



Policy that works for forests and people no.11

Forestry tactics

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### Lessons from Malawi's National Forestry Programme

To get anywhere in forestry these days you have to play politics. Forestry can and should improve people's livelihoods as well as looking after trees – and this means changing the political environment for the better. Malawi's National Forestry Programme seeks to address this challenge. It is different to many other national forest sector strategies and programmes which exist only as fat documents and lists of projects for which donors cannot be found. It seeks to make the most of existing knowledge and do something with it, to get stakeholders of all kinds negotiating, to focus on a few agreed priority areas, to hit them hard and achieve major change. It's a big challenge and results to date have been mixed. This study tells the story of Malawi's NFP so far – it draws out lessons from the process, identifies challenges ahead and identifies a range of practical tactics for national forest programmes which may be useful in other countries.

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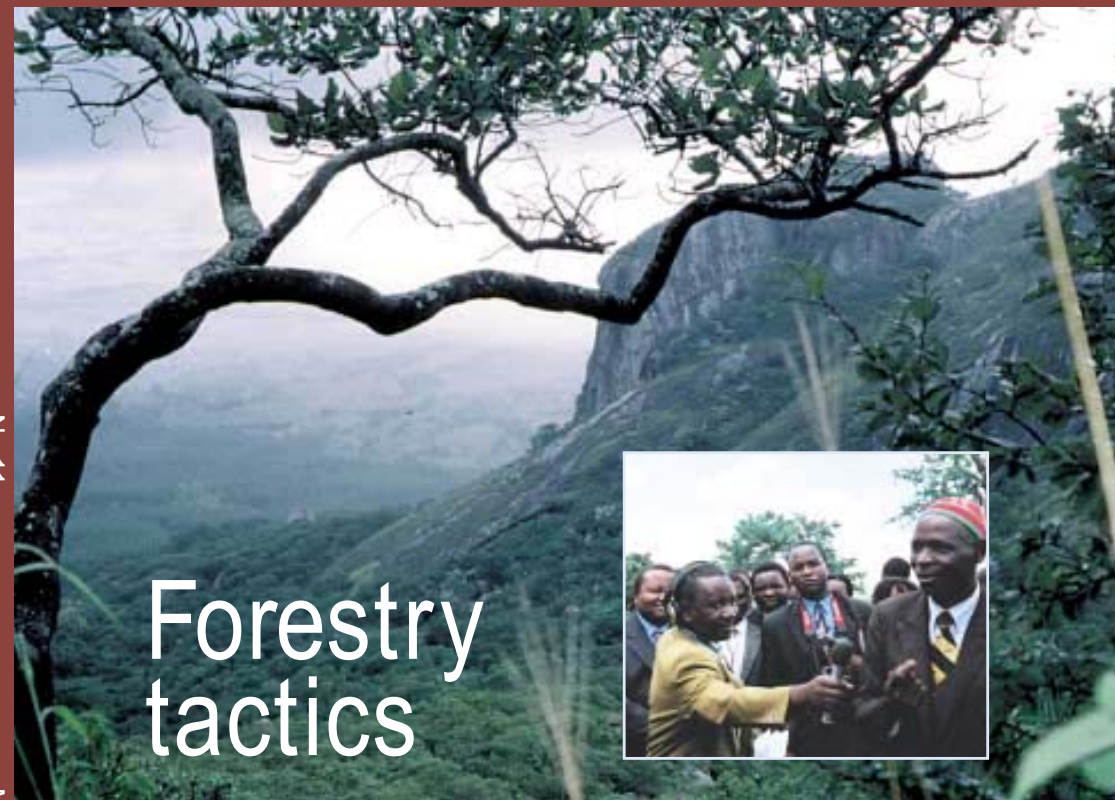
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## Lessons from Malawi's National Forestry Programme

James Mayers  
John Ngalande  
Pippa Bird  
Bright Sibale



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Authors:

James Mayers, John Ngalande,  
Pippa Bird, Bright Sibale

Series editor:

James Mayers

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**Copies of this report are available from:**

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International Institute for Environment and Development

3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD, UK

Tel: +44 20 7388 2117 Fax: +44 20 7388 2826 e-mail: [mailbox@iied.org](mailto:mailbox@iied.org)

**The lead author can be contacted at:** [james.mayers@iied.org](mailto:james.mayers@iied.org)

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# Executive summary



Many countries are re-thinking their approach to developing the forest sector. For some, a concerted effort to put together a national forest programme makes sense. But whilst there is considerable guidance available internationally in the form of advice on the principles and contents of nfps there is a dearth of practical written experience of how it is actually done – the approaches and tactics that work.

This study tells the story of Malawi's National Forestry Programme (NFP). It aims to describe the context, the actions taken and the results so far – what has worked, what has failed and why – and to convey some of the features of the process – the characters and key moments, the muddle and frustration, the occasional inspiring breakthrough. It is hoped that this experience can prove useful in other countries grappling with nfps, and in other contexts where sector sector-wide approaches are being pursued.

In Malawi, forest degradation is increasingly severe and the poor have urgent needs to acquire better access to forest goods and services. If forestry is going to play its part in national development it must become a livelihood strategy pursued by and for the millions of smallholder families that make up the country. Just recognising this represented a major challenge to the system. Like other countries, Malawi inherited a colonial model of forestry – decisions taken by expatriates involving the protection of forests against the perceived ravages of the people who lived in their vicinity, and development of plantations of pines and eucalypts for future, somewhat unspecified, uses.

But in the 1990s some key ingredients for a new approach began to come together. A change of government heralded the arrival of a more democratic era. This set the scene for a number of sectoral policy reform processes. Following considerable stakeholder involvement, the passing of the National Forestry Policy and the Forestry Act laid some solid foundations for a new kind of forestry linked to improved livelihoods. For the first time policy was outlining non-governmental roles in the sector, and the Department of Forestry knew that it had to move forward in concert with other actors. But making a start proved difficult.

Then in 1998 the Department of Forestry began to take serious steps under a new a Director of Forestry and NFP Co-ordinator. Two sources of core support for developing the NFP emerged – the UK Department for International Development and the UN agencies' Programme on Forests (PROFOR). Interested internationally in nfps, and ready to work together in Malawi, they were encouraged by the new appointments in the Forestry Department.

The NFP Co-ordination Unit's aim was to shape a NFP process that was long and concerted enough to generate and maintain adequate stakeholder engagement and 'buy-in' but short and focused enough so that it did not wear out everybody's energy and enthusiasm. It was also determined that the NFP should engage with policies, markets, institutions and programmes beyond the forest sector, since otherwise it would go the way of other countries' sector plans that fail to do this and become irrelevant in the face of these greater influences. Participation mechanisms were charged with making this cross-sectoral engagement a reality.

Principles developed for, and through, the NFP process included all the usual stuff about communication, capacity, partnership and the like, but also some more home-grown principles on: making use of 'good-enough' information, tactical action, negotiation, prioritisation, and an energetic process geared to practical outcomes. These principles came to be a useful checklist of 'watchwords' for the health of the NFP process, such that if workshops or findings of working groups fell obviously short on some of these principles they were questioned and modified.

It was also realised through the process that some terms that crop up regularly in the literature and debates on forestry and development need to be interrogated and unpacked. These loaded terms include:

- *Political will* – a favourite phrase for those who think politics is something rather mysterious, done by others. Forestry is a political activity and those interested in improving it can build help build the will for useful change
- *Participation* – everybody agrees that it's both a right and a practical necessity, but its form, mechanisms and functions need to be carefully shaped
- *Decentralisation* – the transfer of power from higher to lower levels of decision-making. But clarity is needed on whether this means 'deconcentration', delegation, privatisation, deregulation or devolution
- *Stakeholder consensus* – usually the aim of multi-stakeholder processes. But where there is underlying conflict, a consensus may in practice mean the loss of innovation and the domination of one group's vision over others
- *Livelihoods* – a useful concept conveying the multidimensional characteristics and causes of poverty, but with complications stemming from its recent elevation to the higher echelons of development jargon

These terms can mask hugely differing interpretations and implications. Working through them to determine what they should mean in relation to local realities is crucial – and a useful tactic for engaging stakeholders.

Malawi's NFP process did not have much time – it needed some 'early wins' to get some solid achievements under its belt, to demonstrate progress and bring more people on board. Working groups were set up on five themes demanding a major surge of new thinking, each group calling on the services of one or more national and international consultants. Work on co-management of forest goods and services, farm and small-scale private production forestry, and financial flows and mechanisms made good progress and were soon holding joint findings-discussion meetings and presenting findings for debate at the multi-stakeholder NFP Forum. But the working groups on managing institutional change and fostering good large-scale private sector forestry were much slower to make tangible progress.

That the issues of institutional reform had been agreed as priority areas at all was remarkable. The consequences of the new direction in forest policy for changing the institutional architecture, if followed through to their logical conclusion, were far reaching. When the political and legal imperative to decentralise was overlaid on top of this – the implications were potentially dramatic indeed. For the Department of Forestry there was the worry that 'selling off' state forest assets and transferring control to others would sound the death knell for government's ability to control the sector. Nevertheless, through the course of development of the NFP ways were found to approach these issues from a number of different angles, through dogged insistence from the NFP Co-ordination Unit and its donor supporters that they remain on the agenda, and through an ever-increasing pool of people recognising the need to find ways of steering institutional change.

'Ground-truthing' actions were also undertaken to test the viability and legitimacy at local level of ideas developed by the working groups and Forum. Information from existing village-level studies and processes was synthesised, six local government-level workshops and a similar number of stakeholder-specific meetings were held at district level. Some twenty-one villages in nine districts were involved in Participatory Rural Appraisals aimed at understanding village-level forest priorities whilst others were aimed at gathering village-level views on the ideas emerging from the working groups.

The ground-truthing activities reinforced the need for a tactical approach to developing the NFP by showing that stakeholder groups have very different opinions and degrees of power over decisions that have effects on forests and livelihoods, and they also have different degrees of potential to bring about

improved forestry and livelihoods. To provoke debate at meetings of the NFP Forum, the Co-ordination Unit developed a basic 'ranking' of stakeholder groups according to power and potential, and proposed that the major challenge for the NFP is: to increase the power of those with potential and increase the potential of those with power! To get closer to such a lofty aim required a basic re-examination, definition and re-negotiation of roles. The Co-ordination Unit therefore worked hard on this and boiled down much debate into simple statements of core roles for four main groups of stakeholders: central government, local government, the private sector and civil society.

As definition of basic roles began to receive positive feedback, prioritisation of all the proposed NFP actions generated through the participation mechanisms became crucial. A simple transparent participatory method for scoring actions against some basic criteria – environmentally beneficial, socially beneficial, economically beneficial, institutionally feasible and affordable – was developed within the NFP Forum. Once the scoring was done on all five criteria for each action, an estimate of importance and urgency was given, and finally an indication was given of the 'lead actor' for each action. To help generate action, these lead actors were then encouraged to bring to the Forum clear public statements of commitment, and pledges on how they will support the NFP.

A number of key moments can, in retrospect, be highlighted as instrumental in steering, stimulating and shaping the process. These include the arrival of the new Director of Forestry which made the whole process possible; agreeing a work plan with a practical approach to awkward subjects; heated meetings to clear the air with the private sector; getting it all down on paper in a short, sharp NFP framework; and the Presidential launch of the NFP raising the political and public profile.

Particular strengths of the process in Malawi appear to include:

- Strategic, not overly comprehensive, knowledge and participation
- Early findings and proposals on key issues
- Tactical coordination from within the forestry department
- Extra-sectoral influences have begun to be tackled
- Stakeholders and new supporters increasingly coming on board

Weaknesses include the fact that messages have not always been clear nor consistently pressed home, timeframes have proven repeatedly unrealistic, and sufficient high-level political engagement is still proving elusive. Major challenges ahead for Malawi and elsewhere include:

- Tackle new roles head on – some bold moves are needed
- Install the NFP at high political levels
- Engage with previously marginalised groups
- Hold on to tacit knowledge
- Expand the NFP ‘supporters club’
- Strengthen Government’s quality control

From the Malawi experience some key ‘members of the cast’ can be discerned as necessary for an NFP process: those crucial to its progress include the dedicated donor, the catalytic coordinator, the periodic adviser, the wise old-timer, the spark/enthusiast, the godfather and the media friend; whilst those inevitable to the process who have to be worked with or worked around include the maverick, the political obstacle and the saboteur. Malawi’s NFP is still in its early stages, but it is hoped that the cast is soon joined by many implementers, team workers and finishers to keep the show on the road.

Practical tips can also be distilled for other NFPs, including:

- Build on existing mechanisms to establish: an NFP steering group to keep things on track; an NFP coordination unit to run the show; and an NFP forum to generate ideas and commitment
- Avoid ‘full fat’ project wish-lists
- Focus on substantive actions to bring people to the negotiating table
- Develop a communications strategy, visualise plans and tell stories – not just dry information
- Plan for a high turnover of key people
- Promote the NFP as an adaptive cycle, and focus on the systems – or information, human resource development, finance, participation and management – which will keep the cycle moving

Malawi’s NFP is ambitious but tactical. It deals with current capabilities, understanding and the state of debate in a country where improvement of forestry and livelihoods is badly needed. It has tried made some early gains in a relatively short time and built confidence and capability to move forward. It has attempted to get energies focused on key agreed priorities and has tried not to do everything at once. The Malawi experience shows that nfps can even be quite good fun.





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## Acronyms

CURE	Coordination Unit for the Rehabilitation of the Environment
DFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development (previously ODA – Overseas Development Administration)
EC	European Commission
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
FD	Forestry Department
FMDF	Forest Management and Development Fund
FSR	Forest Sector Review
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
MNREA	Ministry for Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs
NFP	National Forestry Programme
NFAP	National Forestry Action Programme
NFPCU	National Forestry Programme Coordination Unit
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PROFOR	UN Agencies' Programme on Forests
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
SWAp	Sector Wide Approach
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WICO	Wood Industries Corporation



# Introduction

## What this story is about

This document describes the recent experience of developing a national forest programme in Malawi. The idea is that various people in Malawi would benefit from taking stock of progress, whilst others outside may be interested in what seems to be a rather different approach to that taken in many countries. The document aims to highlight the process – why things were done, what was done, when, by whom and whether it worked or not. It is written by ‘insiders’ – two of the authors have the job of coordinating the process, whilst the other two have been involved in supporting it. Thus, we are hardly dispassionate and possibly not very objective, but we try to imagine what those looking from outside might want to know, and to be as frank about success and failure as we can. However, these are personal views and we fully expect others to disagree.

We hope that readers will be interested in the whole Malawi NFP story but we recognize that some will prefer to dip in and out. To help these ‘dippers’ we present some forestry tactics in boxes under four different headings, each referring to a type of lesson learnt, as follows:

♥ **Key Moments** These boxes present important decisions, innovations and/or actions that were instrumental in steering, stimulating or shaping the NFP process. Many of these helped supporters of the NFP to clear blockages and enabled either the next steps to be taken or a path forward to be agreed. Some were engineered, others were unexpected. These boxes aim to illustrate that any process has its own ‘golden moments’ that shape both its direction and its outcome.

♣ **Members of the cast** In any NFP process there are some roles that someone must play to make a show a success, and to avoid it collapsing or closing down after a very short run. These boxes illustrate the diversity of roles needed to make a good show – a dynamic and practical NFP process – and the range of individuals who may play these roles – some play one role throughout, others play a number of different roles, while some make only a guest appearance.

◆ **NFP tips** Malawi's NFP process picked up on lessons from similar (and not so similar) processes in other countries, but much of it remained somewhat experimental. These boxes offer short practical descriptions of some of the mechanisms and ways of working that seemed to be effective in constructing and maintaining a healthy NFP. They may not be immediately replicable to the contexts of other countries, but it is hoped that they will stimulate ideas and encourage the emergence of NFP supporters elsewhere.

♠ **Loaded terms** The Malawi NFP process is not unusual in having to deal with, and sometimes even promoting, some very value-laden terms, phrases and jargon. In these boxes some of these words are briefly interrogated or 'unpacked' of the assumptions and shorthand they contain. They highlight the fact that loaded terms are often used in a casual manner, usually with little disagreement, but they may mask hugely differing interpretations or implications and thus avoid debate on touchy subjects. Occasionally, the introduction of some new terms helps raise and clarify debate and allows ways forward to be found through difficult political terrain.

Section 1 of this paper gives a summary of the content of the Malawi NFP as it now stands, and notes the main milestones in progress over recent years. We see right from the beginning that some 'loaded terms' are involved. Section 2 reflects on the timing and nature of the process which gave a major boost to the NFP over the last couple of years. Sections 3 to 7 describe and analyse the main stages in development of the NFP – drawing out lessons along the way. Section 8 concludes on the strengths, weaknesses and major challenges ahead.



# Malawi's NFP – in a nutshell

Malawi's National Forestry Programme (NFP) has been developing since the early 1990s – with a concerted development phase during 1999 and 2000. Existing information has been unearthed and utilised, new analysis has been carried out by working groups, key international obligations and opportunities have been considered, and consultation processes with stakeholders at national, district and local levels have been steered and synthesised in a framework document launched by the President of Malawi in January 2001.

## Box 1 Key problems tackled by Malawi's NFP

- *Forest degradation and food insecurity go hand in hand.* About half of Malawi's farm households have been classed as food insecure, and farmers often have no way to tackle their food insecurity except to cut woodland on customary land or to encroach upon the forest reserves.
- *Fuelwood problems are rising, and affect women and children most.* For the foreseeable future fuelwood will remain vital for most Malawians. But much of the wood is being chopped from woodlands much faster than it can grow back. Women have to spend more time finding wood, whilst children suffer from less frequent cooking.
- *National demand for forest products is much greater than supply.* Annual consumption of forest products, estimated at 15 million m<sup>3</sup>, far exceeds the sustainable supply of 7-8 million m<sup>3</sup>.
- *Potential benefits from plantation forests are being missed.* Effective management of Malawi's industrial plantations has declined, and a significant opportunity for off-farm employment and much needed industrial development, in a sector in which Malawi enjoys a comparative advantage, is thus being missed.
- *Broader threats to national sustainable development damage the forest sector particularly badly.* Increasing inequality and insecurity of law and order are national problems which impact on rural smallholders to a great degree. Such trends reduce the possibility of smallholders investing their precious land, time and cash in the forest and tree resources which could help them stabilise and improve their livelihoods.
- *Existing institutions are poorly fitted to the changed roles which stakeholder pressures and new policies demand.* The related drives for private sector involvement and decentralisation are creating pressures for change amongst government agencies and new responsibilities for other stakeholders.



The NFP proposes that forests and trees can and should be managed and used to contribute to achieving national goals of poverty eradication, a thriving economy and good environmental management. To make this possible, the NFP has generated an agreed set of strategies and prioritised actions to bring about sustainable management of forest goods and services for improved and equitable livelihoods.



#### LOADED TERMS

##### **'Improved forestry and livelihoods'**

This is the type of phrase heard tripping from many a forester's lips these days, but what does it mean? Forestry can mean a wide range of arts in managing trees in the landscape. For example, whilst foresters tend to like to see big trees, preferably in large blocks, local people often prefer a mixed bush fallow landscape producing a range of forest products. Thus, what is improved for some may for others be degraded – it depends on people's perspectives and aspirations for forests. Livelihoods is a term that has been relatively recently raised to the higher echelons of development jargon. A livelihood is said to comprise the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. It is thought to be a useful idea particularly for focusing on the multidimensional characteristics and causes of poverty – but again, it has very different connotations for different people. Thus, these terms need to be pinned down for their meaning in any one context, and efforts to do this can be helpful in building support for an NFP that is a process rather than a product. Recognising that what can be reasonably expected from an NFP process is *improved* forestry – rather than instantly sustainable forestry (another loaded term which we do not have the inclination to unpack here) – and that different perspectives on what would constitute an improvement need to be considered, can help to ground the NFP in some local realities. The same goes for thinking through livelihoods – whose livelihoods should or could be improved and how can forestry best contribute to this? Efforts to work out what the terms should mean can help to take the discussion of forestry out of its traditional 'box', and into other sectors. For example, the Department of Forestry in its government budget submissions is now using the twelve NFP strategies (see below) prioritized against criteria to show how forestry can contribute to improved livelihoods (potential to create employment, to generate household income, to contribute to food security and to provide environmental services).

Malawi's NFP has generated an energetic process which is seen as a cycle of strategy, action, learning, adaptation and improvement. A major challenge is to keep this process alive and ensure lessons learned from practice really are fed back into the NFP cycle to improve strategies and make progress.

## Box 2 Malawi's NFP – twelve strategies

1. *Manage the process of institutional change.* Re-shape the Forestry Department organisational structures and procedures for managing human resource development, information, finance and planning.
2. *Optimise policy influences on forests and livelihoods.* Use the platform provided by the NFP consensus to pull sectors together through mechanisms for policy analysis and cross-sectoral policy co-ordination.
3. *Build local forest governance through decentralisation.* Rise to the challenge of decentralisation and focus central and district actions to empower local institutions for forestry.
4. *Support community-based forest management.* Recognise a broad range of village institutions and develop their capabilities, along with those of front line extension staff, for collaborative management.
5. *Improve individual smallholder livelihoods.* Foster the trust, entrepreneur-smallholder partnerships, information and availability of inputs necessary for growing and nurturing trees.
6. *Strengthen forest extension.* Improve effectiveness and efficiency in extension for community-based and smallholder forestry.
7. *Sharpen research and information systems.* Make old and new research and information on forest assets, demands and uses more useful, and fill the gaps in social and economic knowledge for improved forestry and livelihoods.
8. *Influence wood energy supply and demand.* Focus wood energy policies, and phase out government subsidies for timber, to encourage private production of wood fuel and timber.
9. *Manage forest reserves.* Establish local boards and prepare practical planning guidance and partnerships between government, NGOs and the private sector for reserve management.
10. *Foster improved industrial forestry.* Generate a clear political decision on the future ownership and management of plantations, and develop proper standards and leases for plantation management
11. *Increase wood production in the estate sector.* Encourage better management of existing woodlands on estates and promote development of outgrower schemes and contract tree-growing on estate land by neighbouring farmers.
12. *Develop forest sector financing.* Develop partnerships and co-financing agreements between government, private sector and civil society for new forestry investments.

The vital *next steps* for each of the main role-players are spelled out in the NFP document – these are the actions which enable people to make a start on implementing the strategies (MNREA, 2001):

- *All role-players* - should spread the level of agreement reached on the NFP so far, make commitments to the NFP, and develop practical means to implement the identified highest priority activities.
- *Central government* - political decision-makers should clearly decide the future of plantations and the responsibilities of different forestry players under decentralisation policy; and the forest department should ensure that the NFP Co-ordination Unit is well-supported, and put in place better departmental systems for human resource development, information, finance, and institutional change management.
- *Local government* - should incorporate NFP actions in district development programmes and generate alliances and proposals for necessary support.
- *Private sector* – should engage with the FD and other role-players to identify and overcome blockages to promote new investment in sustainable forestry forest enterprise and trade.



Photo: Bright Sibale

Wood for cooking is the forest product in highest demand in Malawi



## LOADED TERMS

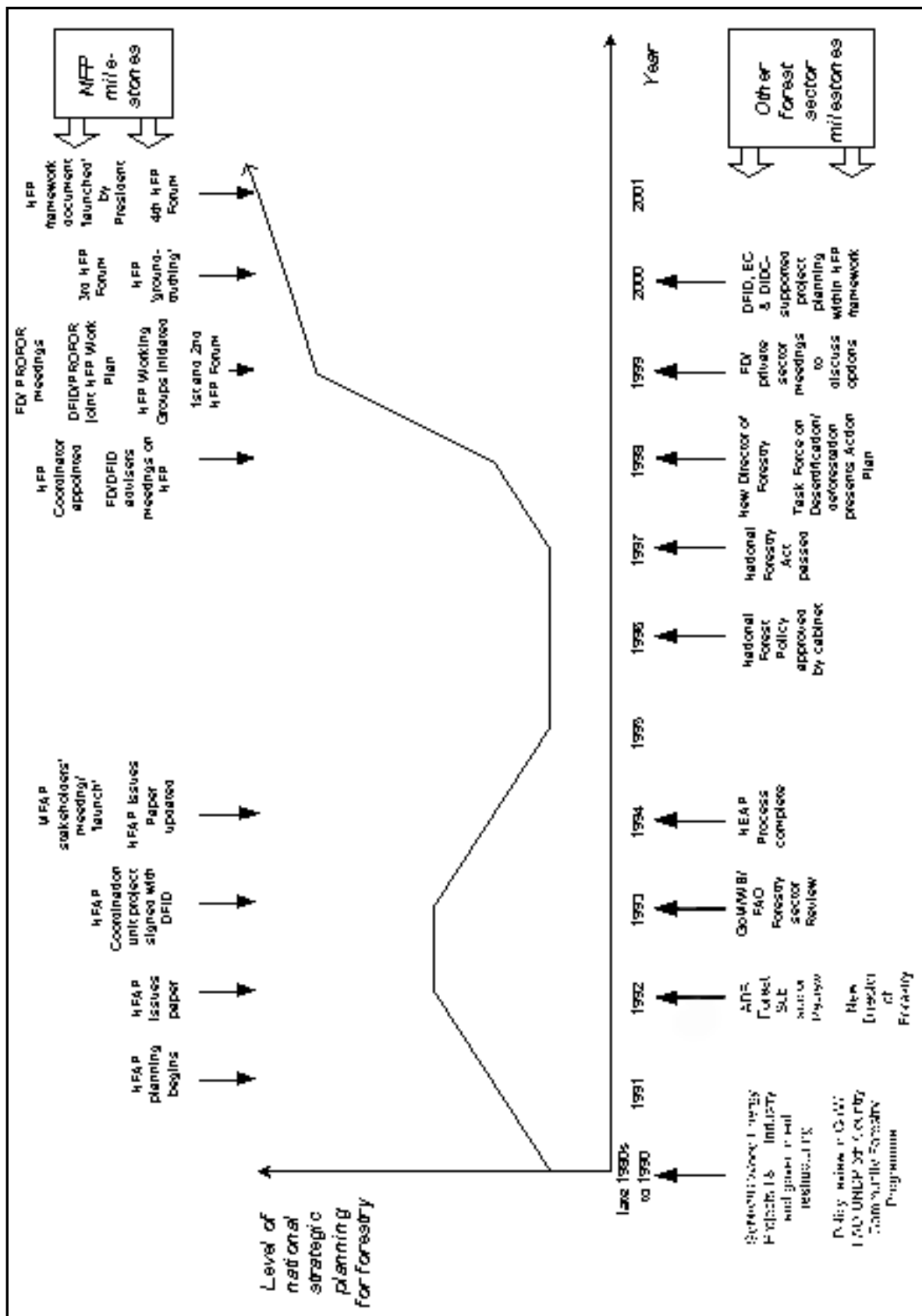
### 'Political will'

This is a favourite phrase used by those who think politics is something rather mystical, dirty or unfortunate done by others. When plans produce few results a 'lack of political will' is routinely blamed. Foresters are famous for it – they commonly state that the fate of forests is determined by forces beyond their control – and thus feel justified in retreating into their shells and ignoring these forces. Yet almost every aspect of forestry is a political activity and some major changes can be wrought from humble beginnings – power and politics do change over time and those interested in a better forest sector can help mould these changes. In Malawi, the 'collective bargaining' over roles and responsibilities developed through some of the NFP participatory mechanisms (see below) generated considerable will and momentum for making progress. Strategic alliances with others beyond the sector can bring vital developments for forestry, as can work on key catalytic forestry issues which bring useful incremental change without having to take on the whole agenda at once. But to declaim a 'lack of political will' is generally to duck the responsibility which foresters' considerable powers give them.

- *Civil society* – should incorporate NFP strategies in programmes and proposals, and strengthen community-based institutions that have capability and motivation to improve forestry and livelihoods.
- *International community* – should support the other role players in pursuit of NFP actions and work towards sector-wide support for the NFP.

Malawi's NFP is ambitious but tactical. It deals with current capabilities, understanding and the state of debate in a country where improvement of forestry and livelihoods is badly needed. It has tried to make some early gains in a relatively short time to build confidence and political will to move forward. It attempts to get energies focused on key agreed priorities and does not try to do everything at once. The first steps have been taken; hopefully the next steps will be taken too.

Figure 1 Malawi NFP milestones





# Why now? Why this way?

## 2.1 Timing is everything

Like any political or planning initiative which has life in it, a fruitful NFP process depends on a few key ingredients coming together at the right time. In Malawi, the first ingredient fell into place with a *change of government* in 1994 – marking the end of an era of autocratic and authoritarian control and the arrival of a more democratic regime. This sharp change in political context brought the principles of participation, partnership and poverty-focused development to the forefront of debate. The new Government launched a poverty alleviation strategy and hot on its heels came various *sectoral policy reform processes*. The reform of policies was seen as an important first step in rectifying the weaknesses and failures of the authoritarian approaches of the past. Several donor agencies encouraged and supported these processes in line with general *donor enthusiasm* for structural adjustment.

The natural resources sector had already given considerable thought to revamping its key policy statements and was therefore well placed to be a frontrunner in the Government's drive for policy reform. The revision and subsequent adoption of a new Forest Policy in 1996 consolidated thinking developed over several years and identified new emphases for forestry – notably co-management and increased private sector involvement. The new policy began to focus the forest sector's attention on the fact that Malawi is a nation of smallholders – most households only have a hectare or so of land from which they must get a variety of livelihood needs. Forest goods and services may be crucial components of these livelihoods and could be further developed to improve them through enhancing their contributions to household fuel supplies, building materials, cash, or soil-fertility. The policy revision thus gave the Forestry Department an *opportunity to publicly respond to the increasingly severe forest degradation and the urgent needs of the poor* to acquire better access to forest goods and services.

Enshrining principles of participation and partnership in the new forest policy was one ingredient; but it was the *pressing demands on government forestry from*

*an increasingly vocal civil society* – that brought a hesitant acceptance of the need for institutional reform. The urgent need for a reallocation of roles and responsibilities within the forest sector was further elaborated within the Government's public expenditure review of 1996. This review was part of a general drive for fiscal discipline and civil service reform and took place within the context of incipient policies on decentralisation and privatisation. Whilst ducking some of the fundamental challenges, the review certainly highlighted the need for redesigned roles and financing in the sector.



#### LOADED TERMS

##### **Institutional change/reform**

Institutional change is likely to be a fundamental element of any NFP process. Pressures such as basic institutional survival, the growing calls from civil society for new ways of working, and the dissatisfaction of those inside institutions are often impossible to ignore. But an NFP that simply states that, 'institutions must change' is not going to get very far. There are many sources of resistance to change in the institutional cultures, skills and systems that maintain the old way of doing things. The direction of change and how to manage it is the issue. This is particularly true for – but not exclusive to – state institutions. Change is needed to narrow the gap between their capacity and their new roles that demand they engage with a whole range of players, with varying needs, varying degrees of power and different aspirations for the forest. Institutions are having to reform so that they can learn better, and this requires active conversation between the players. If an NFP process achieves nothing more than bringing the players together to have a genuine dialogue, it will have had some effect. But it should also look to raise issues such as rules and restraints that check actions and combat corruption; it should promote competition in order to increase efficiency; and, it needs to promote partnerships, participation and devolution processes that bring the players closer together. An astute NFP process should not limit itself to supporting change agents, it should also seek out and support change advocates. Change is difficult and politically fraught – developing a vision of change which balances the state, the market place and civil society will take time – and needs all the help it can get.

The above major changes in the environment in which the forest sector found itself, coupled with more subtle changes internal to the sector described later in this document, led to a step-wise *increase in the motivation and commitment of the Forestry Department* to turn its new policy into practice. A final key ingredient was a timely *recognition by donors of the new opportunities* these changes in context offered.

## 2.2 The tactical approach



### LOADED TERMS

#### Strategy and tactics

A dictionary definition of strategy is, 'generalship, or the art of conducting a campaign and manoeuvring an army; artifice or finesse generally', while tactics are defined as, 'the science or art of manoeuvring in the presence of the enemy'. Whilst some may wince at the military allusions brought out by these definitions, it pays to recognise that crafty tricks are involved here.

The Malawian government's decision to put together an NFP signaled both its intention to meet its international commitments and its need to redress some of the poor relationships between stakeholders stemming from the autocratic approach to forest management prior to the 1990s. The Forestry Department's dialogue with several international organisations and with some of the donor representatives in-country was slowly persuasive in moving the Department away from earlier ideas of an NFP as a comprehensive 'master plan' for the sector. It accepted that a thick master plan document with a wish-list of project proposals which poorly reflected the real priorities and motivations of key stakeholders, and quickly went out of date, was not going to get the forest sector to where it needed to be. The Department was also painfully aware of its limited financial and human resources and, while increased donor funding was keenly sought, needed an approach that would not demand a level of resources simply beyond its reach.



### NFP TIP

#### Avoid 'full-fat' project wish-lists

Detailed master plans and action plans comprising detailed prescriptions for projects prepared without a 'buyer' already waiting in the wings are generally doomed to failure. Those that have produced them generally assume that the detail will appeal to potential supporters and enable new actions to get under way. But nobody reads them and they are often out of date as soon as they are produced. In reality, potential supporters do not like to be told exactly what to do – they need to be given some guidance and asked for their support within a general framework. With NFPs, donors are unlikely to take up project proposals that are pre-detailed and priced. Rather they can be steered in the right direction – and towards the right partners – then invited to develop their own plans with those partners.



Actions emerging from the NFP thus needed to be genuinely viable, building on existing capacities and motivations and avoiding the temptation to try everything at once and thus do nothing well. A process that focused on prioritisation of issues and actions, and pulled people in to work together, became the agreed need.

A small group of senior staff in the Forestry Department, in contact with key players in some other government departments and several NGOs, reflected on their various international experiences and information available to them related to national forestry programme approaches. Material included personal experiences from previous donor-supported study tours of forest sector programmes in Zimbabwe and South Africa, published NFAP guidance booklets from FAO, and IIED's lessons-learned series on '*Policy that works for forests and people*' (a series now joined by this paper). This experience and information backed up several of the Department's more progressive inclinations<sup>1</sup>.



## LOADED TERMS

### From NFAP to nfp

The change from NFAPs to nfps is not simply about following the common trend in forestry of putting old beer in new bottles. There is a more important rationale: 'action plan' has generally been used as a term for a written product only, whilst 'programme' implies mechanisms, instruments and processes, as well as products. 'Programme' also incorporates policy and strategy, as well as planning. The name change is also important in relation to international forestry debates. Many countries developed National Forestry Action Plans (NFAPs) from the mid 1980s onwards – following an FAO model which emerged from the global Tropical Forestry Action Plan of that time. Many NFAPs remained exercises on paper only – lasting only as long as donors propped them up – they failed to catalyse the detailed actions expected of them. In general, this was because they were done quickly, often by foreign experts, and failed to engage with political and economic reality to show not only *what* needs to change, but also *how* it can change. International debates have incorporated some of the lessons learned from NFAPs and there is now emphasis – in the recent recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests for example – on in-country programmes which are enabling and strategic in ways which make sense for the country concerned. 'National forestry programme' (nfp – note the lower case, a conceit to downplay the idea that such programmes are international constructs) has thus become an accepted notion in these debates – although few countries have explicitly developed nfps as yet. Malawi is ahead of the game (and is unafraid of the upper case acronym – NFP).

<sup>1</sup> One principle underpinning the preparation of the NFP became (see section 5.3), 'making use of "good enough" information'. This approach served the process pretty well, but there is some danger of the NFP becoming another initiative that recycles outdated information (some of it probably inaccurate when it was first put together) and gives credence to untested assumptions. Malawi is not alone in finding a preponderance of recycled and untested information floating around the sector; the trick it has attempted to pull off is to be careful in using the information, make its weaknesses clear, and try to address any fundamental problems or gaps in information within the preparation and implementation processes of the NFP.

International emphasis on *participation and dialogue* for example encouraged the Government to promote inclusion of key stakeholders and avoid a top-down and largely irrelevant plan likely to occupy shelf space rather than attention. Its highlighting of the strong *extra-sectoral influences* that could well override forest policy or forestry interventions was also seen as key to ensuring that that the fine words laid out in the forest policy actually delivered better lives and forests.



#### LOADED TERMS

##### Participation

This is clearly a 'good idea' that nobody from any position will want to say they are against. But they could be talking about very different things. To some it will be a goal or aspiration, to others a demand, and to others a description of the way things are. In forestry, as in other sectors, there are too many simplistic exhortations to 'get everyone participating and democratise the process'. But if we consider why participation is needed it is clear that it is not going to be an easy business. Participation is needed because current inequities, bad forestry, stakeholder stalemate or other problems persist due to misunderstandings or lack of knowledge amongst stakeholders of each others' perspectives, powers and tactics, and the potential for change in these. Participation processes are fundamental to nfps - to understand multiple perspectives, negotiate and cut 'deals' between the needs of wider society and local actors, form partnerships and to maintain nfps as 'alive processes', not 'dead papers'. Participatory mechanisms such as the NFP forum, steering group, working groups and local-level learning groups need to be explicitly designed to tackle particular problems.

International experience also convinced at least some emerging champions of the process that an NFP approach allowed for *innovation* and perhaps most importantly innovative implementation in parallel with the necessary planning and prioritisation process.



#### NFP TIP

##### Catalytic actions

The kinds of actions which can really push forward a nfp process are those requiring a bold intervention, which has tangible impacts and stimulates further actions. These actions may start small, but have knock-on effects or set in train a series of other actions which bring larger effects. Such actions often have an experimental emphasis – bringing stakeholders to the table and allowing them to explore each others' claims, make mistakes, learn, and make changes for themselves. Debate and experience of specific actions can lead to progress on specific issues, and can improve the NFP process itself. An example in Malawi was the NFP Coordination Unit's pro-active organisation of a high-level meeting of government and the private sector to discuss forms of private sector involvement in forest management. The meeting produced much heat and set the scene for subsequent negotiations over new forms of lease and privatisation processes.



Watering seedlings in a tree nursery

Malawi needed an implementation framework that could accommodate the acute changes in approach and direction set out in the new policy as well as one that could deal with the links and overlaps of policies operating inside and outside the forest sector. NFP supporters recognised the need for a process which concentrated on agreeing and adopting new roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders, as well as a process that brought the then estranged players together so that they might begin to forge meaningful *partnerships*. The Malawi NFP was therefore seen as one means to break down barriers and to start to dissolve the high level of distrust between partners with very different powers and potentials – most notably the Government, the private sector, traditional authorities and local communities.



#### LOADED TERMS

##### Partnerships

Like 'participation' nobody will disagree that 'partnerships' are a good idea – but this agreement in itself will not change players' relationships overnight. Indeed, some argue that working in partnership is a deeply unnatural form of behaviour. The word can imply 'business partners' and/or the more difficult 'partners as equals'. Taking the notion of a business partnership beyond its origin in the private sector, and using it to mean a relationship which allows the business at hand to be dealt with, it begins to make more sense. Taking it a step further, the term 'deal' may be more useful for 'business transactions' which are mutually acceptable (or bearable) to the parties. Striking such deals within the NFP may or may not move the relationship towards a partnership of equals – but it will at least engender the need for give and take to build partnerships that can address some of the NFP's core strategies. Partnerships may start as small catalytic actions (see above) by a couple of people or partner organisations, demonstrating something tangible and attracting others to join the action.



# Getting started and negotiating goals

## 3.1 Back in the mists of time the NFP seeds were sown

In the middle parts of the 20th century Malawian forestry was admired throughout Southern Africa. Forest and plantation management systems were carefully developed and foresters from Malawi were recognised for their high degree of professionalism. But this was a particular sort of forestry. One based on the colonial model – decisions taken by expatriates involving the protection of forests – mostly miombo woodlands – against the perceived ravages of the people who lived in their vicinity, and development of plantations of exotic trees – pines and eucalypts – for future, somewhat unspecified, uses. Policies, laws, plans and programmes backed all this up.

But in independent Malawi in the 1980s, cracks were appearing in the system. The plantation-based forest industry was not bringing in the anticipated national development benefits, indigenous woodland reserves were in places under siege from local people seeking farm land and forest products, and the capacity of forest institutions to respond was in decline. Yet the sheer weight of policy, law and institutional procedures and norms militated against effective change.

Nevertheless, advocates for a new approach to policy and planning that could address the changed conditions and demands of forests and people began to have some effect in the late 1980s. Calls for reforming forest law and policy found expression in various analyses and submissions emerging from forest-related projects at the time, such as the FAO-UNDP supported Fifth Country Community Forestry Programme.

## 3.2 New policy in the 1990s – quick fix experts versus locally-driven process

In 1992 the Forestry Department's own planning section, until that time mostly focused on planning at forest management unit level, produced an analysis of more macro-level planning issues – in an attempt to set the scene for a National Forest Action Plan. The FAO and the UK government (via the ODA, later to become DFID) pushed some support Malawi's way for this, and an FD officer of considerable operational and planning experience was given responsibility for developing a NFAP. Ironically, the donors were now calling for a 'country-driven process' yet the overall capacity of the planners in the Department was weak in part because of the deep-seated tradition of having donor-supported technical assistance in these roles. In any case, support from senior management of the Forestry Department was far from strong – and further progress was stymied as these donors quietly shelved their support.

The NFAP issues paper was revised in 1995 to incorporate some of the findings of the Forestry Sector Policy Review carried out in 1992/93 by the Government of Malawi, World Bank and FAO. Despite doing some excellent analysis which remains highly relevant today (and is re-visited in some of the priorities identified by the NFP) the FSPR had very little immediate impact since there was no process at the time to take it forward.

Also in 1995, a multi-stakeholder meeting for the Plan was held. However, due to staff losses and changes in the Forestry Department, momentum was then lost and only really began to grow again when work to develop a new national forestry policy and law was given the green light.

The passing of the *National Forestry Policy* in 1996, and the *Forestry Act* in 1997 laid some solid foundations for a new kind of forestry linked to improved livelihoods. The Policy was based on considerable involvement of at least some stakeholder groups outside of the Forestry Department, and the Act – written by hired hands – captured some of the new directions in a considerably changed regulatory mandate for government. The Policy drew strongly from the work of the earlier Forestry Sector Policy Review and from the National Environmental Action Plan developed in the mid '90s. The main emphases of the Policy and Act can be summarised as:

- strengthening core roles of government (planning, programming, monitoring, regulating, extension, managing conservation/protection areas)
- increasing involvement of private sector and civil society
- empowering communities to manage forest resources on customary land and, in collaboration with government, on reserves

- engaging with international obligations and processes
- co-ordinating with other sectors

Clearly, the challenge was to put these sentiments into practice. Yet everything seemed to have high priority and there was a period of considerable confusion as to who should do what. For the first time policy was telling the Forestry Department that other actors in the sector had roles to play too, and the Department had to move forward in concert with them. To begin planning for this, another multi-departmental meeting was held (the rationale for these now becoming firmly established), but it was otherwise proving difficult to make a start on this new agenda.



#### NFP TIP

##### **Build on existing mechanisms**

An NFP process needs several forms of participatory mechanism. At national level some effective form of genuine multi-stakeholder dialogue and negotiation mechanism is a must. Such mechanisms do not become effective easily – internationally there are many examples of failed attempts to invent them to meet the purposes of particular projects and programmes. In an attempt to build on a mechanism which already had some political momentum in Malawi, the Director of Forestry convened a meeting of the existing inter-departmental Task Force on desertification and environmental degradation – which already had a mandate to report to the Cabinet Committee of Health and Environment. This Task Force had previously worked to good effect, with some political buy-in, but following its initial report had suffered from reduced continuity and profile as departments sent a different person each time, often with little decision-making clout. However, it made sense for the NFP to build on the interaction already established through this mechanism rather than start afresh. Over successive meetings the Task Force evolved into the NFP Forum (see below) with a greater range of stakeholders coming on board, and establishment of more decision-oriented ways of working.

In 1998 the Forestry Department was called on to provide the secretariat, and much of the input, to the Task Force to Combat Deforestation – which involved more than 20 institutions. The Task Force developed a submission to Cabinet and a set of detailed project proposals bound together in a fat report. To date, none of these proposals appear to have been taken up by funding agencies, and the Task Force has not met since mid-1998. However the Task Force later became the basis of the government grouping which in 1999 joined others in the first multi-stakeholder NFP Forum.

Also in 1998, after a period of limited activity the previous year, the appointment of a new Director of Forestry and new NFP Co-ordinator offered an opportunity to revive the NFP Co-ordination Unit. Provision of modest technical assistance and operational support from two donors encouraged the revival.



## NFP TIP

### Changing Director, Changing Direction

The middle 1990s were a period in which some central government restructuring and legislative developments began to bring change to the forest sector. But it took a change in Director of Forestry to pave the way for a concerted effort to rethink policy and planning in forestry. The new Director was keen to harness ideas from a broad range of sources in Malawi and internationally, and to bring in new support for forest sector programmes. Crucially, he recognised the guiding framework for the sector provided by the new forest law and policy and highlighted the need to develop a coherent and prioritised programme to operationalise it. This was the challenge thrown down to the NFP.

## 3.3 The NFP supporters' club starts with two members

In late 1998, two sources of core support for developing the NFP emerged – DFID and PROFOR. There appear to be four main factors that explain why the DFID funding tap was turned on in 1999 for the Malawi NFP:

- *It was interested internationally.* DFID's forestry advisers in London had recently restated their interests in supporting nfps in places where the stimulation and management of policy and institutional change in the forest sector was really needed to move forest management towards sustainability and improved poor people's livelihoods.<sup>2</sup>
- *It was expanding its overall programme in Malawi.* The new DFID Country Strategy Paper identified 'Safeguarding the Environment' as one of its six key Impact Areas within an expanding financial framework for Malawi. This programme was building up from an average of about US\$45 million per year in the early 1990s to become DFID's third or fourth largest bilateral programme world-wide with a projected framework of over US\$ 110 million per year from 2000-2001. Support for developing the NFP is specifically mentioned as an activity to help 'safeguard the environment' in DFID's 1998 Malawi Country Strategy Paper, and it addresses several of the other six main impact areas identified, such as 'rethinking the role of government, including decentralisation' and 'sustainable rural livelihoods'.

<sup>2</sup> DFID forestry advisers also noted that support for developing Malawi's NFP was one means to put into practice some of the learning about connecting policy to practice generated and synthesized by the programme 'Policy that works for forests and people', part funded by DFID, which is coordinated by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). This work and IIED's related experience of local and national forest programmes was also the reason why IIED was asked to provide advice to the NFP development process in Malawi (see section 3.4).

- *It was encouraged by new appointments in the Forestry Department.* The appointment of a new Director of Forestry and the designation of a Co-ordinator of the NFP Unit in whom DFID had a high degree of confidence signalled a re-emphasis on strategic planning and the beginning of a more open relationship between the Department and donor agencies which had been opaque in recent years.
- *It had a privileged position.* DFID had staked a claim for the NFP since the early 1990s without conditions ever being quite right for more than low level support to the Coordination Unit. This slow build up, and the regular reiteration of interest from DFID's Lilongwe-based Natural Resources Adviser, resulted in a widespread perception in the Forestry Department and the MNREA that DFID was the 'natural' and 'central' donor for policy, planning and institutional issues in the forest sector.

Thus, DFID had engineered itself into a position of capability and interest for supporting the NFP, and was also perceived as having considerable responsibility to do so.



#### **MEMBERS OF THE CAST**

##### **The dedicated donor**

Developing and managing effective and equitable policy and institutional change processes – at the heart of an nfp – is much more commonly talked about than brought about. It is no easy business to support either, and rare is the donor which can ride with real stakeholder engagement, organic growth and all the other elements of genuine local control that are not easy to fit with the 'traditional' timeframes and models of technical assistance. Even if donors have the heart and the money they may not be the right ones for the job if they have no prior base of trust with local partners. Like all reputations – the reputation of a donor in this respect is slow to build and can be quick to lose if things go wrong. It may take several years of work by donor representatives to establish the trust and good communication to enable potential partners and beneficiaries to decide that the donor's proffered support can indeed be used to make progress with the thorny political issues involved in an nfp. Without this type of relationship, projects in support of policy and institutional change may still be welcomed by partners (reflecting how important such change is – since one indicator of effective institutional capacity is the confidence to decline ill-considered projects) but they are unlikely to change anything effectively and the money will be wasted.



Meanwhile the UN Programme on Forests (PROFOR) was finding its feet in 1998. It became fully operational that year, coordinated from UNDP Headquarters in New York. PROFOR has a global mandate, undertaking activities at national and international levels. The purpose of the first phase of PROFOR is to promote sustainable forest management and related public and private sector partnerships, by improving capacity, nfp processes and financing mechanisms in participating countries, and by spreading understanding of best practice in these areas within participating countries and beyond – to other interested countries and to international organisations and processes.

PROFOR began activities in four countries in 1998 – Costa Rica, Guyana, Cameroon and Vietnam. The Programme wished to add another country which was grappling with the particular issues of smallholder livelihoods dependent on forest resources and in January 1999, with financial support from the European Commission (EC), initiated discussions for activities in Malawi. Support to the NFP in close collaboration with DFID was seen as the central plank of PROFOR support in Malawi. Support to the NFP fitted well with PROFOR's strategic and national objectives, and collaboration with DFID was commonsensical given this niche and the fact that the New York-based adviser responsible for Malawi happened to be a seconded DFID staffer.



#### **NFP TIP**

##### **NFP supporters club**

Those donors supporting NFPs should be encouraged to set up a 'supporters club' which meets regularly to discuss their progress in supporting the NFP – including how they can do better and how they can work towards an effective partnership with government and other role-players such that they are not manipulating the process towards their own ideals. This club should consider what they are doing – here the NFP strategies can be converted into a basic logical framework against which progress can be charted – but also how they are doing it. Internationally developed codes of conduct for those supporting national sectoral approaches to forestry development can be adopted to guide both product and process and, through regular meetings and continuous reference to the NFP framework, support for the NFP can become more effective. The supporters club can then report back to the broader 'implementers club' represented by the NFP Forum.

### **3.4 Planning for a 'long enough but short enough' process**

By early 1999 the challenge, previously ducked by the Forestry Department and other institutions, of making progress in putting new policy into practice was being strongly stated by the new Director of Forestry and the NFP Coordinator. They took the view that the central function of the NFP was to provide the essential means to operationalise the National Forestry Policy and Forestry Act.



Photo: Bright Sibale

Cooking fish on a wood fire



## MEMBERS OF THE CAST

### The catalytic coordinator

There is no escaping the fact that an individual at the centre of it all is both expected and essential. Although an nfp is not just about high profile 'leaders', everyone wants to see a spokesperson and coordinator of the process. The Malawi NFP has such a person, who is crucially backed up by a 'right hand man' with complementary qualities. Knowledgeable, well-connected, respected, confident and free enough to take action – between them these coordinators are able to promote decision-making, encourage contributions from many others, and at times indulge in a little understandable 'facipulation' (a combination of facilitation and manipulation) to keep things moving effectively.

In March 1999 DFID's NFP Adviser – contracted from the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) began the first of a number of short visits to Malawi (this was to be followed by four more visits in the year that followed, and four more in the succeeding year). Together with the NFP Coordinator and with assistance from the PROFOR Adviser a work plan was prepared. The work plan aimed to spell out what needed to be done to get to a set of actions agreed and prioritised amongst stakeholders, and captured in a framework NFP document. Under some pressure for results particularly from the Director of Forestry and DFID's Natural Resources Adviser, a 9-month timeframe was given – this was later extended to 12-months, and later yet by almost a year more.



## MEMBERS OF THE CAST

### The periodic adviser

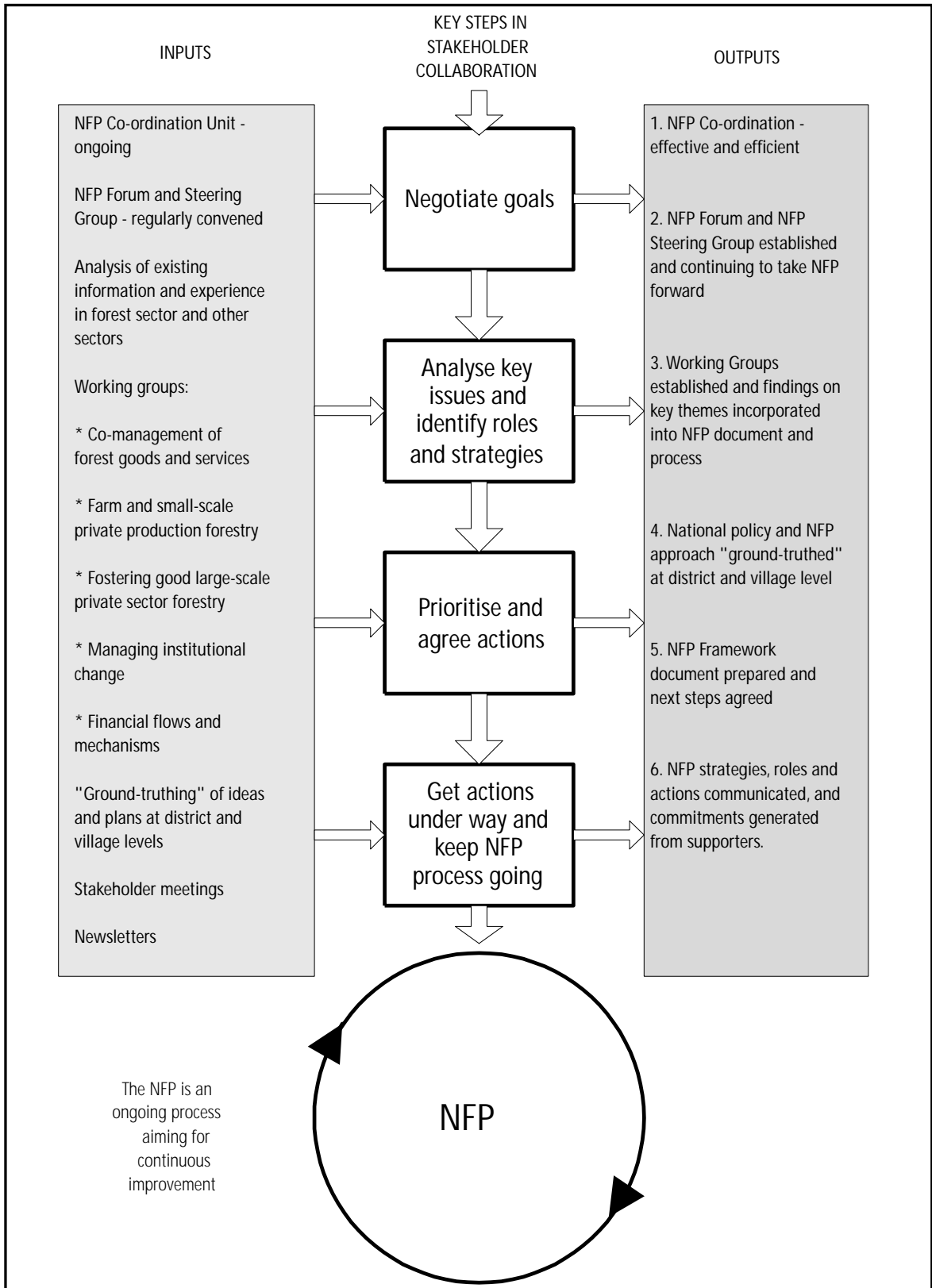
There was quite some debate among the two donor agencies that formed the foundations of the NFP supporters club on whether to provide a full-time adviser or whether to opt for periodic advisory support to the process in key areas which could spark off further action. The decision was made to go for the latter, and the adviser recruited from IIED by DFID then undertook some 10 short visits of between 1 to 3 weeks over the next two years. The PROFOR adviser followed a similar pattern. A disadvantage of such periodic inputs was relatively high transaction costs and an uneven pace to the process. The NFP Co-ordinators and advisers found themselves in a pattern characterised by a winding up for, and winding down from, each visit. Inevitably, momentum would drop between visits, although in many ways this is useful since momentum is by necessity 'unnaturally' high during the advisers' visits – with much to get through in limited time. The advantage of this approach has proven to be that the NFP Co-ordination Unit runs and owns itself and receives only specific inputs at specific points. It proved important to have reasonably long-term advisory input coming from the same individuals, albeit intermittently, rather than from one-off consultancies. This ensures some level of continuity. Contact was regular, collaborative and highly focused and a strong relationship between the NFP Co-ordination Unit and its advisers was established. This allowed problems to be addressed and overcome between visits, and created some space for support even when many miles distanced the team.

The aim was to shape a process that was long and concerted enough to generate and maintain adequate stakeholder engagement and 'buy-in', but short and focused enough so that it did not wear out everybody's energy and enthusiasm. The work plan thus spelled out the expected steps for the NFP process:

- Identify initial boundaries and goals for the NFP
- Identify the challenges that can be addressed
- Synthesise lessons from experience – to address some of the challenges
- Work on some key current challenges – through working groups
- Prepare a NFP framework document
- Agree the next steps and maintain the process

It was hoped that these steps would be well connected through a process of stakeholder collaboration and communication, made possible through a range of inputs, and would result in a set of outputs. These elements were detailed in a logical framework and summarised in a diagram – Figure 2. – which was developed over time as a useful tool in itself.

**Figure 2 Developing Malawi's NFP**





## NFP TIP

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### Visualising plans and concepts

Diagrams help many people to get a quick idea of what is planned or talked about. For example, a lot of words and a logical framework about the process to develop the NFP was converted into one diagram, which developed over time – going through several versions. It showed the connections between process and product – between the actions being undertaken and what was expected of them. Other sorts of diagrams work well to stimulate discussion by both non-literate and literate people. In general diagrams and visualisations work because they provide a focus for attention while discussing an issue, represent complex issues simply, stimulate ideas and therefore assist in decision-making. Of course, some people do not think or work well in terms of diagrams and prefer verbal discussion with descriptions of real examples and stories (see NFP tip: Telling stories).

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The work plan also proposed an overall goal for the NFP<sup>3</sup>: *sustainable management of forest goods and services in Malawi for improved and equitable present livelihoods and the benefit of future generations*. A year or so later – following many activities to consider policy and practice within and beyond the forest sector, and to debate the words used – this goal had become: *NFP Goal: Sustainable management of forest goods and services for improved and equitable livelihoods*.



## KEY MOMENT

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### Agreeing a work plan

The drafting, arguing through and agreeing of work plans for supporting the development of Malawi's NFP was a turning point in the process since it enabled key ideas about the process to be captured. The tactical process, the need to free up and pay for dedicated coordinators, the need for two donors to work effectively together, and the responsibility of the Department of Forestry to provide a strong steering role – were all spelled out in the work plans which provided effective benchmarks for the process.

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The work plan found favour with the Director of Forestry, the Principal Secretary of the MNREA and with DFID. There was a concerted effort to design the inputs from DFID and PROFOR – and their respective work plans – to complement each other. In terms of donor support this worked well (see Table 1).

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<sup>3</sup> It was with this work plan that the words 'national forestry programme' began being used instead of 'national forestry action plan'. Although meeting with considerable resistance at first from within the Forestry Department this phrase gradually became installed over the next year as stakeholders became involved in the process.

**NFP TIP**

**NFP Steering Group – keeps things on track**

A small group representative of key stakeholders is needed to take responsibility for strategic decision-making and operational guidance for the whole nfp process. In Malawi, this group was initially composed of senior staff of the Department of Forestry. Although poorly reflective of other stakeholders, this was considered legitimate in the early stages since it was vital to develop shared vision within this ‘lead agency’. Over time this group became synonymous with the Department’s regular monthly management meetings thus effectively installing the NFP at this level. The need now is to implement the original plan for the Steering Group – to expand membership to a few key stakeholders nominated by the NFP Forum. The make-up of the Steering Group should now work towards near equal representation the four main role players identified by the NFP – central government, the private sector, local government and civil society (see section 5.2).

**Table 1 Summary of inputs paid for by DFID and PROFOR in support of developing the NFP**

DFID	PROFOR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● NFP Co-ordinator</li> <li>● NFP Adviser</li> <li>● Vehicle, materials, equipment and running costs for NFP Co-ordinating Unit</li> <li>● NFP Forum workshops</li> <li>● NFP Steering Group meetings</li> <li>● ‘Boundaries and goals’ analysis</li> <li>● Syntheses of experience, including: conservation and reserve management</li> <li>● Working groups x 3:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Farm and small-scale private production forestry.</li> <li>○ Fostering good large-scale private sector forestry.</li> <li>○ Managing institutional change</li> </ul> </li> <li>International consultants x 3, National consultants x 5</li> <li>● Briefings/newsletters, interim highlights paper, brochure/calendar</li> <li>● NFP framework document</li> <li>● Dissemination, review and identification of next steps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● PROFOR Malawi Co-ordinator – as assistant to NFP Co-ordinator</li> <li>● Administrative and finance officer to support the NFP Co-ordinating Unit and oversee the administration of PROFOR inputs</li> <li>● PROFOR New York Adviser</li> <li>● PROFOR vehicle, project materials, equipment and running costs</li> <li>● Working groups x 2:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Co-management of forest goods and services</li> <li>○ Financial flows and mechanisms</li> </ul> </li> <li>International consultants x 2, National consultants x 4</li> <li>● Analysis of options for collaborative extension services (international and national consultant)</li> <li>● Workshops and other communication inputs e.g. media briefing</li> <li>● District level NFP awareness activities</li> <li>● Support to ensure inputs of ‘smaller’ NFP interest groups e.g. NTFP collectors, the estate sector, traditional leaders</li> <li>● NFP launch</li> <li>● Support to agree milestones towards a sector wide approach</li> </ul>



## NFP TIP

### NFP Coordination Unit – running the show

The NFP Coordination Unit is the engine room or nerve-centre for the NFP. Based in the most politically and operationally practical institution, the Department of Forestry in Malawi's case, it organises and co-ordinates the NFP process. Led by the NFP Co-ordinator, this Unit focuses on:

- un-earthing existing information, synthesising it and making it useful;
- organising the NFP Forum, and participating in the NFP Steering Group, and fuelling both with the necessary information;
- co-ordinating the working groups;
- organising and managing consultants;
- fostering donor support and co-ordination;
- building up a database of key stakeholders, bringing them on board and communicating progress on all the above to them;
- preparing briefings, interim highlights, and the draft NFP framework document.
- securing commitment and action to implement NFP strategies

The Unit started life in Malawi manned only by the NFP Coordinator. He was later periodically joined by the NFP Adviser and PROFOR Adviser and then by the full-time PROFOR Malawi Coordinator, and Assistant. This core of two professionals backed up by two advisers worked well – but more full-time local capacity would have been very useful.

## 3.5 Paying for NFP development

Budgets for the work plans to support the development of the NFP were developed for DFID and PROFOR in 1999. DFID planned to spend about US\$275,000 over one year plus the costs of the NFP adviser's time and travel, while PROFOR planned to spend about US\$300,000 over one year plus the costs of the PROFOR adviser. In the event, costs were spread over two years. Rough figures for what DFID and have PROFOR have spent on the NFP over these two years are shown in Table 2.

The Government of Malawi's financial contribution to the development of the NFP has been made chiefly through the salaries of key staff in the process and through the infrastructure, transport and organisational support made available. Over the two-year period this is estimated at about US\$50,000. Thus the total cost to date is about US\$1 million.

**Table 2 Estimates of expenditure by DFID and PROFOR supporting development of the Malawi NFP, January 1999 to March 2001 (US dollars)<sup>4</sup>**

<b>Expenditure category</b>	<b>DFID</b>	<b>PROFOR</b>
Lead adviser time	50,000	30,000
Lead adviser travel	30,000	30,000
International consultants time	120,000	114,000
International travel	30,000	105,000
National consultants time	100,000	100,000
National travel and subsistence	20,000	65,000
Equipment	20,000	42,000
Workshops, meetings, communication, publications	30,000	60,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$400,000</b>	<b>\$546,000</b>

These estimates should not be taken to mean that developing an nfp elsewhere would cost a million dollars! Costs will vary hugely from country to country. International assistance will not be needed or appropriate in many contexts. Much national-level work may already have been done. However, it should also be noted that an nfp cannot be developed for nothing – significant time, resources and investment will be needed in any context.



### **NFP TIP**

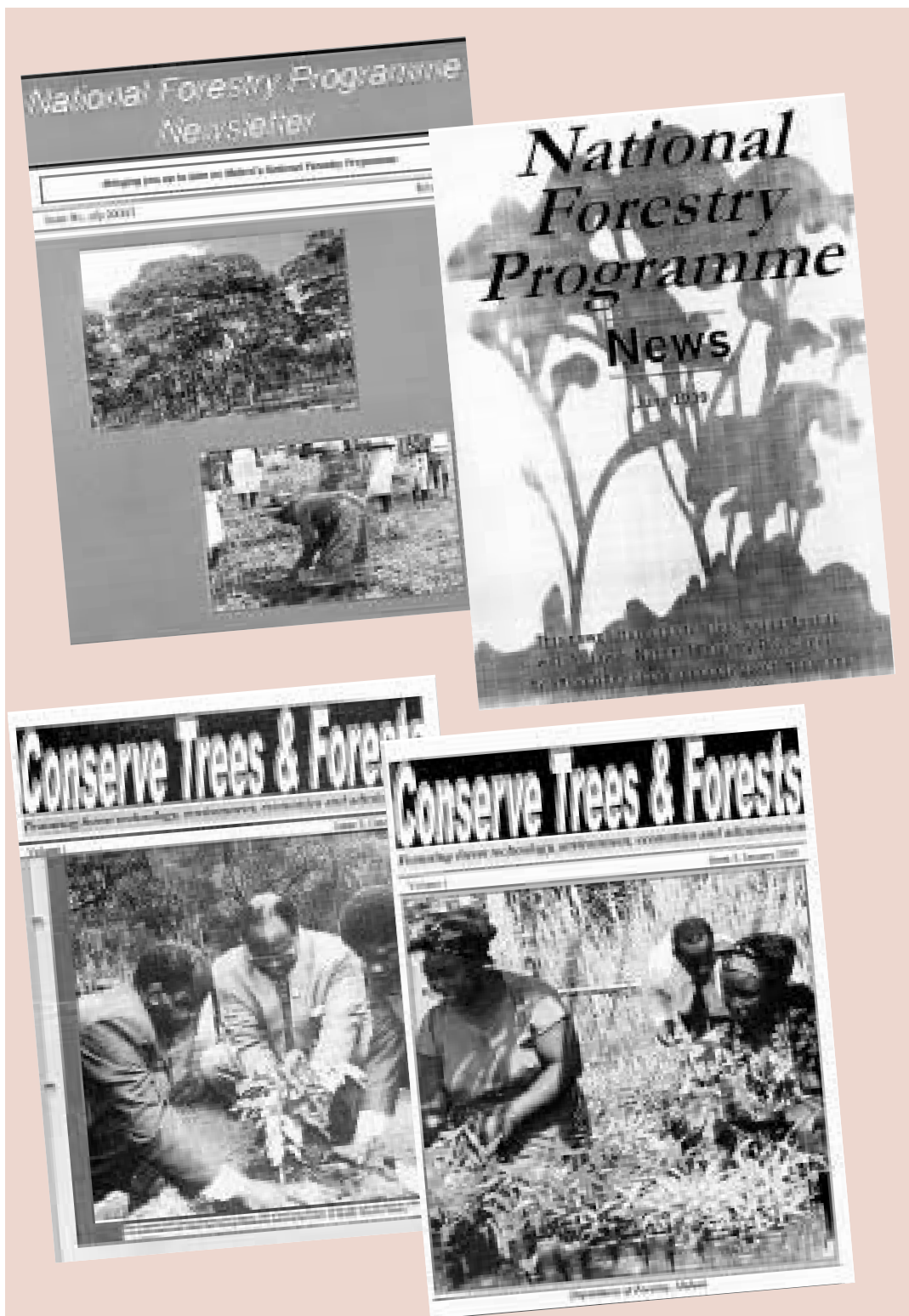
#### **Workshops that work**

Workshops are a part of life for many professionals, public sector employees and project staff of all kinds in Malawi. Some workshops make useful progress – drawing on the fact that many people are used to a range of formats and to working very hard during them – whilst others achieve little more than the allocation of daily allowances to participants. The NFP realized that it had to deal with ‘workshop culture’ – good and bad – and to strike a balance in several tricky areas, e.g. between new versus tried-and-tested approaches, and between paid and unpaid contributions. The workshops that worked have been those that get the real ‘doers’ together, have clear objectives, work within institutional constraints and participant expectations, make efficient arrangements, are clear about the nature of reporting and follow-up and are well focused on ensuring outcomes from the workshop results.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of international comparison it is also useful to list some of the average unit costs (in US dollars) of key ingredients of the process to date:

Working group meeting	\$ 800
NFP Forum meeting	\$ 3,000
Ground-truthing – village-level process	\$10,000





Newsletters have played a vital part in spreading information about developments in the forestry sector and the NFP process



# Analysing key issues and ‘ground truthing’ them

## 4.1 Identifying the big influences beyond the forest sector

All too often, efforts to make progress within a sector fail because they ignore or are running counter to bigger influences from beyond the sector. The NFP CU carried out some ‘quick and dirty policy analysis’ looking at the information on the major influences exerted on forests and people by international, macro-economic and other extra-sectoral policies in Malawi to assess the basis they provide for sustainable forest management. This highlighted:

- Extra-sectoral influences that are likely to over-ride policy provisions within the forest sector itself
- Inconsistencies, links and overlaps between policy inside and outside the forest sector
- Particular innovations and challenges in forest sector policy

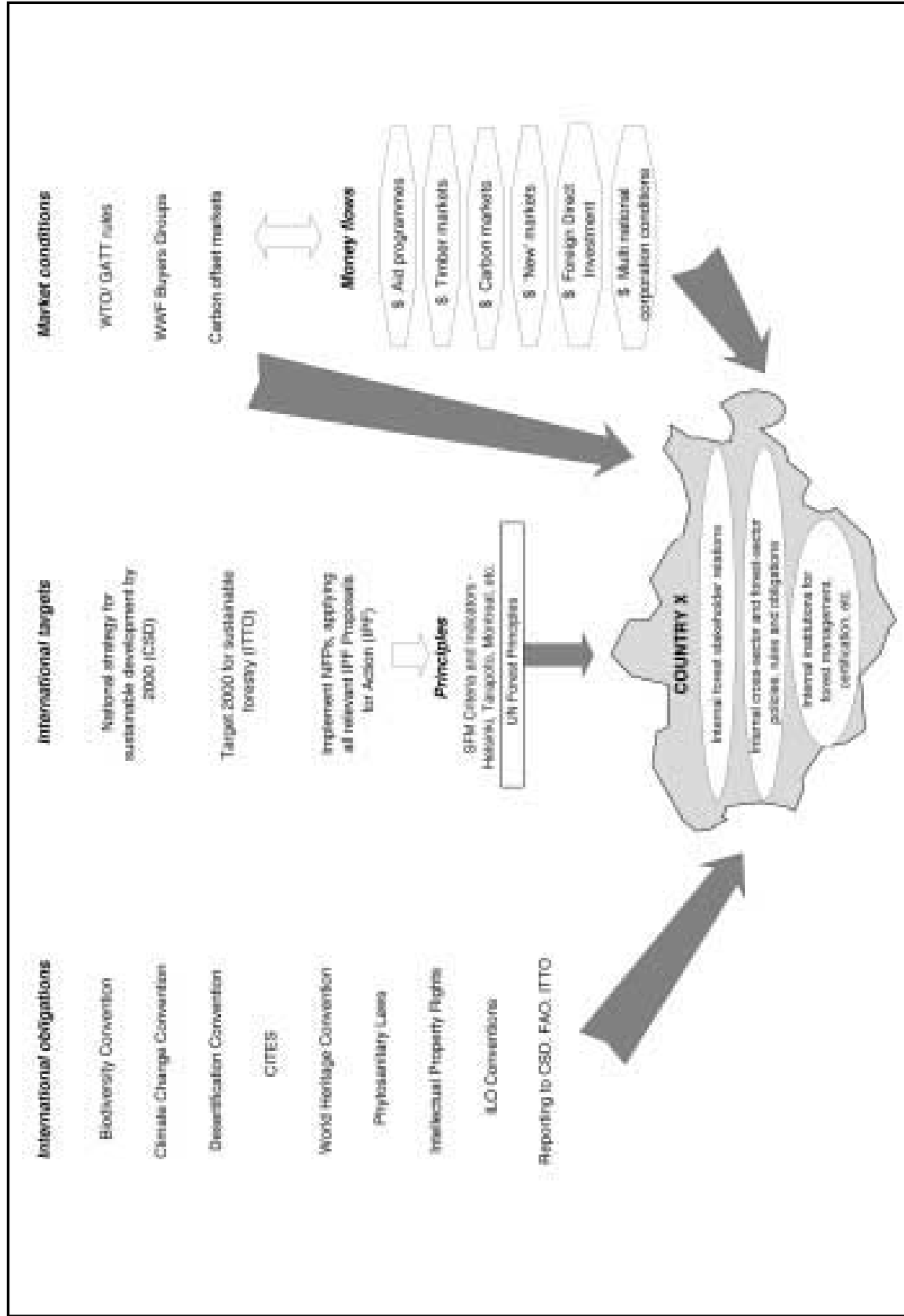
Visual means were used to show the ways in which policies from beyond the country’s forest sector relate to each other and influence Malawi’s forests and livelihoods (see Figures 3 and 4). These policies include Malawi’s international commitments and financial conditions, national macro-economic decisions and programmes, and policies from sectors like agriculture and industry that have major impacts on land use and shape what is possible in forestry. Figure 4. also tries to show that the NFP needs to find ways of operating on this wider stage and should seek to optimise these influences so that they are focused on improving forestry and livelihoods.



Photo: Bright Sibale

Fuelwood being cycled into town

Figure 3 Countries are ‘bombarded’ by international policies and processes



Source: Mayers, J. and Bass, S. 1999. Policy that works for forests and people. Series overview. IIED, London.

Figure 4 Policy influences on forests and livelihoods

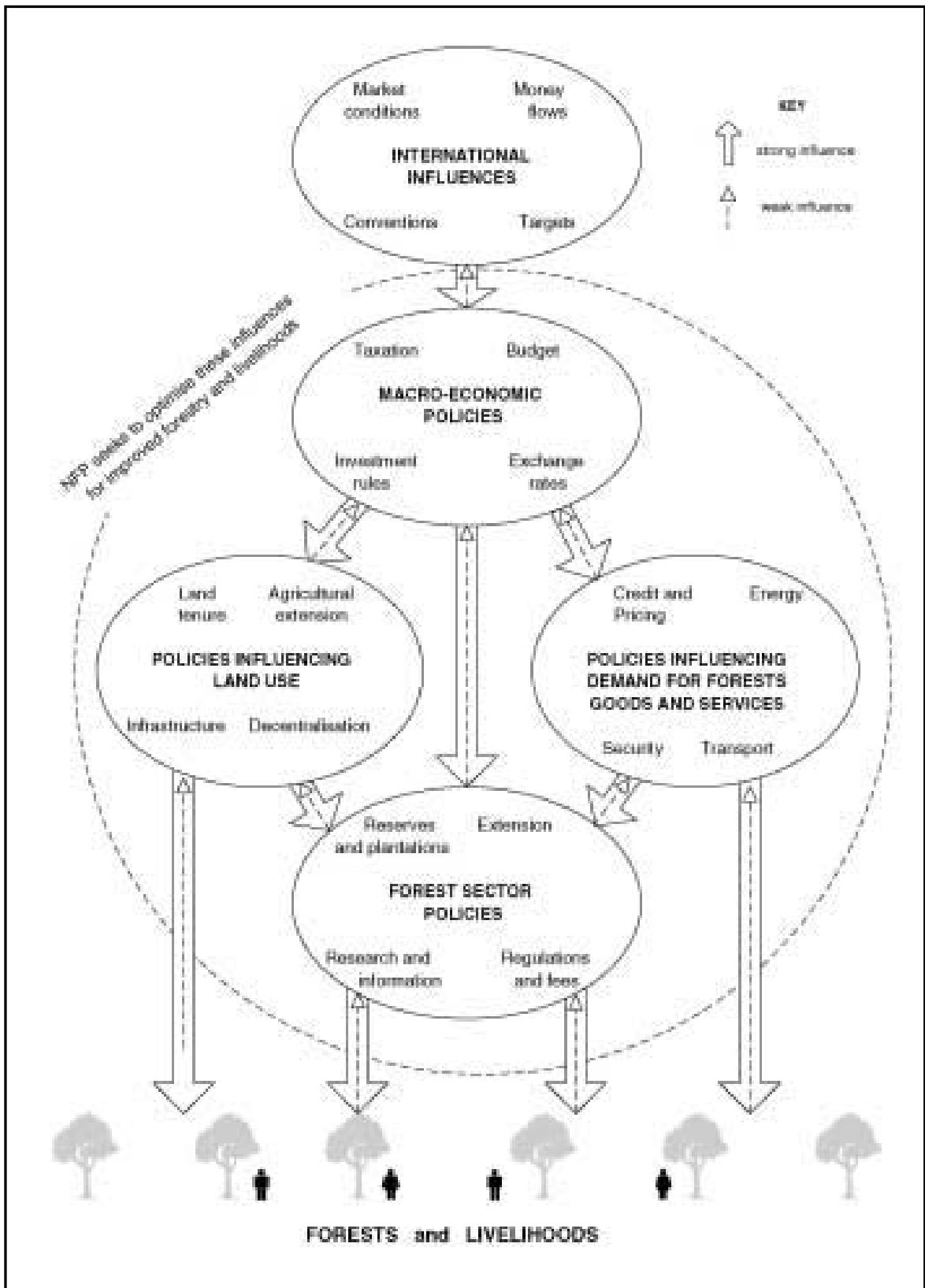




Photo: John Ngalande

**Pit-sawn planks waiting for transport**

Elements of this ‘big picture’ of policy were highlighted by the NFPCU and stakeholders were urged to bear them in mind when thinking about priorities in the forest sector (see Annex). For example, it was noted that Malawi has turned away from past development strategy based on estate-based, state-led growth towards:

- Smallholder agriculture as the main focus
- Private sector promotion and competitive markets rather than parastatals, and over-regulation
- Macroeconomic stability and a competitive exchange rate
- Decentralisation of government agencies and transfer of responsibilities to other local stakeholders
- Expenditure focused on social services and other programmes which benefit the poor.

These macro-policy trends in practice have varying influences on forests and livelihoods. There are some good signs and bad signs for forests and livelihoods – and the NFPCU recognised that the NFP needs to contribute to confronting the latter (see Box 3).

### Box 3 Macro-policy influences on forests and livelihoods – challenges for the NFP

There are **positive trends** rooted in macro-policy developments

- *Inflation is down and growth is increasing* – encouraging investment, at least by a few niche forest product producers and the larger private sector in forestry
- *Primary school enrolment is up* – which in time increases the capacity of the workforce, small entrepreneurs and management in forestry
- *Smallholders are benefiting from market liberalisation* e.g. removal of restrictions on burley tobacco – providing a much needed boost to livelihoods but at the expense of woodlands in some areas as farm sizes increase
- *Privatisation and decentralisation* are creating new opportunities for other stakeholders – notably in the commercial plantations, and in smallholder tree production
- *Land policy reform* – the draft new Land Policy includes proposals to allow for the registration of communal land. This is intended to increase security of access and use, which should increase willingness to make long term investments for production, including tree planting.

However, there are also **negative trends** for livelihoods and forests exacerbated by macro-policy:

- *Land shortage and food insecurity is chronic* – which is neither conducive to long-term smallholder tree production nor larger forestry investment. It puts additional pressure on forests by stimulating agricultural expansion at the expense of forest resources. Such trends reduce the possibility of smallholders investing their precious land, time and cash in the forest and tree resources which could help them stabilise and improve their livelihoods.
- *Credit use and repayment is declining* – which militates against small and medium enterprise in forestry
- *Roads, law and order are still deteriorating* – which keeps smallholder farm gate prices low and reduces security of forest and tree assets
- *Income inequalities are increasing* – exacerbated by currency devaluation which benefits only those with access to foreign exchange and markets. Within households, apparently positive effects such as market liberalisation of tobacco have exacerbated gender inequalities.
- *HIV/AIDS is overwhelming* the abilities of the social services to contain it and is a major cause of mortality in service provision agencies, rural and urban communities alike. The epidemic also has other massive impact on livelihoods – reduced availability of labour, increased responsibilities for orphans and the sick, and the financial demands of funerals.
- *Inadequate fuelwood is a chronic problem* which, in a country where an estimated 93% of all energy used is derived from biomass, has resulted in the: diversion of household time (particularly female labour) away from productive activities to the search for fuel; the burning of crop residues and available biomass to the detriment of soil fertility; and reduced consumption of energy through less frequent cooking – with attendant adverse nutrition consequences, particularly for children.
- *Civil service reform and shrinking budgets* have contributed to a collapse in capacity in some key areas, and on-the-ground realities are revealing the costs in e.g. poor plantation and natural woodland management.
- *Weakly-planned decentralisation* needs much attention to rise to the demands for a quite radical devolving of decision-making, capacity and resources to district and sub-district level if local communities are going to be able to realise opportunities to access resources, assert their rights and rise to their responsibilities.

## 4.2 Focusing on ways to tackle the big influences

A similarly indicative approach was taken in analysis of the policy framework within the forest sector – to see how it measures up to the evolving international consensus on the main elements of sustainable forest management (see Annex). It was agreed that the key forest sector policy documents provide a sound basis for sustainable forest management. However, some functional needs of good forestry are clearly not likely to be delivered by forest sector policies alone. For example neither the National Forest Policy nor the Forest Act offer much of a basis for:

- Clarifying stakeholder roles and procedures
- Building staff capacities within institutions
- Prioritising and making choices between objectives
- Covering the costs

This macro-policy and sectoral policy ‘snapshot’ analysis served to reveal some of the problems which the NFP needed to address. The programme had to find ways to harness and complement policies and initiatives in other sectors through cross-sectoral links. The NFPCU used this analysis to highlight the major constraints (or ‘boundaries’) and opportunities – particularly those issues about which there was little knowledge but are important to the future of forestry and livelihoods. These issues were ‘bundled’ into five broad themes around which it was proposed that working groups form.



### MEMBERS OF THE CAST

#### The wise old-timer

Development in the forest sector, as in wider fields of political and economic development, is prone to fixating on apparently new ideas and solutions as if they had been thought of for the very first time. Conversely, many nfps and related initiatives make the mistake of assuming that there is a dearth of information and knowledge on just about everything. This is where the wise old-timers are needed more than ever. These are the people who have been around and seen it all before. They may be repositories of vital knowledge developed over years of experience of seeing what has worked and not worked before. They can point out which apparent proposed solutions build effectively on something tried before, which are recycled nonsense and which are genuinely useful new ideas. The forest sector in Malawi is fortunate to have some such people although, tragically, accidents and disease have caused the death of several key wise men of forestry, during the period in which the NFP has been developed, before they even had the chance to enjoy growing old.

The proposed working group themes, together with the NFP process, were described and widely communicated in mid 1999 through the first of several NFP Newsletters. These Newsletters became an important component of the programme to inform the wider public about the NFP – since news of a good story should be spread. The first multi-stakeholder national NFP Forum was held in mid 1999 to discuss and refine the NFP work plan and outline terms of reference for the five working groups. Malawi's emerging NFP approach was also presented and discussed at an international meeting of forestry advisers from donor agencies – an influential group in international forest policy. Following the recruitment of the PROFOR Co-ordinator for Malawi, further international links were made with regular discussion of the Malawi NFP within the context of PROFOR's broader activities and Malawi's NFP was presented at a side event of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IV) in New York. These meetings served useful notice that Malawi was following a relatively unusual 'tactical' approach to developing its national forestry programme.

#### ◆ NFP TIP

##### **NFP Forum – generates ideas and commitment**

A periodic multi-stakeholder meeting to guide the NFP process was established. It consisted of key stakeholders from government, the private sector, NGOs and donor agencies who met to generate ideas, debate progress and build commitment. The Forum provided an effective tool to build a constituency of 'thinkers and doers' and an opportunity for NFP supporters to identify change advocates and agents who could drive further action. The size of a NFP Forum can be allowed to be quite large – say up to 50 people; the challenge really lies in keeping it reasonably balanced across stakeholder groups and ensuring that the different viewpoints aired are facilitated towards productive outcomes. The Malawi NFP Forum met three times in the first year and it is planned to maintain them at a twice-yearly or yearly frequency in future. Multi-stakeholder forums should only be convened when there is a clear value in bringing the players together, be that to generate vision, to air disagreements or to undertake specific tasks. Stakeholders will not all agree with each other (see Loaded term: stakeholder consensus). But through involvement in the NFP process they can learn about other stakeholders' perspectives, power and tactics, can recognise why they disagree, and see who is currently 'winning' and 'losing' and why. This experience may sway a few opinions, ideas will emerge and the sort of information and organisation required for the losers to fight their corner more effectively next time, can be identified.



### 4.3 Use of working groups and consultants

Filling priority knowledge gaps could be done in several ways: from quick snapshots by consultants with knowledge of related issues in other contexts; to detailed studies carried out by individuals or teams of researchers; to learning group approaches where a substantial timeframe is given to a process of action-research and learning from the outcomes. Malawi's NFP process did not have much time – it needed some 'early wins' to get some solid achievements under its belt, to demonstrate progress and to bring more people on board. So any learning processes needed to produce early results. The model arrived at after considerable debate was small working groups of key individuals who, it was hoped, could draw on their expertise to gather information together relatively quickly and could work together effectively. These working groups were offered the services of one or more national and international consultants to help in their task.



#### NFP TIP

##### Working groups and consultants

The working groups comprised key knowledgeable individuals (three to ten people) proposed by the NFP Coordination Unit and then debated and modified by the NFP Steering Group (see above). Proposed group members were contacted and told of the work involved. This was estimated to consist of a series of group sessions drawing on their own experience, information sources and contacts, work with consultants contracted to service the group, and participation in the NFP Forum. The Coordination Unit hoped that the individuals proposed were sufficiently committed to the type of work involved that they would be prepared to make their contributions without financial reward except for meetings expenses. Most agreed, following some initial misunderstandings, although in practice some were much more active than others as a result.

Draft terms of reference for each of the working groups were developed by the NFPCU – each giving a first cut on the key issues and outlining some common tasks:

- Consultation with key stakeholders to identify primary sources of information
- Collation and review of key documentation.
- Development by the group of its own detailed terms of reference
- Analysis to include field visits and consultation with local stakeholders
- Consideration of the experiences and lessons learned in related contexts in other countries
- Preparation of a draft report, which also reflects preliminary findings from the other working groups and NFP analyses

- Participation in the NFP Forum to discuss the draft report
- Refinement and modification of findings to reflect debate
- Detailing of options for specific contexts which can be addressed through the NFP
- Production of theme paper in collaboration with the NFP Co-ordination Unit.

Each of the working groups was offered the services of one to three national consultants and one international consultant. Advertisements were put in the two daily national newspapers for national consultants to offer themselves for work on the above five themes. Many applied – providing a significant base of potential consultants. The NFPCU short-listed the most likely candidates and proposed these to the Steering Group. For the international consultants, word went out through the networks which could be accessed by the NFP Adviser and PROFOR Adviser – with the aim of obtaining the CVs of several candidates for each position for approval by the Steering Group. In practice, time was short and only a few high calibre consultants were available.

The five ‘issue-bundles’ or themes, around each of which a Working Group was formed, were:

- a) *Co-management of forest goods and services.*  
Co-management – the participation of communities, NGOs and, potentially, the private sector alongside government in the management of woodland on customary land and forest reserves – is a concept with major potential to realise the drive for locally responsible forest resource management and smallholder development. The challenge of re-orienting forest staff traditionally skilled in forest policing towards developing their extension and facilitation skills is a major one.

The working group was asked to draw on the considerable body of information and experience from recent and historical experiments in the forest sector and other natural resource sectors – notably fisheries and wildlife – and propose a viable means to strengthen co-management approaches in forestry.

- b) *Farm and small-scale private production forestry.* Currently, high demand for forest products, notably fuelwood, is liquidating forest assets and growing stock. A major new emphasis on production forestry is called for, and it

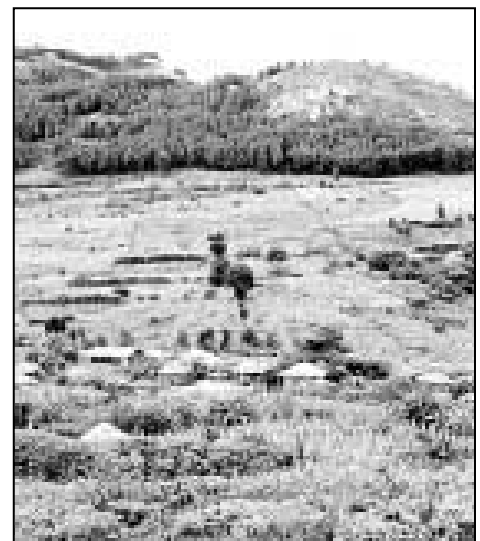


Photo: James Meyers

Village in central Malawi with agro-forestry in action and a small pine plantation

appears that a large number of small and medium scale farm forestry and commercial tree growers will be needed, growing wood as part of broader livelihood strategies. The working group was asked to consider combinations of strategies including: indigenous woodlands; trees on farms for domestic use; farm forestry (including belts and strips) for small-scale commercial production; and small-scale forest product enterprises.

- c) *Fostering good large-scale private sector forestry.* As a vital complement to the above-mentioned emphasis on production forestry, management and development of existing plantations can be stepped up to meet and expand the industrial wood sector. The working group was asked to examine opportunities in restructuring state-owned plantations through appropriate commercial leases and open international transaction processes, and in securing increased private sector investment in value-added processing.
- d) *Managing institutional change.* Pressure for institutional change is being exerted by civil service reform, the drive for fiscal discipline, and the modified roles and functions of forest sector agencies implied by the new national forest policy and law. Within this increasingly complex institutional environment, there is a clear need to reform the State's role. However there is some uncertainty about the appropriate allocation of rights, responsibilities and roles between and within institutions with respect to different forest goods and services. The working group was asked to map out a vision of stakeholder roles, to identify the means to spread such a vision, and to highlight the options for planning and managing the process of change towards fulfilling these roles.



## MEMBERS OF THE CAST

### The spark/enthusiast

Any effective team needs a vital spark – the person who is an enthusiastic source of ideas. They often work in creative, unorthodox and imaginative ways. Sometimes they can be a bit unfocused, impractical, up in the clouds. Either way, nfps need such people – in working groups and the occasional forum but also on a regular basis to keep the enthusiasm infectious. They are needed too to help recognise and make bold moves when all seems to be bogged down in detail or red tape. In Malawi, sparks/enthusiasts were found at many levels: in the Forum where whole new areas for the NFP to focus on were pointed out; at district level where several DFOs were found to have big ideas; and at village level where some innovative proposals for improving forestry linked to livelihoods were put forward.



Photo: John Ngalande

**Burned plantation on Mulanje mountain**

e) *Financial flows and mechanisms.* Paying for improved forestry and livelihoods is a major challenge. The current situation is characterised by: (i) inadequate public funding for core functions (e.g. normative and regulatory functions, research, training and extension); (ii) low levels of private sector investment; (iii) increasing financial responsibility handed to local government, but without sufficient capability and control over many budget decisions; (iv) increasing responsibility also being given to local community based organisations and NGOs dependent in the short term on external resources; (v) unbalanced distribution of external funding depending mostly on donor priorities. The working group was asked to analyse such constraints and to find sufficient opportunities to develop a coherent financing strategy for the forest sector.

The working groups and their consultants met with mixed success. The less politically sensitive themes were more easily addressed than those that had much riding on them. Work on co-management, small-scale forestry and finance made progress and by the end of 1999 the working groups were convening in a joint findings-discussion meeting followed by presentations and debate at a second NFP Forum. However the working groups on managing institutional change and large-scale private sector forestry were slow to make tangible progress.

## 4.4 Touchy subjects: institutional change and the private sector

The fact that the issues of institutional reform had been agreed as priority areas was remarkable in itself. The implications of the new direction in forest policy for changing the institutional architecture, if followed through to their logical conclusion, were far reaching. When the political, and latterly the legal, imperative to decentralise is overlaid on top of this – the implications are dramatic indeed. For the Forestry Department there was the worry that ‘selling off’ state forest assets and transferring control to others would sound the death knell for government’s ability to control the sector. Senior management’s concern that it might be accused of presiding over the fragmentation and decline of the department was understandable. So despite regular reminders and efforts to facilitate progress by the NFPCU, one way or another the institutional change group bided its time, waiting for the other groups to report before launching into any substantive discussions about roles and responsibilities.



Photo: James Mayers

The ‘top table’ at a meeting of the NFP Forum



### Privatisation and decentralisation

These terms have come to mean rather different things to different people. Here we set out some possible definitions to demonstrate the range of notions which may be hidden in these terms, and to note the relationships between them. We regard **decentralisation** as the over-arching notion, which can refer to any of five different types of power transfer – deconcentration, delegation, deregulation, devolution or privatization:

- **Deconcentration:** spreading authority from the central administration to its agencies closer to the 'grass roots'. A non-definitive transfer of decision-making and executive powers *within* the administrative or technical structure (e.g. from the Ministry of Interior to a governorship or from the national directorate of a service to the regional directorate). This takes the form of institutional modification from within an administration.
- **Delegation:** a non-definitive transfer of authority from an administrative service to a semi-public or private company.
- **Privatisation:** a type of delegation involving transfer of ownership and/ or management of (forest) resources, and/ or the transfer of the provision of (forest) services, from the public sector to private entities, either directly or through parastatal institutions (*corporatisation*).
- **Deregulation:** a transition in which a sector of activity previously regulated by a public authority ceases to be subject to such regulation.
- **Devolution:** a transfer of power from a larger to a smaller jurisdiction; this transfer may be total or partial (e.g. transfer to local communities of decision-making over renewable resources on their village lands).

Particular definitions are sometimes associated with particular voices. For example, 'decentralisation' in the language of government officials often really means *deconcentration*, whilst for local communities and NGOs it may mean *devolution*.

Issues associated with large scale private sector forestry centred on the question of what to do with the plantation assets which were developed by the government, firstly colonial then independent, in the 1950s to 1970s at the (mostly British) taxpayer's expense. The government had been selling small amounts of timber to the indigenous forest industry for years at subsidised prices, and had sold off its own sawmilling parastatal – the Wood Industry Corporation (WICO). Furthermore, government had not been consistently able to carry out basic plantation management operations such as thinning and pruning for the last 20 years, and was experiencing increasing pressure from illegal harvesting and fire. The question had become: What needs to be done to enable private enterprise(s) to take over government's plantations and manage them well – to generate forest

products and jobs for the benefit of Malawians as well as profits for themselves? Who is interested, and at what price?

The working group did not answer these questions. Historical baggage cluttered the scene since similar questions had been asked before, and been inconclusively answered. In pursuing structural adjustment and its agenda of cutting government costs and divesting liabilities, the Treasury had previously asked for options to be developed for the ownership and management of state-owned plantations. DFID sponsored a study of these options. But it was somewhat cursorily done, ending up with rather few options and a basic conclusion that privatisation was good, but with few details on how it could be effectively brought about.



## MEMBERS OF THE CAST

### The political obstacle

This is the wet blanket person – who puts out the sparks before they catch fire (admittedly an unfortunate metaphor in forestry). An nfp process will always need the support of those in a variety of political positions and is very likely to reveal conflict and uncover thorny political issues along the way. Some in political positions will be highly uncomfortable with this. They may perceive political or personal threat in what is being proposed, be unconfident in the support of their superiors, be jealous or resentful of the progress made by others, be mis-informed or simply poorly informed. Sometimes these perceptions are real and provide a useful signal to the nfp that it is going astray, at other times they can be tackled. Ways of engaging with the people presenting political obstacles need to be found – to develop their understanding and confidence. In Malawi, the NFP Coordination Unit found that there was no substitute for grasping every opportunity for meeting and talking through progress with colleagues and superiors. This allowed modifications to be made and tactics to be developed. It also revealed a typical set of stages that people go through in integrating with a new process: firstly, interest in the novelty of it; secondly, uneasiness and difficulty with all the new ideas and approaches; thirdly gradual comfort as the ideas sink in; fourthly, satisfaction and reward from taking action within the process.

The Privatisation Commission, alert to the prospects of saleable assets with which to pursue its mandate, jumped on this report and with minimal consultation with the Forestry Department announced, in January 1999, the sale of the state-owned Viphya Plywood Company – government’s main processing asset – to a Kenyan-Malaysian firm, Raiply. This sale was accompanied by 20,000 hectares of state plantation to manage on a 30-year lease. This is a major slice of the state’s 73,000 ha plantation estate (an estate which is deteriorating fast through fire and over-harvesting in certain areas).

The conditions of this lease made it a rather poor deal for Malawi. But the precedent had been set. The question was no longer whether to privatise, but how to privatise. Yet the Forestry Department had been stung by the experience, and came under heavy pressure from the domestic industry – by-passed in the Raiply deal – to hand over the remaining plantation assets. The question was how to salvage sufficient honour, and decent management, in transactions over the remaining state resources.



Photo: James Mayers

Woodland mice – a popular roadside snack

Rather than activate the cross-stakeholder working group, the Forestry Department held internal meetings to develop its own position, then held two key meetings with some key members of the existing timber industry. These meetings generated considerable heat, and in retrospect have proven to be vital in setting in train a process now showing some concerted effort to address privatisation and improved private sector investment in forestry.



#### KEY MOMENT

##### **Clearing the air with the private sector**

In 1999 the Department of Forestry recognised the urgency for government to formulate its own common position, and take some key political decisions, on the future of plantations. However, in restricting this process initially to Department staff alone it was avoiding the evidence of recent history, which shows that some key decisions were taken at higher levels of government without sufficient input of forestry expertise. Nevertheless, the Department later met with a good range of representatives of the private sector in a workshop to discuss various possibilities for partnership. Whilst both these meetings were inconclusive at the time, they kicked off considerable subsequent discussion and have proven vital in developing a stronger positive working relationship between the Department of Forestry and the private sector – a relationship previously characterised by mutual suspicion and acrimony.



## 4.5 Ground-truthing the NFP

It was recognised by the NFPCU that the credibility and likelihood of impact of the NFP depend on its ability to have meaning for people at district and village level. To have meaning it needs to be developed and shaped by those people – to reflect their ideas and priorities.

However, it was also recognised that a massive process of consultation about the NFP with every village in Malawi was not possible or desirable. The ‘long-enough but short-enough’ timeframe did not allow this, nor did available resources. Furthermore, considerable information already existed on which to draw. Thus, since the NFP needed to be ‘true on the ground’, what was needed was a process similar in conception to that familiar to foresters for ground-truthing a remote forest survey. But instead of checking out the trees, it was the people on the ground who needed to be listened to. A tactical combination of gathering existing information, convening district level meetings, and interacting with village-level stakeholders was developed.



Photo: James Mayers

Meetings in villages proved useful to discuss plans or results of participatory ground-truthing

## ◆ NFP TIP

### 'Ground-truthing' actions

Tactical actions to link national-level strategic planning processes with local-level realities included:

- **Information from existing initiatives and processes.** Information on local priorities from a variety of existing project reports and consultation exercises was drawn on – including those involved in the development of the national environmental action plan, and biodiversity conservation plan.
- **District-level workshops.** A range of workshops and district-level meetings were held. All the country's District Forestry Officers were brought together through several meetings to discuss the NFP and to gather ideas, and a similar approach was taken with several other stakeholder groups at district level, such as traditional leaders.
- **Understanding village-level forest priorities.** A programme of interaction with village-level stakeholders through a process of Participatory Rural Appraisal was spearheaded by an NGO with experience in forestry and particular expertise in these approaches (CURE – Co-ordination Unit for Rehabilitation of the Environment). This process linked ongoing training of field-level forestry staff in PRA to a series of interactions with villagers to examine their priorities for forest goods and services, and how they see their roles and responsibilities with respect to others. This allowed comparison of 'village forest policy' with national policy to see the similarities and differences – and thus see where some of the key challenges lay.
- **Gathering village-level views on ideas from the working groups.** The PRA work was also developed to incorporate a checklist of issues derived from the key proposals emerging from the NFP Working Groups. This was then drawn on to gather local views on these to see if these proposals made sense at local level.

These ground-truthing activities were all completed over a period of about six months. A total of 21 villages in 9 districts were involved in the PRA work whilst six district level workshops and a similar number of stakeholder-specific meetings were held at district level. The approach continues through the current phase of converting the NFP's agreed priorities into practical actions, and it is hoped that ground-truthing will be undertaken as part of the periodic monitoring of NFP progress.

Key findings from the ground-truthing work included:

- Considerable *indigenous knowledge and skills* for managing forest goods and services are often available at village level
- Households will not invest precious labour and time nurturing trees when there are more pressing needs for food security. Thus, often the most significant support which can be given to ‘forestry’ at local level is to focus on *improving labour efficiency and food security* – with forestry extension information and inputs only having much impact when such improvements have already been made
- Dependence on wood from government plantations is high in some communities, and these *subsidised resources are a disincentive* for many other communities to invest in forestry
- *Diversity of village-level institutions* which can be effective in managing forest resources needs to be recognised – and a flexible approach to developing Village Natural Resource Management Committees is needed, rather than forcing conformity to a blueprint
- Demand for improved forms of *farm forestry* and limited forestry extension services is high, and a focus is needed on improving *the quality and targeting of forestry extension*, as well as expanding capacity
- Capacity of the FD at district level is low compared to some other government agencies and NGOs, and district forestry offices are often overlooked in local initiatives. The potential for *partnerships between the FD and other forestry-related institutions* at district level is high.

Ground-truthing results, alongside working group findings and a range of other syntheses of information and opinion were significant influences on the NFPCU’s efforts to propose and promote workable roles and strategies and were debated at the second and third meetings of the NFP Forum.



# Identifying stakeholders, roles and principles

## 5.1 Stakeholder power differences and the illusion of consensus

A major reason for taking a tactical approach to developing the NFP – plotting a very particular course through the contextual minefield (sometimes it is difficult to escape from the military origin of the word tactics) – is the recognition that stakeholder groups have very different opinions and degrees of power over decisions that have effects on forests and livelihoods. Not only this, some stakeholders have a history of opposition which prevents easy agreement. Thus, whilst the NFPCU made efforts to bring opinion together to develop and spread a vision, it did not assume that consensus amongst such stakeholders was possible, or even particularly desirable.



### LOADED TERMS

#### **Stakeholder consensus**

Many multi-stakeholder processes assume that societal consensus is possible (although they generally grossly under-estimate the time, goodwill and money needed to produce it). But there are dangers in a fragile consensus. For example, apparent agreements from other ministries or key parliamentarians may in practice be worth little as decisions which strongly affect forests and livelihoods are made without cognisance of the forestry debate (viz the recent Raiply deal). Others suffer from the domination, however subtle, of one group's vision over others (viz the current status of co-management). Consensus can thus be an illusion and forcing its formation may impede creativity and innovation.

Whilst this may be an unusual position these days, a non-consensus based approach makes more sense, especially in the Malawian context where stakeholders are not generally particularly hostile or abusive – indeed they seem to agree a great deal but nevertheless have greatly differing views. The lack of consensus can make for greater richness of debate. The NFPCU hoped that facilitating the interplay of differing groups would enable clearer

identification of errors and possible corrections – the checks and balances that an effective process needs. Such an approach may temporarily manage conflicts, but will not attempt to permanently resolve them. However the NFP could attempt to install a collaborative learning process – stimulating a range of experiments from which stakeholders can learn, and the monitoring and adaptation necessary for this to occur. This is the ‘cyclical’ notion of the NFP represented at the bottom of Figure 2.



## MEMBERS OF THE CAST

### The saboteur

This is the person who tries to derail the process by diverting it towards his/her own agenda or just blocking progress. Participation mechanisms such as working groups and the NFP Forum can quite easily be disrupted by this cast member. Ways in which this is done include dominating the floor, rigidity, interruptions, rudeness or sulky silence when everyone else is participating. Strategies for dealing with this common member of the cast include: ignore politely, clearly interrupt, stop the discussions, talk it out, acknowledge and postpone, divert attention, or use the saboteur’s agenda for debate. Ideally the saboteur him- or herself should be involved in reflecting on their behaviour as well as their agenda in developing ways to deal with it.

In addition to the power to act, the NFPCU attempted to propound the idea that stakeholders vary in their importance or potential for good forestry and livelihoods. Potential for good forestry and livelihoods lies in factors such as: knowledge about forest management, proximity to forests, dependence on forest goods or services, viable forest enterprise, cultural linkages to forests, and existing rights. Some stakeholders have considerable potential to bring about good forestry and livelihoods, yet have little power to do so. Others, by contrast have lower potential, yet have considerable power.



## NFP TIP

### **Bold moves – to bring people to the negotiating table**

One problem with an nfp is that hardly anybody is interested in all of it. Very few people have a fully ‘national’ agenda – most are only interested in certain parts of it. Two likely consequences of this can be anticipated. Firstly, few people are likely to be fully satisfied by an nfp, because their interests need to be balanced against the interests of others. Secondly, to gain any interest and involvement preparing the programme requires well-focused actions. Inviting people to give their ideas in vaguely planned discussions will not do the trick. They are more likely to become involved if there is something important to argue over. Initiatives should focus on specific areas – those that affect real lives, jobs, money and resources – about which tangible conclusions and proposals can be made. In preparing for this, nfp coordinators and supporters need to have a clear view of their own priorities, and encourage others to make theirs clear also.

To provoke debate at the second and third meetings of the NFP Forum, the NFPCU developed a basic ‘ranking’ of stakeholder groups according to power and potential. The following table and diagrams show the results. In the table, the main current stakeholder groups are listed, and then given an indicative ranking along the following lines:

- *Size of group* (17 = largest, 1 = smallest): an indication of the number of people in the group
- *Potential to contribute to good forestry* (17 = highest, 1 = lowest): an indication of the contribution which the group could make, given their size, with their current role, level of knowledge and expertise – if they had the power to do so
- *Power to contribute to good forestry* (17 = highest, 1 = lowest): an indication of the power each group currently has to contribute

**Table 3 Ranking of stakeholder groups’ power and potential to contribute to good forestry (by the NFP Coordination Unit)**

Stakeholder Group	Size of group	Potential to contribute to good forestry	Power to contribute to good forestry
Smallholders	17	17	1
Organised users and groups at community level (e.g. VNRMCs)	16	16	2
Fuelwood and charcoal sellers and traders	15	1	4
Chiefs and traditional authorities	14	10	5
Pitsawyers	13	8	6
Small NTFP enterprises	12	9	3
Ministry of Agriculture	11	12	12
District Assemblies	10	2	9
Forestry Department	9	15	15
Other departments: Department of National Parks and Wildlife, Environmental Affairs Department, Department of Energy	8	6	11
Estate owners (tobacco)	7	3	8
NGOs	6	14	10
Wood industries	5	5	13
Plantation companies (timber, rubber and tea)	4	7	14
Other government agencies: Malawi Investment Promotion Agency, Privatisation Commission	3	4	7
Donors	2	11	16
Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs	1	13	17

Figure 5. is an attempt to show these rankings visually. In the figure, the various main stakeholder groups in Malawi's forest goods and services are shown by circles – the larger the circle the greater the number of people in the group. The centres of the circles are 'plotted' against the two axes – power and potential.

Figure 5. shows the scale and direction of the challenge for the NFP– to push and pull stakeholders towards matching up power with potential. If progress towards better forestry and livelihoods is to be made, some stakeholders need to be empowered to make more positive contributions, whilst others need to be restrained from making destructive contributions. The NFPCU thus proposed that the major challenge – and an ambitious slogan – for the NFP is: *to increase the power of those with potential and increase the potential of those with power!*

## 5.2 What roles need to be played no matter who the stakeholders are?

Regardless of the current strength and relationships of stakeholders, there are jobs to be done in forestry. Some of the functional needs of SFM recognised internationally were taken on board by the NFPCU in its initial analysis (see section 4.1) whilst much background work helped identify the core functions required. It was clear that both the range of functions and the identity of stakeholders who could or should perform them was changing. Chief amongst the drivers of these changes were the imperatives of privatisation, transfer of responsibilities to communities, and political decentralisation.

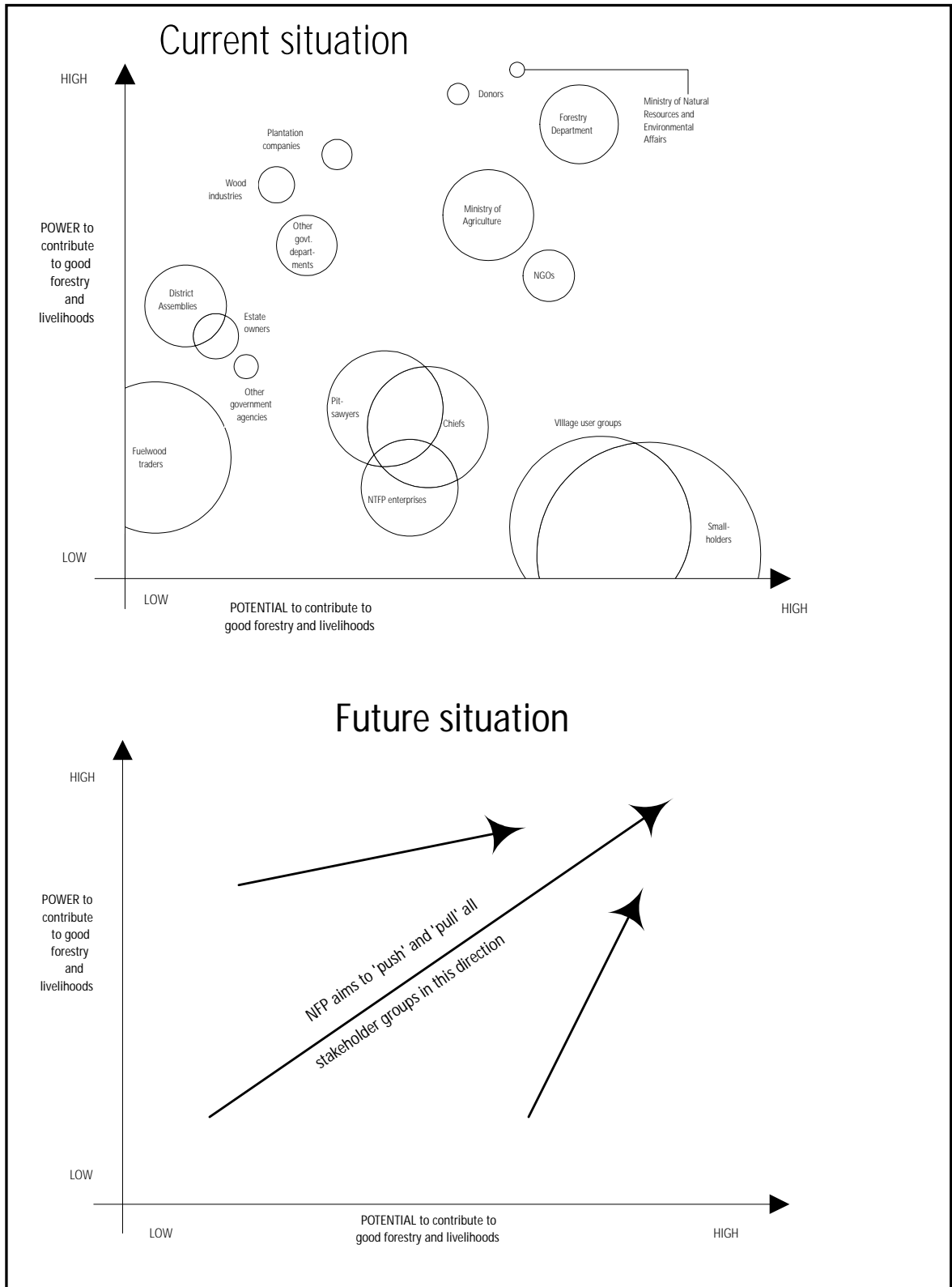


### LOADED TERMS

#### Roles

Roles are not the same as job-descriptions. Whilst job-descriptions are highly specific, handed out and often 'cast in stone', roles are more dynamic, requiring interpretation and development by the role-player. Roles evolve and become more effective over time as role players discover new opportunities and dimensions in them. To play a role well the role-player needs to identify with it, and work towards 'owning' it. Thus, the roles and their attendant responsibilities need to be steadily 'internalised' through the pursuit of practical actions – the start-points for which can be spelled out in an nfp framework document.

**Figure 5 Stakeholder groups: size potential and power to contribute to good forestry and livelihoods**





It was highlighted from the outset by the NFP Co-ordinator that the re-examination, definition and re-negotiation of roles was the single most important missing step prior to the NFP process, and the one which the NFP most needs to take. But roles have rarely been explicitly mapped out before in Malawi's forest sector, and never negotiated.



#### NFP TIP

##### Telling stories

Some people cannot read while others who can, do not. Others hate to read 'consultant' style reports riddled with bullet points and abnormal language. Stories can be better – getting messages across through narrative accounts, whether written or verbal, with examples and colour from real or imagined worlds. It may be difficult for nfps to devote attention to all of the different ways in which knowledge is generated – but stories based on real-world experience are fundamental to the way many people learn, and need to be told. There are usually a few natural story-tellers around who can be encouraged to work on issues of forestry and livelihoods both within the participatory mechanisms set up for an nfp, and in the informal spaces around these mechanisms – the corridor, the fire-side, the bar, etc.



Photo: James Mayers

The links between trees and business enterprises are sometimes surprising!

In making a start on this challenge, the second NFP Forum was tasked with identifying the range of functions which today need to be performed (by someone) in forestry, and then deciding who should be responsible – identifying which stakeholders have existing rights and/or responsibilities, or are generally best placed to perform each function. These initial assessments were subsequently refined and revised by the NFPCU through discussion and circulation of various draft statements of roles. At the third NFP Forum these functions were boiled down into a simple statement of the roles needed to be played by four main groups of stakeholders. This is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4 A vision of the roles which need to be played for Malawian forestry and livelihoods**

<b>Role players</b>	<b>Central government</b>	<b>Local government</b>	<b>Private sector</b>	<b>Civil society</b>
<b>Who</b>	Forestry Department headquarters, central research and training institutions, central line agencies in agriculture, wildlife, environment, etc	District, Town and City Assemblies, including District Forestry Offices and their links to traditional authorities	Profit-oriented forest-based industry, estate owners and small-scale enterprise	NGOs, community-based groups and smallholders
<b>Role</b>	Regulating, planning, managing reserves, providing guidance	District, Town and City Assemblies, including District Forestry Offices and their links to traditional authorities	Developing and using markets for delivering the forest goods and services that people want	Developing local capacities and alliances for improving forestry and livelihoods
<b>Activity</b>	Restructuring and strengthening of existing core roles	Responding to the imperatives and opportunities of decentralisation	Increasing private sector capacity and participation in forest management, investment and production of forest goods and services	Empowering people to fulfil these new roles

In addition to these main groups of role players in Malawi, the NFPCU recognised a fifth group – the donor agencies and other organisations making up the international community. After much discussion the NFPCU proposed that the main role for this group is to support the Government of Malawi’s agreed priorities for improving forestry and livelihoods, to develop a co-ordinated sector-wide approach to provide support to these priorities, and to work with the other four groups to ensure integration with international agreements and the global services which forests can provide.

Following support from the Forum for these basic roles, the more detailed functions within each role were outlined and eventually put forward in the NFP framework document (see section 6).



#### **NFP TIP**

##### **Plan for high turnover of key people**

Key people tend to be mobile. They are in demand and have much to do – and often get promoted, re-assigned or offered new jobs. Sadly, some get sick or even die. This is likely to be true of all those important in the coordination and development of an nfp process – including donors and other supporters – and needs to be anticipated in managing such a process. Various tactics can be used to avoid putting all eggs in one basket including – making sure there is a good ‘paper trail’ of the process and key information generated, seizing opportunities to ‘download’ and spread knowledge held by key people, and training up assistants – understudies for the key members of the cast.

## **5.3 Principles guiding the apparently frantic activity**

Around the same time as work was focusing in on core roles, the NFPCU proposed a set of principles to guide the process and, it was hoped, its outcomes. These were intended as a general ‘values statement’ – another piece of the vision to share with the ever-increasing constituency. These principles built on the following ‘key principles’ for national forest programmes proposed by the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests:

- National sovereignty and country leadership
- Consistency with national policies and international commitments
- Integration with the country’s sustainable development strategies

- Partnership and participation
- Holistic and inter-sectoral approaches

Malawi's NFP principles are in tune with this international thinking, albeit with some idiosyncratic twists:

- Communication and transparency
- Building capability and motivation
- Making use of "good-enough" information
- Learning from success and failure – continuous improvement
- Inter-sectoral and intra-sectoral consistency
- Strategic and tactical action (not comprehensive project wish-lists)
- Negotiation and prioritisation of objectives and actions
- Devolution to effective levels
- Collaboration and partnerships to realise roles
- Energetic process and practical outcomes

These principles came to be a useful checklist for the health of the NFP process. The key words became watchwords for the NFPCU and, gradually, for increasing numbers of Forestry Department members – such that if workshops or findings of working groups fell obviously short on some of these principles they were questioned and modified.



## MEMBERS OF THE CAST

### The godfather

A process which relies on long-lasting policy-level attention, budget allocations and other political decisions requires political minders and champions. In addition to the high-profile political figure-head, who is vital but whose long-term political life cannot be guaranteed, a key member of the nfp cast is the 'godfather'. This person is an experienced and respected long-term political operator, a public servant or leading figure in commerce perhaps, who takes a keen personal interest in the nfp and is able to work, mostly behind the scenes, to help spread the word, overcome obstacles and occasionally pull a few necessary strings. Finding such people, early in the nfp process is crucial. Malawi's NFP has developed a few such 'godparents', but needs more.



Photo: James Mayers

**'Use your head' to solve problems says the NFP – a pit-sawn plank carrier demonstrates the value of this**



# Developing strategies and prioritising actions

## 6.1 Strategy plucked from the jaws of defeat

One of the defining moments of the NFP process came when, amidst growing mounds of analysis, divergent opinion and frustration at a perceived lack in tangible progress, the NFPCU took the initiative to set out some strategy. On the basis of the mound of analysis – primarily from the working groups – but also on ‘gut feeling’ from experience, the NFPCU defined twelve areas in which it thought the NFP should focus, and drafted strategy statements for each of these. Initial informal favourable reaction to these strategic elements from Forestry Department and NGO colleagues gave the NFPCU confidence to retreat for a few days to write a draft framework document. This was then circulated prior to the third NFP Forum in March 2000.



### NFP TIP

#### The NFP as an adaptive cycle

The idea of the NFP in Malawi as an ongoing process producing concrete outcomes took some time to sell. Some people saw a process ‘going round in circles, not getting anywhere’; others were unhappy with the lack of an end in sight. But towards the later stages in the initial process of developing the NFP the ‘continuously improving process’ or cycle represented by the clockwise-running circle had become the NFP’s recognized guiding concept – and motif. The first turn of the cycle represents all the stages needed to get the NFP up and running. The second turn of the cycle represents the hoped-for spreading of agreement and expanding the range of those taking agreed actions. Effective decentralization of the NFP is perhaps the key defining feature of the second cycle. And the NFP should not go on forever; it will hopefully end when its objectives are achieved – by mutual consent of the entire cast.

## 6.2 Prioritisation without too much pain

The NFPCU also hatched a cunning plan for the third NFP Forum. The draft framework document identified a list of possible actions under each of the twelve NFP strategies. This was not a list of ready-made projects, but of

areas in which initiatives of various kinds are needed - some will need project support, some will not. The aim was to describe each action in just enough detail to provide a start point for initiatives. The cunning plan was to get the Forum – by now a reasonably representative body of stakeholders – to make an initial prioritisation of these action points. This would fast-track a potentially lengthy democratic process.



## MEMBERS OF THE CAST

### The maverick

This is the person who does not conform, who questions conventional wisdom, makes leaps of imagination and plays devil's advocate. Those who can ridicule the norm may be vital – to point out fundamental flaws in thinking and identify radical alternatives that just might work. Some processes and issues will benefit more from the maverick's art than others, for example intractable, turgid debates need the maverick, whilst those in which the basic arguments are clear and just need the support of political decision-makers could well do without the maverick's diversion tactics. The maverick can be very useful to give originality and vitality to an nfp – but don't put him/her in charge.

All of the actions were considered necessary if the NFP goal is to be met – some are major far-reaching actions which will take a long time, others are smaller and could be implemented quite quickly. The actions cannot be done all at once – some are more important than others, and they are not equally urgent. Hence prioritisation was crucial – and a transparent participatory method to do this was put to the NFP Forum. The NFPCU hoped that this transparency would stimulate further debate and the emergence of information that would in turn raise the quality of decision-making. The process had been tested in one of the break-out groups at the December 1999 NFP Forum and was applied to the whole list of actions at the March 2000 NFP Forum.



Photo: James Meyers

An occasional tree is left growing over a tea plantation. With changes in price, perhaps tea estates could grow much more timber in future



## NFP TIP

### Prioritising actions

A simple system of scoring actions against some basic criteria was proposed. The scores were used to rank the actions in order of priority. The advantage of using a scoring and ranking system is that criteria for selecting between alternatives are clear and judgements are made explicit. The criteria used were:

- *Environmentally beneficial* – the degree to which the action safeguards or enhances ecological and environmental functions of forests and trees
- *Socially beneficial* – the degree to which the action contributes to the alleviation of poverty and supports equitable and culturally appropriate development
- *Economically beneficial* – the degree to which the action contributes to a stronger local or national economy
- *Institutionally feasible* – the degree to which the action is possible with current and foreseeable future institutional and political realities
- *Affordable* – the degree to which the action can be supported with the current and foreseeable future skills and money available

The actions were scored against this set of criteria. Each criterion was given a score – from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. The criteria were simple – and there was no weighting between them. In other words, all the criteria can be compared directly; for example, a score of 3 for environmentally beneficial has the same overall value as a score of 3 for socially beneficial, etc. Once the scoring was done for all five criteria for each action, this allowed an estimate of two aspects of priority:

- *'Importance'* – the sum of the scores given to the five criteria was converted, for simplicity, into one of three categories of importance – *very high, high, or medium* (nothing seemed to be of low importance!)
- *'Urgency'* – one of three categories – *immediate, short-term, or medium-term* – was then agreed for each activity to indicate whether it should be done in the short term, in the medium term or in the longer term.

Finally an indication of who would take the action was made:

- *'Lead actor'* – each action needs to be *'owned'* by an institution or stakeholder group that will be centrally involved in *making the first moves* on that action. These 'lead actors' will need the help of others in almost every case. Thus, lead actors are the 'first port of call' for those interested in the activity – and the efforts of lead actors with their supporters should result in *catalytic* action – they set the pace and provide the inspiration to bring others on board.

Tables were then produced of the results under each of the twelve strategies. Each table listed the NFP actions in summarised form with the indications of priority and lead actor as developed at the NFP Forum. The prioritisation method worked fairly well in practical terms. The priorities produced by the Forum were then modified and further debated through a phase of circulation and comment on the draft NFP framework document.





## KEY MOMENT

### Getting it down on paper

In the nfp preparation process – which generates large amounts of information and a good measure of both understanding and confusion - there comes a time when a tactical decision is needed about what constitutes enough information and agreement for a programme. In Malawi this point was reached in mid 2000 – it was time to get it all down on paper in a short, sharp NFP framework document. The document summarises the analysis developed during the process and clearly outlines the ways forward for forestry policy and practice. It is not a large compendium of proposed projects but a short strategic document which clarifies key issues, assesses strategic options and defines the necessary actions and policy instruments to deliver them.

The development phase was thus close to conclusion – a process with considerable energy had been developed, a mound of findings and stakeholder network had been built, and a framework document aiming to capture the essence of all of the above had been written. Now it was time to do something with it.



Photo: James Mayers

Fuelwood and charcoal for sale by the road. The fuelwood trade is one of the NFP's touchy subjects



# Strengthening the process

## 7.1 There's no such thing as a free launch

The President 'launched' the NFP in January 2001. This followed cabinet approval of the final draft framework document. The 50-page document was printed in colour with an attractive design and layout and made available for the first time on the day of the launch. Tied in with the beginning of national tree-planting week, now established in government's calendar, the ceremony took place in a village in southern Malawi. Exhibition and extension stalls were set out and manned by a range of organisations.



### KEY MOMENT

#### Launching the NFP

When the moment is right, a glitzy launch event with key speeches to attract public and media attention can do a useful job in raising the political profile of an nfp. In Malawi the publication of the NFP framework document was the excuse rather than the reason for the launch. The main reason was to keep building momentum for the NFP process at the critical phase of moving from development to action. Key steps in enabling the event to attain a high profile were to produce the document in an attractively designed format – to encourage its distribution and use which in itself raised interest at ministerial level; then to hitch the launch to the opening of national-tree planting week which meant that there was sufficient precedent and protocol to secure the highest political attention.

The President and First Lady, the Minister for Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs, and a wide range of other ministerial representatives and diplomats planted indigenous trees around farms in the village. Speeches were then made and the NFP document pronounced launched to rapturous applause from the assembled masses (about 3,000 people had gathered, mostly from the surrounding area). A bite to eat and drink was then made available to a selected few – each of whom seemed to have a

great many friends. Although not cheap, this was NFP extension in action. Considerable media coverage was generated – television programmes featured forestry issues and panel discussions before and after the event, and the radio and newspapers also carried the story.



## MEMBERS OF THE CAST

### The media friend

Unlike single-issue politics or special interest campaigns which are tailor-made for journalists, nfps are about balancing many interests and making the most of existing knowledge and capacities – characteristics unlikely to attract the media. Nevertheless, the process of developing an nfp should dig up many good stories and vital issues that deserve a good media airing. And if the process generates new thinking, negotiation and energy, then that in itself is a good story. These stories are much more likely to reach the media if contacts with journalists and media programme-makers are fostered from an early stage. Nfp coordinators should seek out media friends and help them to work their way into the subject matter by telling them in advance of stories that are brewing, keeping them informed of developments, and helping them capture the story by preparing press-releases and briefings with eye-catching content.

## 7.2 The proof of the pudding is in the eating

It was recognised early on that the stages of the ‘NFP cycle’ do not run cleanly one after another. Reality is more messy – and there were always elements of capacity-building, field-level action and adaptation going on at the same time as the goal and priority setting ‘formulation’ stage. Indeed the NFPCU and many other key players were also involved in ‘implementation’ actions of various kinds throughout the stage of NFP formulation culminating in production of the document. However, the prioritisation process represents a major milestone – for the first time there is substantial agreement and motivation to make a concerted start on a range of actions which take forestry in new directions.

The next year or so will be a critical period. The prioritisation of actions provides a useful start point in thinking through what to do first; but this thinking also needs to reflect political realities, what’s already happening on the ground, and what different people need to see happen quickly. This means that the NFPCU must be both quick on its feet and opportunistic. Existing relevant project-supported activities offer one means to demonstrate immediate action against priorities although it is probable that the NFP coordinators will have to invest quite a lot of time (and they are hard pushed already) to work alongside project implementers to see how existing work plans can be tied to the NFP framework.



## NFP TIP

### Re-shaping existing work

The process of 'growing' the supporters club offers the NFP an opportunity to do some creative re-branding. A sound relationship with existing activities or initiatives can be capitalised on in order to convert good existing activities into even-better NFP activities. This requires conversation and quite some effort, but shaping existing projects or programmes through the integration of NFP strategies and actions in their management, core documents, and work plans is an effective way to both demonstrate action against the NFP, and to guide new supporters into the NFP fold. If existing plans and actions evolve to fit with the NFP, there's a much higher chance that new activities or initiatives will be designed within the framework offered by the NFP. The hope is that use of the NFP will become increasingly natural to the current players and the profile that this act offers will encourage new players to shape their work in support of the NFP process.

**Another tactic for generating action and publicly demonstrating how the NFP might be implemented is to encourage role players to make clear, public statements of commitment, and pledges on how they will support the NFP. The NFP's strategies and action points can be used to set objectives and targets. Those making commitments might then be paired up to ensure that there is some mutual assurance to meet them.**



## NFP TIP

### Public commitments to take action

The NFP document listed lead actors for each action – responsible for 'making the first move' on that action. Lead actors were asked to reflect on what these first moves should be and to make some plans which they could commit to. For example, an organisation could commit to integrating key elements of the NFP into the strategies, projects and budgets of the organisation in various ways. Lead actors were asked to address the following three questions:

1. What practical actions can you take with current and anticipated resources and capabilities to implement the NFP?
2. What further practical actions can you take if particular constraints are removed by others?
3. What further practical actions can you take if new alliances and programmes of support are developed?

These plans were then brought to the NFP Forum to be announced and discussed.

Donors were also amongst those asked to prepare their plans for the Forum.



Director of Forestry being interviewed with local elder at the launch of the NFP

Donor support is crucial. Forthcoming project planning and design processes need to be steered into the NFP fold. For example, the design process of a second phase of an EC-supported forestry project – which in its first phase of strengthening forestry extension has made considerable contributions to some high-priority NFP actions – offers a clear means to ensure that this major donor comes good on its verbal commitment to the NFP by designing its new support within the NFP framework’s strategies and actions. There is no doubt that the NFP needs to win the support of some large donor projects. A concerted source of support linking NFP coordination to other aspects of institutional change is needed (DFID’s support to date in this area leaves it best-placed to fill this niche). Other groups of actions also justify external funding as development activities e.g. strengthening forestry extension services

in order to get co-management initiatives on their feet. Working to turn initial expressions of interest received from key donors into actual support is a key challenge for the near future.

As well as demonstrating fancy footwork, NFP coordinators must keep improving their juggling skills. Different players each have their own views and preferences on how to take action – requiring sufficient flexibility and patience in the NFPCU to use ways of working and language that can encourage the best out of each player. The NFPCU will also have to bear in mind that many, if not all, NFP supporters are having to dance to particular, and often different, tunes in order to fit in with their own particular organisational culture and rules.

NFP implementation must somehow accommodate these institutional peculiarities whilst being wary of unreasonable demands, passing trends and unrealistic claims of NFP support. The trick will be in ensuring that the Department leads the players towards some common ground on implementation such that the NFPCU does not become swamped with a disparate set of responsibilities and approaches that no longer make up a coherent picture. In summary, desired NFP outcomes are most likely to be achieved through an opportunistic, iterative process of bringing supporters on board to pursue politically strategic and practical actions.

## 7.3 Managing the process – improving the systems

Turning priority actions into activities and ultimately deriving NFP outcomes is critically dependent on the management of the process. The NFPCU will need to put the focus on the five systems at the heart of the NFP process – planning and process management, participation, skills development, information and finance – to see where it needs to invest its time and energy in order to maintain the flow of the NFP and ensure that the framework is used and remains relevant.

All of these systems have been established in some shape or form, but all need an overhaul. The system for participation – the NFP working groups, steering group and forum, alongside other participation mechanisms in the sector – will remain critical in the second NFP cycle but their effectiveness needs review and several mechanisms will need to be strengthened or given a jump start. For example, effective institutional change and private sector forestry working groups are needed now more than ever, and the finance group has much work still to do. For some actions, simply convening people to develop ideas on what to actually do, following the strategic thinking phase, will be enough; for others an injection of new energy from new people will be needed. But some mechanisms will have to be completely redesigned to meet the needs of a second NFP cycle – for example the NFP Steering Group needs to be effectively and consistently operating, with members including those from beyond the Forestry Department.

Development of other core systems such as human development, and support mechanisms such as monitoring and feedback, needs to proceed hand in hand. But further work is needed to get the priorities right if overload of the NFPCU is to be avoided and the Department is not to drown in consultancies. For instance, a sector-wide information management system will eventually be needed but to aim straight for it would be a mistake. Steps are needed. First, the NFPCU needs to focus on its own information and communication system and on how it can make best use of existing information and mechanisms.



## NFP TIP

### **Focus on systems which keep the cycle moving**

Once the NFP framework is agreed the temptation might be to leave behind some of the key ingredients that allowed this to occur – one being the essential characteristic of realism and practicality. In its next iteration, the NFP process must continue to be strategic. The need for better systems – of planning and process management, participation, skills development, information and finance – may be increasingly obvious, but the existence of the NFP framework doesn't mean that the capacity or resources are in place to take big leaps. Rather, energies should be focused on addressing the immediate system needs, whilst bearing in mind what processes these systems must eventually be able to support. For example, in the long run, Malawi's NFP systems must be able to support and facilitate the decentralisation process, but this will only be achieved through small (or smallish) steps. A dual process of strengthening systems while also laying the foundations for more comprehensive, widespread systems is required.

Strategic, short-term thinking and action whilst also laying the foundations for achievements in the longer term is an increasingly natural style of working for the NFPCU and its core supporters. For instance, a major phase of awareness raising and generating commitment on the NFP is now underway. At the same time, some work will be done to lay the groundwork for later stages. This includes assessing the viability of using the Forest Management and Development Fund as common pool funding mechanism and, most importantly, developing plans for decentralising the NFP – the major requirement for an effective 'second cycle'.

The first stage in this second cycle is about information, communication and advocacy. The NFPCU is aware that due to sheer weight of work, its efforts to share information and spread understanding were limited and there is much to do. The framework document is a start but other materials and other extension media must be used to get the message out and to help different players make sense of the NFP within their day-to-day jobs. Popular versions of the document will be produced (in English and local languages), and the work to tell the story of the NFP and what the NFP could bring to forestry and poverty alleviation must be told in as many forms as possible.



Photo: Pippa Bird

Busy Forestry Department extension stall at the launch of the NFP





## NFP TIP

### Communications strategy

For the nfp to develop and maintain its momentum it needs to be explained and discussed again and again and again. The nfp process needs from the start to make a clear focus on the type of influence desired. Possibilities for influencing and improving forestry and livelihoods range from just hoping that someone will listen, to working with a policy-maker for a particular policy decision, to trying to build long-term consensus among groups to take action. Key questions to ask in preparing the nfp include:

- *What is our likely message?*
- *Who needs to hear it?*
- *How will we get this message across?*
- *How will we follow up on message delivery to actually improve forestry and livelihoods?*

Repeated consultation and discussion, through the nfp's participatory mechanisms, with a range of active 'opinion-formers' and decision-makers can generate 'political space' for key issues and policy opportunities that may arise in the course of the work. Products of different forms can then play their part. These include both written and recorded materials and the institutional mechanisms to do something with them:

- *Launch events and presentations* – to deliver and debate nfp strategies
- *Dissemination workshops and 'what next' retreats* for internalising nfp approaches
- *Presentations* to local, national and international seminars and workshops
- *Training course* contributions at local, national and international levels
- *Printing and mailing* of written materials
- *E-mail shots* on progress
- *Working papers* on key areas and themes
- *Policy briefings* and flyers
- *Newspaper and newsletter* contributions, reports and columns
- *Pamphlets* in local languages
- *Videos* on key themes and processes
- *TV and radio* programmes featuring action on nfp strategies
- *Curricula* and training programme establishment/input
- *Online information* – postings all above material on partner websites



# Conclusions – summarising lessons

## 8.1 Strengths and achievements

Strategic, not overly comprehensive, knowledge and participation have been built

Unlike many national forest sector programmes, Malawi's NFP is not wholly defined by a big fat document containing a lengthy wide-ranging situation analysis and detailed list of projects looking for donors. Rather it is viewed by the increasing numbers of stakeholders who have engaged with it as a set of mechanisms through which they can get their ideas heard, hear those of others, and develop support to pursue some mutually agreed action. Malawi's NFP framework document is a lean affair, capturing the best bets for action, but it represents just one stage in the process – it is not the goal in itself.

Prior to the NFP there were major gaps in useable knowledge – there still are and there probably always will be. The NFP Coordination Unit recognised this – and also noted examples from the past where such gaps have not been successfully filled by the quick generation of a vast amount of new information. A sector which is used to a relative paucity of recorded information cannot easily digest a sudden glut of it, such as that produced by the forest sector review of the early 1990s. Large amounts of useful work was done (albeit by external consultants rather poorly connected to local institutional realities) but little of it found its way into the heads of those in the sector. Furthermore, no matter how good information systems become – it only takes the re-assignment, diversion or death of one or two key players for vital stores of tacit knowledge, or indeed large collections of written material, to be dissipated or lost. This is why one of the main principles of the NFP came to be to make the best use of existing information available at any one time. The working groups, consultant inputs, NFP Forum and stakeholder meetings were all focused on this – and generated usable findings which the NFP Coordination Unit has been able to draw on and synthesise.

In its approach to participation the strategic approach was also evident. So far, the conscious design of the process to be long enough to generate a good level

of participation, but short enough for results to emerge before participants become exhausted, seems to be working. Some issues, such as those involved in developing the broad vision and roles needed in the forest sector, needed a strong process of broad participation and negotiation. Fundamental disagreements were both anticipated and managed in the mechanisms used for this process. But it was also recognised that not all issues need such broad participation. For example, government had to make its own way, to formulate its own clear positions on issues such as the mechanisms and conditions for restructuring government institutions and privatising the forests.

### Early wins look set to bring long-term gains

The NFP process was able to focus on some actions with potential to change long-term attitudes as well as have short-term effect. Some of these actions related to forestry functions such as the findings of the working group on co-management – which helped put experiments in this relatively new area on a surer footing, and the work on financial flows and mechanisms, collaborative extension services, farm forestry and the comparative advantage of the Malawi industrial sector which have all brought a range of new ideas to the table. Participation mechanisms have also generated early wins, including the NFP Forum, which has been a successful national level stakeholder mechanism. Meetings with the private sector which broke the ice early on in the process showed that the NFP could provide a means for working through old hostilities, and the village-level ground-truthing exercises and district forestry meetings which brought many new stakeholders and a lot of ideas on board, showed that the NFP was serious about local-level consultation.

### Tactical coordination from within the forestry department has worked

Perhaps the most crucial ‘early win’ was the establishment of the NFP Coordination Unit itself. Headed by a forester partially relieved of other duties, backed up by a social service professional, supported through judicious use of external technical assistance and housed in the Department of Forestry, this unit had considerable strength. The departmental location made much sense in this first NFP cycle – since this is where most existing government forestry capacity and information lies. A constituency could be built easily from this home because traditionally it is the recognised source of any government action in the sector. The potential downside of this approach is the apparent separation from other sectors and from macro-political decision-making levels. The alternative might have been to install the NFP coordination unit at ministry level – building on the precedent in

earlier years of forest sector planning cell at that level. However, this cell had gone into hibernation because it was divorced from those with jobs in forestry. On balance it seems that the departmental home for NFP coordination is best in the early stages – to generate initial actions which other stakeholders can see, relate to, get upset about and help modify. Heightened political momentum is the necessary next step and can then be taken up through additional or alternative arrangements (see below).

### Extra-sectoral influences have begun to be tackled

One of the biggest failings in forestry worldwide is the inability of forest sector agencies to modify and change the big influences on forestry from beyond the sector. Time and again some analysis is made of the ‘bigger picture’ beyond the sector, but because time, money and reputation can only be controlled within the sector – that is where solutions are sought. Malawi’s NFP has not yet achieved engagement with the full range of other sectors, but a basis for doing so has been built. Evidence suggests that some of the problems and contradictions with other sectors and macro-policy, are simply the result of the inability of the advocates of good forestry to make their voices heard at this level. Yet foresters can argue their case well when armed with the confidence and knowledge gained by a fresh look at their own sector through the frameworks used in other sectors. For example, the Department of Forestry has presented the sector’s efforts to contribute to the national poverty reduction strategy by showing the links between targets in this strategy and NFP priority actions.

### New mechanisms have built on old

Progress made to date with the NFP relies in large part on the persistence of a small number of people and the existence of several key mechanisms. A key characteristic of both key people and mechanisms is that they are able to pursue these new activities because of the knowledge and institutional capital they already possessed. Core existing staff of the NFP Coordination unit, key members of working groups, and mechanisms like the desertification task force had been in the system for years, and had considerable capability. But it took the addition of some new resources, people and ideas to kick them into a new lease of life. The task force metamorphosed into the NFP Forum with some new blood. Regular FD management meetings developed as a NFP Steering Group over time, which in turn has meant that the NFP has become a guiding framework for the FD’s work.

### Some of the audience have joined the cast

Stakeholders have joined in with elements of the NFP process when they have seen it being bold in tackling difficult issues, being serious about taking views

on board and being able to free people up to participate. Several donor agencies have been attracted to the clear statements of sectoral priority and commitment represented by the NFP. Several new project developments based on the actions outlined in the framework document are in train and the prospects of building a platform of donor support for a sector-wide approach look good. It was the establishment of the NFP Coordination Unit within the Department of Forestry that has enabled considerable donor liaison and joint development of project ideas to take place. The EC, DFID, PROFOR and DIDC have all noted the benefits of complementarity and effectiveness in working within the NFP framework, and we hope others will follow.

## 8.2 Weaknesses and failures

Messages have not always been clear  
nor consistently pressed home

Experience thus far with the NFP suggests that plans and approaches have to be broadcast and explained again and again. When a new approach or angle is taken on an issue, it will not be digested by most people first time round. Key stakeholders in forest sector institutions are both somewhat nomadic – going from workshop to meeting to project activity – and sceptical – they have seen many initiatives come, talk big, then disappear before. The NFP Coordination Unit, swamped with organization and administration of the process, was not able to get all news out quickly in flexible ways – to people at both ‘high’ and ‘low’ levels. People came on board too slowly as a result. The remedy for this is not simply a matter of adding ‘communications’ staff, although this would have helped, since the most effective messages are put across by the people most immersed in the process. Freeing up the key coordination staff from administration to do communications work is similarly difficult in the early stages of a process that is ‘inventing’ administrative systems as it goes along, but this should become more effective as the process continues.

Timeframes have proven repeatedly unrealistic

‘Think of a timeframe, and treble it’, has become a rule of thumb – but only after a couple of years trying to ‘fast-track’ the NFP process. This is the case at any level where an initiative involves more than a couple of people. An over-arching example is the NFP formulation phase, or first cycle, during which the NFPCU was under pressure from senior management in the Department of Forestry and two donors to make a work plan and complete the process in under a year. Although the NFPCU and advisers noted this



Photo: James Mayers

**Biodiversity hotspots and landscape beauty often go hand in hand – like here at Mulanje mountain**

was too tight for an adequate process they prepared a plan accordingly. In the event the first cycle took two years and countless schedules and budgets had to be rearranged. It should be noted that the outcomes are certainly stronger as result of this longer period, and that both the Department and the donors seem fairly content with them. In retrospect it seems that most of the timing under-estimates could have been spotted with greater attention, yet the suspicion lingers that if the plan had been for two years, it would have taken four.

### Inadequate political engagement

Two-thirds of the process to date – the first NFP cycle – made some supporters nervous. The plan from the early stages to engage with politically sensitive topics such as institutional reform and privatisation signaled bold and fairly combative intentions. Some at both departmental and ministerial level in government, and in the private sector, were ready and willing to seize the opportunity of the NFP to make progress on these issues, but others were not. The means by which key decisions are taken seemed to be being challenged by the NFP, and hostile reactions to this were at time picked up in some senior members of the Department of Forestry. However, in retrospect some of these reactions proved to be more imaginary than real, and the doors are now more open for a higher level of political profile for the NFP. The last third of the process to date has shown that building up the

NFP from its base in the Department of Forestry has been effective – since key NFP champions are now recognised and well-supported, some early wins have been achieved, and some tactical moves – like attaching the NFP launch to national tree planting week to make both work better – have raised the political stakes usefully.

## 8.3 Major challenges ahead

### Tackle new roles head on

Taking up new roles is often daunting and complicated but, once there is some agreement on what they are, it needs to be tackled head on. Spreading and increasing the level of agreement is likely to be the best way into this, and is a job for NFP coordinators to help facilitate. Much of this can be achieved through informal liaison and face-to-face interaction, but some of the more contentious details about how new roles might be implemented will have to be thrashed out in open negotiation. Argument, disagreement and strong views are inevitable, but with careful facilitation to work through the contentious issues, positive outcomes can be developed. An important role for NFP coordinators is to work with the individuals and institutions identified through the process as key role players, and to encourage them to think through what these roles mean and how they can respond with workable commitments and make progress to meeting them. Not everyone can be worked with at once, but regular liaison is vital with those with big roles such as the Forestry Department and key donors, to see how they can start to respond within the context of their existing priorities, activities and resources.

### Keep an eye on the big objectives

Just as early gains are important in the first cycle of the NFP, solid outcomes should be planned and worked for early in the second cycle. But this should not be at the expense of longer-term objectives. As the short-term work is done, key activities to set things up to make progress on the bigger objectives should be kept going. For instance, it is clear that decentralisation presents a whole range of challenges, so focusing now on how to raise political interest in the NFP at district level should pay dividends when there is more time and resources to initiate district level work. Such work can then capitalise on this raised awareness and get district-level activities up and running faster.

### Install the NFP at higher political levels

More ‘godparents’ and other well-informed minders and champions of the aims and practicalities of the NFP are needed at a high political level. This is

not a call for party-political alignment, but for seizing opportunities for installation of the NFP in the workings of government. The best route to this is likely to be through the solid base now made at ministerial level. Priority should be given to supporting the efforts of those in the ministry to lever acceptance from, and engagement with, NFP strategies in macro-economic and cross-sectoral decision-making.

### Engage with previously marginalized groups

The NFP process to date has made the first steps in recognizing that key stakeholders – those in civil society and the private sector who could make forestry part of sustainable livelihoods in Malawi - are currently out of the loop. The next challenge is to undertake a range of actions which can map out stakeholder capacities and motivation – to find out where real capacity (the people who could take action) lies – then, even more importantly, build up a picture of real motivations (the people who want to take action). Careful work is then needed to engage with these groups – since the reasons for their previous marginalisation need to be tackled. With community-based groups there is often a legacy of mistrust on forestry issues to work through. With the private sector, many issues of regulation, red tape, security and finance need to be worked through before enabling conditions favour healthy investment in large, medium and small-scale enterprises.

### Hold on to tacit knowledge

Much of the NFP's intellectual and institutional capital relies on the tacit knowledge – the continued use of what is in the heads – of a few key stakeholders. Information and knowledge management systems currently revolve around direct human interactions. This will always be the case – and is surely the best way – but ways of increasing the spread of knowledge through learning groups in face-to-face contact need to be concertedly developed. Key knowledge is lost when people move on and pass away – so ways of augmenting human interaction are also needed. There is a long way to go before many people in Malawi can get much out of the internet, but this is one route needing support. A range of other ways to improve the recording and using of tacit knowledge are called for.

### Expand the supporters club

The NFP has done fairly well with quite a small band of supporters – two funding agencies, some champions in the Forestry Department, and some strong collaborators in projects and NGOs. Now its time to expand the club, and some more tactical actions are called for to do this. Those on whom the actions of others depend will be particularly important to bring in. Thus work is needed to identify these potential supporters and highlight to them



the advantages of closer collaboration through relatively painless mechanisms for their participation. Ways can then be found to add NFP elements to existing/planned projects to bring them further on board.

### Strengthen Government's quality control

Given the paucity of resources to take new initiatives or even to tick over in Malawi, it's not surprising that the tendency is to say yes to just about any donor funded project, no matter how relevant or well developed it is (and there have been some truly irrelevant, bog-standard projects over the years). This tendency will not vanish with the launch of the NFP and a two-pronged approach may help ameliorate this problem. Firstly, continuous effort is needed to build Government commitment, understanding and belief in a strong stance with the donors that steers them towards support for the agreed NFP priorities. Secondly, all available means need to be used to encourage donors to place their support within the NFP framework. This can be done by the NFP coordinators and influential friends. In time it can also be done by raising the stakes of opting out of the NFP – since if the NFP's public profile is justifiably high, failure to engage with it could prove embarrassing to agencies whose policies highlight national ownership, national leadership and nationally agreed priorities.

### In summary

Bold moves need to be made to widen and deepen the initial progress and impact of Malawi's NFP. Government in particular has a major job to do in steering donors towards concrete commitments within the NFP framework, tackling decentralisation, and motivating all to turn agreed action points into real results. The tactics, pitfalls and remaining challenges of the process in Malawi appear to have wider applicability and it is hoped that those engaged with nfps in other countries, and in sector-wide approaches in other sectors, may find food for thought in the above story. Sharing experiences has been a key feature of the process so far – and well-told dramas from other countries and sectors are also likely to find an attentive audience amongst those working for better forestry and livelihoods in Malawi.

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# Annex

## Indicative policy analysis for the Malawi NFP

One key step in developing Malawi's NFP involved identifying the key influences on forests and livelihoods from policies, institutions and markets beyond those directly controlled by the forestry agencies. Working groups, stakeholder meetings and analytical studies were encouraged to develop ways to identify and work with critical extra-sectoral influences.

Table A1 was developed as a summary of some of these influences.

**Table A1 Extra-sectoral policy influences on forests and people in Malawi**

Policy influence	People		Forests		Comment
	Big	Small	Cons.	Use	
High budget deficit and domestic borrowing	-	+	?	?	Discourages private investment. May increase services in the short term
Competitive exchange rate	+	-	-	+	Promotes export growth. But devaluation increases inequality and kills off some agricultural incentives
Liberalised maize markets and smallholder burley tobacco	+	+	-	+	Increases farm size. Reduces woodlands
High transport costs (with low road maintenance and high tax/regulation)	-	-	+	-	Keeps farm-gate prices low. Many taxes on vehicles
Weak promotion of small companies in seed and tree nursery development	?	-	-	?	Demand is high, inadequate supply
Weak research and extension on resource management and small-scale processing	?	-	-	?	Demand is high, inadequate supply
Poor access to and reliability of electricity and communications	-	-	?	-	Disables many development options
Weak physical security provision	-	-	-	+	Disables many development options. Increases illegal use
Unclear institutional roles	-	-	-	?	Much institutional overlap and inconsistency
Complex land titling and transfer arrangements	-	?	?	?	Not conducive to investment?
Improving focus on basic education and middle level supervisory and technical skills	+	+	+	?	Increases capacity of workforce, small entrepreneurs and management
Ongoing civil service reform	+	?	?	?	Concentrates government capacity on essential services. But major social impact through retrenchments
'Starter packs' and other safety nets	?	+	?	?	Vital but limited role in development

Explanation of the columns in table A1 above:

- Big** – Estate farmers and large scale private sector
- Small** – Smallholders and small scale private sector
- Cons.** – Conservation and management of forests
- Use** – Utilisation of woodlands and trees
- +** – Positive influence
- – Negative influence
- ?** – Uncertain influence

Analysis of the wide range of international, regional and national initiatives to define sustainable forest management, which have proliferated in the last few years, shows that they all have the following in common:

- Framework conditions
- Sustained and optimal production of forest products
- Protecting the environment
- Ensuring the well-being of people

These core elements can be broken down into a number of common sub-elements. These are listed in Table A2 in a summary assessment, also used to analyse key strengths and gaps in preparation of Malawi's NFP. The Table notes some of the features of the National Forest Policy and Forestry Act which are particularly innovative, and some challenges remaining.

Explanation of the columns in table A2 below:

**Innovations.** Features of the above-mentioned policy documents which appear particularly innovative, and likely to be of interest to others in the forestry world beyond Malawi.

**Challenges.** Features of the documents which appear to be challenges remaining - potential gaps or issues in need of further policy or legislative attention.

**Table A2 Malawian policy documents in relation to common elements of international standards for sustainable forest management (SFM)**

Common element of SFM standards	Policy	Act	Innovations	Challenges
<b>Framework conditions</b>				
Compliance with legislation and regulation	**	**	Much reference made to law and regulation in other sectors. Provision for international commitments and opportunities	Policy implies major modifications required in various laws – not fully met by Forest Act. Weak practical mechanisms for cross-sectoral collaboration
Securing tenure and use rights	**	***	Rights on customary land and reserves clarified. New provisions for Village Forest Areas (VFA) with Forest Management Agreements, and Forest Plantation Agreements	Questionable ultimate legitimacy of state controls on forests and trees on non-state land. Lack of provision for conversion areas and vague on criteria for de-classification of reserves
Commitment to sustainable forest management	***	**	Strong theme in Policy	Act not framed around a balance of social, environmental and economic objectives. Priorities amongst objectives and institutional roles unclear. Little promotion of incentives cf. regulation
<b>Sustained and optimal production of forest products</b>				
Sustained yield of forest products	**	*	Emphasis on sound inventory and yield information	Weak provisions for non-plantation forest products. Utilisation provisions in Act not conditional on sustained yield
Management planning	***	**	Much emphasis on planning, VFAs and linkage to other sectors in support of Village Natural Resource Management Committees. Strong links made between plans and regulations	Major challenges lie ahead for realising VFAs, instituting co-management, and leasing state land to private sector
Monitoring the effects of management	*	*		Weak strategies for using monitoring results to improve policy. Monitoring based on policing licenses only
Protection of the forest from illegal activities	**	**	Key objective of the Act – dealing primarily with reserves and customary land	The future of forest protection under re-oriented institutions is a major challenge



Common element of SFM standards	Policy	Act	Innovations	Challenges
Optimising benefits from the forest	**	*	Efficiency of utilisation a strong theme. Call for forestry to benefit from water and hydro-power revenues. Competitive bidding for government-owned timber	Little guidance on equity and priorities amongst uses. Fostering large-scale private production forestry and wood industry a major challenge
<b>Protection of the environment</b>				
Environmental impact assessment	**	**	Required before major developments in protected/fragile areas	Need stronger intersectoral linkages to make this work
Conservation of biodiversity	**	*		Rather weak specific provisions
Ecological sustainability	***	*	Strong theme in Policy	Viable mechanisms for addressing landscape-wide or catchment management not addressed.
Waste and chemicals management	*	*	Strong theme in Policy (including gender provisions) and key objective of Act	No provisions on industrial wastes, (are provisions in Environment Management Act)
<b>Well-being of people</b>				
Consultation and participation processes	***	**	Strong emphasis on government capacity development	Act implies all duties of forest officers involve policing. Major challenge to sort out institutional roles, rights, responsibilities and change to make sense of extension-oriented provisions
Social impact assessment	*	*		No explicit provisions
Recognition of rights and culture	**	*		Not a strong theme
Relations with employees	**	*	Strong theme in Policy (including eco-tourism)	Little emphasis on employment in private sector
Contribution to development	***	**		Small scale private production forestry given little promotion. Much still to do to establish 'vision' of forestry in national land use and development