and sustainable contributions of forests to society, based on a broad agreement among stakeholders.



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Summary

Ten things to know about forest policy

1. A national forest policy is a negotiated agreement among stakeholders on a common vision and goals for a country's forests and trees, adopted by the government. It provides key strategic policy guidance and should be short and easy for a broad spectrum of society to understand.
2. Forest policy goals need to address main societal issues and be closely aligned with a country's development goals. All concerned sectors and stakeholders must be involved in achieving these goals. Such a scope requires a broad perspective of land use and natural resource management.
3. Initiating a policy revision requires a good understanding of the national context, the ability to secure support from high levels of government and key stakeholders, and an accurate assessment of the right time to establish the process.
4. Proper preparation is important, including communication and capacity building, leadership support and sound information on the status and future trends with regard to forests and social, political, economic, environmental and technological factors that determine their use.
5. Participation of key stakeholders at national and subnational levels throughout the process is key, as is joint ownership of the resulting policy and shared responsibility for policy implementation.
6. Drafting forest policy is about accommodating different interests on how to use and protect forests, interests that sometimes conflict. Reaching compromises requires good negotiation and facilitation skills rather than technical knowledge.
7. Policies that work in practice need to be designed with implementation in mind. This requires agreement on the approach and on responsibilities as well as flexibility on the methods to achieve objectives. It also needs an understanding on funding and on re-aligning legal and institutional frameworks with the new or amended policy.
8. Strong and professional communication from the outset and the building of sufficient capacity for those participating in the policy development and implementation are crucial for success. A forest policy that is neither well known nor understood has little impact.
9. The new forest policy and a strategy to put it into practice should be adopted by government at high levels so as to demonstrate commitment and guide authorities in its implementation. Non-governmental stakeholders should likewise express their commitment to both the policy and its implementation.
10. Forest policy should guide daily practice. An institutional arrangement that promotes and facilitates continuous dialogue is essential for effective implementation, operational fine-tuning, coordination with other policies, integration of new initiatives and adaptation over time.

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1. Introduction

BACKGROUND

Forests and their products and services are key for the well-being of society. They provide fuelwood for energy, timber for construction and furniture, living space and food. They also protect soil from erosion, house valuable biodiversity, are sources of income for individuals and families and offer recreation opportunities. Because of these many functions, conflicts arise on how to use forests, who can use them, who benefits and who does not. With changing societal demands, forest policies and practices have evolved considerably over time and must continue to do so to remain relevant, useful and responsive to society's changing demands. However, national policies also need to anticipate future needs and trends in order to help to shape a broader vision for the country in the years to come.

A number of developments have affected the way forests are governed, ranging from globalization, decentralization and privatization to changing demand for forest products and services from a growing and often more urbanized population. Other factors include heightened awareness of the role of forests in regulating climate and in providing other environmental services; greater recognition of the multifunctionality of forests; and a shift from timber-centred to people-centred forest management. International forest-related conventions, agreements and initiatives also contribute to bringing about change. In many ways, these often rapid developments influence a country's decision to adapt its national forest policies in order to respond to changing contexts. According to FAO (2010), 143 countries have forest policy statements, more than half of which are less than ten years old. Each year, on average, more than ten countries issue a national forest policy statement.

Many decision-makers involved in forest policy see issues emerging in the wider political context – for example those related to climate change – as opportunities to translate the value society accords to forests into concrete economic mechanisms such as payments for ecosystem services. Countries that promote more sustainable lifestyles and recognize the merits of an economy based on low carbon emissions and low energy use are looking at the potential of forests to assume a greater role in national development. If society adopts the vision of a “green economy”, the benefits derived from forests can be even greater. Seizing this rare opportunity, politically and economically, requires open, inclusive and forward-looking forest policies and strategies.

Because of the multiplicity of interests and issues surrounding forests and their use, the development of an effective national forest policy benefits from and almost always requires a bottom-up and participatory approach. New actors have emerged and the roles of many traditional organizations have either been

In recent decades, much has changed in relation to forest policies, in terms of both what they address and how they are formulated and implemented.

modified or need to be reinvented. In the process, governments are assuming the task of moderator as they attempt to reach agreement among competing interests.

Also, the way the decisions and activities of other sectors influence forest management is better recognized, as is the need to take future trends more fully into account.

These and other changes argue strongly for the need to reconsider essential questions when developing or revising forest policy:

- What purposes do forests serve society and how will different interests be balanced?
- Who will manage, care for and use particular forests and under what set of rules?
- How will such rules be crafted and by whom?
- How will these rules be put into practice and how will their effects be assessed?

Some of the considerations described above were addressed in FAO's *Guidelines for forest policy formulation* (FAO, 1987). However, since then many changes have taken place, often within the framework of national forest programmes (NFPs). Countries have adopted and have been using NFPs as the main approach for developing forest policies since the 1990s. In the past 20 years, more than 100 countries have gained a wide range of experience in the process of forest policy development, as has FAO through its support to member countries around the world. A range of forest policy processes at the global and regional levels has also provided valuable guidance. This document takes stock of experiences in national forest policy development since the late 1980s.

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

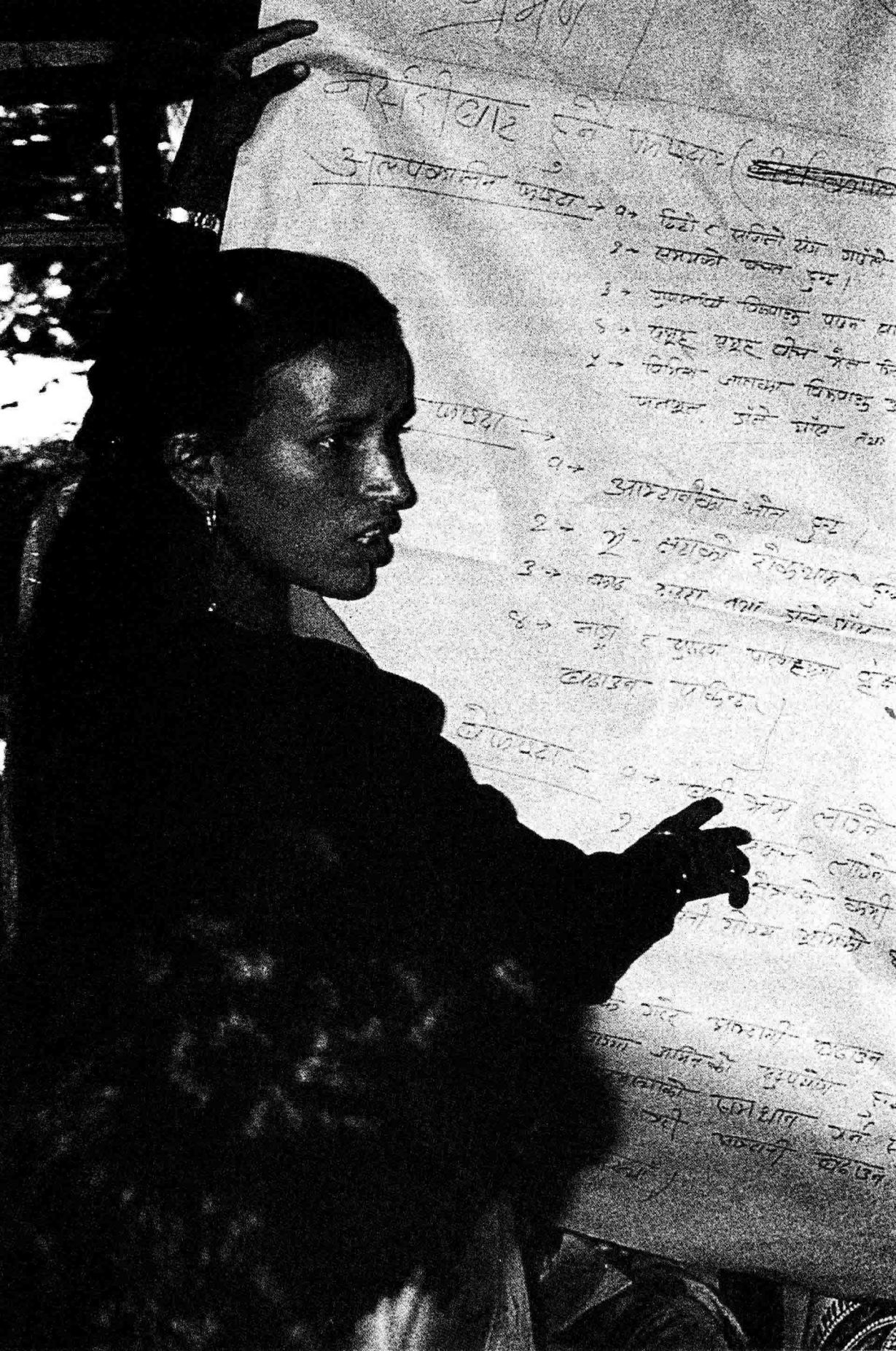
The purpose of this guide is to outline the concepts associated with forest policy development and the formulation of a formal forest policy statement, based on country experiences in recent decades. While focusing on the development and formulation of national forest policies, the guide can also be applied at subnational and local levels. Similarly, it can assist countries both to revise current forest policy and to develop and formalize a new one.

Because forest policy should reflect the particular social, cultural, economic and political context in each country as well as the unique characteristics of its forest resources and their usage, the guide is not a template for forest policy development. Rather, users are encouraged to adapt its contents to their specific needs.

The ultimate responsibility, authority and accountability for national forest policy rests with national governments and the stakeholders who help to develop and implement it – and whose actions make up the *de facto* policy. The principal intended audience, therefore, is senior government officials and the representatives of stakeholders who are involved in developing or revising the

national forest policy. It is also intended as a guide for other stakeholders, so that they can participate more effectively in dialogues about how forest should be used, particularly civil society organizations and community groups with social and environmental goals.

Policies should facilitate sound decisions on forests and trees and their sustainable use – decisions that provide the benefits that society expects. Such policies must be designed to respond to the changing needs of different groups and to emerging challenges and opportunities.



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2. What is a national forest policy?

WHAT IS A NATIONAL FOREST POLICY AND WHY SHOULD A COUNTRY HAVE ONE?

The term “policy” is not tightly defined but is used in different ways on different occasions. Often, it can mean “a course of action adopted and pursued”. A policy can be explicitly stated or not. It can also be planned or it can emerge through evident behavior. It is thus often viewed either as a rational system based on deliberate aims and plans or as a consequence of political activity arising from a series of decisions. In any case, a policy needs to provide guidance and a sense of direction over a certain period of time in order to be useful. People complain that central government, a ministry or other stakeholders “do not have a policy” when decisions are made on an ad hoc basis or are incoherent or contradictory.

A policy is intended to guide and determine present and future decisions and actions. It usually comprises two elements:

- a set of aspirations, goals or objectives
- an outline of a course of action to achieve them.

In this book, a national forest policy is considered to be a negotiated agreement between government and stakeholders (i.e. all those who depend on or benefit from forests or who decide on, control or regulate access to these resources) on the orientations and principles of actions they adopt, in harmony with national socio-economic and environmental policies, to guide and determine decisions on the sustainable use and conservation of forest and tree resources for the benefit of society.

A national forest policy is not to be unilaterally imposed by government. Ideally, it is an agreement among bodies that represent different forest interests and is formally adopted by government. Who should be involved in its development is thus a key question, as the selection of the participants influences which interests are taken into account. As Byron (2006)

A national forest policy is a policy for society, not for the forestry administration.

observes, it is difficult to imagine a national forest policy that can be relevant and useful without being firmly placed within the broader aims of society. Forest policies thus not only have to cover issues under the competence of the forestry administration and its agencies, but they also need to contribute to overarching policies, including those responsible for national development or economic and poverty strategies. They also need to be consistent with policies issued by other government authorities, e.g. on environmental protection, climate change, agriculture, industry and trade. Further, they need to be in line with a country's

forest-related international commitments. Thus, a forest policy is a policy for people, not for the forestry administration.

Being an agreement among government and stakeholders, a national forest policy is endorsed by government and implemented through legal, economic and informational

Today, a forest policy is widely understood as a negotiated agreement among government and other stakeholders on a shared vision on forests (and trees) and their use.

instruments, and by other stakeholders with their respective means. Ultimately, through government endorsement, a formal national forest policy is the official position of the government, as a clear statement of a country's goals and objectives, made public so that all parties know

the directions being pursued and the outcomes to be achieved.

If different actors each pursue their particular interests and change course frequently, larger goals or longer-term objectives are unlikely to be reached. Thus, there are a number of good reasons for jointly developing and using an agreed forest policy:

- The process of bringing stakeholders with diverse interests together to negotiate an agreement is extremely valuable in itself.
- A mutually accepted forest policy builds a sense of joint ownership, which is essential for its implementation.
- The involvement of stakeholders beyond the forest sector gives the policy legitimacy across society. Wide buy-in is particularly advantageous when negotiating with powerful ministries such as agriculture, energy, planning or finance.
- A national forest policy provides excellent guidance for developing more coherent institutional frameworks and policy instruments, including forest legislation.
- A national forest policy can guide the planning and operations of forestry stakeholders including administrations and agencies at various levels.
- A national forest policy facilitates communication, coordination and collaboration across government, non-governmental organizations and the public.
- A national forest policy can provide a solid basis for international policy discussions and for strengthening technical assistance cooperation.
- The national forest policy can serve as a reference to guide decisions on emerging issues, particularly those where quick, difficult or controversial decisions must be made.

WHAT DO NATIONAL FOREST POLICIES LOOK LIKE?

A country's *de facto* forest policy is determined by the actions taken by government and stakeholders in relation to forests. It is the sum of a multitude of more or less coordinated individual policy-relevant actions by government and stakeholders. *De facto* policy evolves over time as the actions of different bodies change in response to changing circumstances.

National forest policies are formalized and issued as statements in order to spell