

# ***National forest programmes and similar beasts: Current state of evolution, and future prospects for life***

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Unlike in the old days, it does not make sense any more to sit with a few friends in some headquarters office cooking up national plans for forests. You have to involve people in planning if your plan is to have much hope of being listened to and implemented by them. You also have to argue your case better with those who are busy making decisions about other sectors – people who control what goes on in agriculture, in land allocation, in road building, in ministries of finance and so on - and you have to learn to take it on the chin from them too. All this is widely understood these days<sup>1</sup>. FAO, which estimates that some 190 countries are currently involved in some kind of forest planning, tells us:

*The expression "national forest programme" designates the wide range of approaches to the process of planning, programming and implementation of forest activities in a country to be applied at national and sub-national levels, based on a common set of guiding principles. The purpose of national forest programmes is to establish a workable social and political framework for the conservation, management and sustainable development of all types of forests, which in turn will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of public and private operational and funding commitments. National forest programmes require a broad inter-sectoral approach at all stages, including the formulation of policies, strategies and courses of action, as well as their implementation, monitoring and evaluation (FAO, 2003).*

Clearly, if you want to get one of these up and running, you are not going to be finished by teatime. So, where did this “wide range of approaches” come from, how much of this understanding about what makes a good national forestry programme is actually being put into practice, and where is it all heading? This paper attempts a brief review of the scene.

## **Current trends**

There have been two main sources of multi-stakeholder policy reform processes in recent times: responses to pressure from local levels; and, responses to international opportunity or the polite suggestions of international soft law.

### ***Local pressure stimulating national forestry reform***

In countries of the South, significant policy change with many stakeholders involved has emerged from initiatives to support participatory forestry at local level. Many projects from the early 1980s onwards, often with donor support, were based on the notion that people at local level should be able to participate more in forestry

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<sup>1</sup> Attempts to install some form of national forestry programme are not, of course, new. They have a long history, usually punctuated by crisis. The Roman Empire, suffering badly on its northern boundary, instituted a policy of avoiding the wild men in the German woods. In New Zealand, the Maori instituted tough preservation rules on their forests but only after having set fire to most of them in the pursuit of the giant Moa birds on which they relied. Later, John Evelyn in seventeenth century England, appalled by the scene of forest destruction he surveyed, called on his king (Charles II) for a multi-stakeholder policy review process (although not in so many words) to put it right. He eventually won some royal proclamations for his pains, but no such process. In more recent times, after the Second World War, Finland produced the world's first Forest Sector Master Plan to try and restore its devastated forestry and timber sector. It had World Bank support.

development. The best of them subsequently ran with the consequences – increasing local responsibility for forest resources, followed by improving local rights, followed by increased bargaining power of local actors at national level, followed by multi-stakeholder policy reform as other actors recognise the imperative for it and come to the negotiating table. This groundswell from below led many tropical countries to reform their forest sectors in the 1990s. The greatest positive effects were probably felt in countries of low forest cover – e.g. Nepal, Tanzania and Sudan - where, as the capacity of local people to manage forest was given greater policy support, the condition of the resource also improved (Brown *et al*, 2002).

In the north, experience of the emergence of national forestry planning has been rather different. Reform has also been on the cards in recent times – generally stimulated by business and environmental domestic agendas. Differences in national government styles and cultures, and in the strength of business and civil society networks, have produced a wide range of national forest planning processes. A greater exchange of north-south learning about these different domestic pressures and responses would likely be beneficial to both.

### ***International pressure stimulating national forestry reform***

The second source of multi-stakeholder forest policy review is the translation to the national level of opportunities and agreements stemming from international policy dialogue. Some of the early creatures that evolved in response to international pressure are described in Box 1.

#### **Strange species that roamed the earth before national forestry programmes**

- *National Forestry Action Plans (NFAPs)* - were called for by the international Tropical Forests Action Plan (TFAP), launched by the FAO, UNEP, World Bank and World Resources Institute in 1985. TFAP created a lot of excitement – never before had there been such multi-country attention aimed at benefiting tropical forests. Many donors and larger NGOs supported the initiative and at one point more than 100 countries were implementing or developing NFAPs within the framework of TFAP. The TFAP could be characterised as a top-down, quick - but none the less comprehensive - fix to the perceived tropical forest crisis, the perception being promoted by NGO and media concern about 'deforestation'. The response was essentially a bureaucratic and technocratic one, led by professional foresters, and lubricated by development aid. TFAP set a 'standard' for a balanced forest sector for the next decade, and defined a new liturgy for forestry aid planning.

Whilst the TFAP set out a broad set of worthy areas for aid intervention, in practice it resulted in fewer improvements in forestry than had been hoped. Because it was closely associated with the government-to-government aid system, the TFAP was not able to challenge the inequities and perverse policies that underlay deforestation, and then to build the necessary trust between governments, NGOs, local people and the private sector. Its very standardisation, within a global framework, and the exigencies of the aid system that supported it (which often installed expatriates to lead the in-country planning), meant that the TFAP did not adequately recognise diverse local perceptions, values, capacities and needs. Finally - and despite efforts to house TFAP exercises in powerful but 'neutral' bodies such as planning ministries, the TFAP failed to generate real extra political support to the broad range of forest values, and thus to appropriate aid and investment (Mayers and Bass, 1999)

- *Forestry Master Plans (FMPs)* – were mainly led by the Asian Development Bank (with Finland as a frequent co-donor) – and consisted of extensive studies of all parts of the sector (typically costing in the order of US\$2 million), of a not very participatory nature,

and these constituted the basis for a forest policy and investment plan, principally directed at commercial functions. Agreement was reached with TFAP that a country could be involved with TFAP or FMP but not both. The countries that went the FMP route were: Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan and Bhutan.

- *Forestry Sector Reviews (FSRs)* – were required by the World Bank, and involved strict rules and procedures to qualify for support. They followed similar formats to the FMPs. Countries that went the FSR route include: Kenya, Malawi and Zimbabwe [get a complete list?]. Whilst producing analysis that is still drawn on today, the FSRs' long lists of policy prescriptions were largely ignored, once support had come and gone.
- *National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs)* – were undertaken from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s, at the behest of the World Bank, and in some countries overlapped (in time if not understanding) with FSRs. They were effectively a form of conditionality and thus many coordinating ministries in countries jumped to attention and stitched together the required list of proposed policy and institutional changes and investment strategies. NEAPs have today been eclipsed by comprehensive development frameworks (CDF) and poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs).
- *National Conservation Strategies (NCSs)* – were popular in the 1980s and early 1990s – some 100 countries prepared them, many with technical support from IUCN. A healthy number of NCSs showed much creativity in both multi-stakeholder processes and practical linkage of environment and development, and some had a strong focus on forestry. Whilst many fell by the wayside due to lack of commitment from powerful development and financial interests, a few – such as the Pakistan NCS – are still alive and are now providing a valuable platform for addressing economic growth and poverty alleviation (effectively an NSDS, by another name – see below).

Several initiatives stemming from the UNCED (1992) multilateral environmental agreements are alive and kicking, but with a mixed record in influencing national forestry planning:

- *National Biodiversity Strategies and Actions Plans (NBSAPs)* – stimulated by the requirements of the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), some 80 countries have completed national biodiversity plan documents, some supported by the GEF. They often lack analysis of forestry's use of biodiversity, and lack integration with other plans and strategies. The 2002 Conference of the Parties to the CBD called for synergies between NBSAPs and nfps to be developed, but it is not clear yet whether this will have much effect. Many NBSAPs have failed to excite any action. However there are a few highly participatory NBSAPs that have considerable momentum and potential impact on forestry decision-making, e.g. India and Guyana.
- *National Action Programmes (NAPs) to combat desertification* – in response to the 1994 Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) many dryland countries have developed NAPs, some 50 of them receiving UNDP/UNSO funding in the process, and a few of them have analysed and stimulated actions in forestry. They vary greatly but have tended to be cooked up by ministries of environment with only weak links to key parallel processes such as decentralisation and land reform which may have major effects on land use and desertification.
- *National Communications on the Climate Change Convention* – developed countries ('Annex 1 parties') must submit a National Communication to the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) within 6 months of ratification, whilst developing countries ('non-Annex 1 parties') have 3 years to submit their Communication following ratification, and can call on

GEF support in doing so. By April 2003 some 100 developing countries had submitted such reports. These generally focus, as they are required to do, on greenhouse gas inventory and projections but increasingly include some assessment of mitigation and adaptation plans. Some have covered source and sink dimensions of forests in this. Few national communications have linked well with other strategic national plans as yet, and there is little requirement that they be the result of multi-stakeholder review.

Despite their best endeavours, however, the net effect of the multi-lateral environmental agreements that have been concluded is at best to provide a source of ideas (at worst a source of confusion) to national level debate about forests. They do not provide an integrated legal regime which views forests, and those that depend on them, in a holistic way. Countries both poor and wealthy are thus generally able to escape from their commitments. Two integrating frameworks currently holding sway in international debates aim to have more clout at national level:

- *National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs)* – All governments made a commitment to adopt an NSDS - the mother of all strategies - at the 1992 Earth Summit (Agenda 21, UNCED 1992). The 2000 Millennium Development Goals, signed by 147 heads of state, are accompanied by targets, one of which requires countries to: 'integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources' (UNGA, 2001). A NSDS has been defined as: 'a coordinated set of participatory and continuously improving processes of analysis, debate, capacity strengthening, planning and investment, which integrates the economic, social and environmental objectives of society, seeking trade-offs where this is not possible' (OECD-UNDP, 2002). A national forest programme could therefore be considered one element of this 'coordinated set'. There are very few NSDSs fitting this bill yet, although the recent development of guidance and lessons for practitioners (OECD-UNDP, 2002), may yet fertilise their early growth.
- *Poverty reduction strategies (PRSPs)* – This is the current main game being played by aid agencies. Initially required by the IMF and World Bank as a basis for access to debt relief in Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) have been required by all countries supported by the International Development Agency since July 2002. Interim PRSPs (I-PRSPs) are road maps to full PRSPs. As of April 2003, there were 26 full PRSPs and 45 I-PRSPs. Bilateral donors are also increasingly subscribing to PRSPs and they have thus emerged as a central determinant of the development agenda in many countries. They are therefore critical as frameworks to realise the potential of forests to reduce poverty. They also, potentially, present national forest programmes with an important platform for dialogue at a sufficiently high level to address macro-level and cross-sectoral issues critical to good forestry. Yet PRSPs to date merely demonstrate that there is a long way to go to develop bottom-up, continuously improving processes rather than one-off encyclopaedias of externally-driven ideas. The recognition of forests as a development asset has so far been disappointing in many PRSPs. A recent study looked at the 11 PRSPs and 25 I-PRSPs in Sub-Saharan Africa and noted that whilst 84% of them touched on forestry issues, almost none of them were convincing about forests-poverty links and their future potential; only Malawi and Mozambique made a significant mention – in both cases the result of their national forest programmes (Oksanen and Mersmann, 2002). Of course these papers in themselves tell us little about implementation.

## ***National forest programmes – emerge from the swamp***

The legacy of past approaches, notably those stemming from the TFAP, provided a considerably wider pool of those engaged with forest issues than before – a policy community whose shared experience is now critical to making progress in the forest policy process. Nfps are now being strongly promoted by that community, the understanding being that they follow a country-led approach, rather than an international programme or precept in the TFAP mould.<sup>2</sup>

All countries that have taken part in UN forest policy dialogues (and there are few that have not) have adopted the requirement for an nfp. It is consensually-agreed soft international law. Agenda 21, the action plan of UNCED, invited all countries to prepare and implement nfps and stresses the need to integrate them activities within a global, inter-sectoral and participatory framework<sup>3</sup>. The CBD, CCD, UNFCCC and the Forest Principles agreed upon during UNCED, as well as current initiatives for the formulation of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, all focus on an increased and expanded role of forestry activities and the need for improved planning in forestry.

The post UNCED intergovernmental negotiations on forests, conducted under the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and later the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), stress the role of nfps as important means for addressing forest sector issues in a holistic, comprehensive and multi-sectoral manner. The IPF and IFF, which wound up in 2000, urged the international community to support developing countries in their efforts to formulate and implement nfps in accordance with the principles defined in the international forest policy dialogue. The current United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) in its Plan of Action commits countries to pursue nfps “as defined in the IPF/IFF proposals for action, or other integrated programmes relevant to forests...” (UNFF, 2002)<sup>4</sup>.

The notion of the nfp currently promoted at international level (FAO 2003, World Bank 2002) puts particular emphasis on:

- Multi-stakeholder involvement in forest decision making
- Means for cooperation, coordination and partnership
- Secure access and use rights
- Research and traditional knowledge
- Forest information systems

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<sup>2</sup> The notion of the nfp, as a generic programme (and hence the view that the acronym should not really be capitalised), was developed by the international Forestry Advisers Group (an informal group of aid agency forestry advisers), adopted by FAO (FAO, 1996), then endorsed by the IPF (Sic-Country Initiative, 1999). Given that the FAG arose from the TFAP, the nfp notion can claim to be the product of lesson learning.

<sup>3</sup> Agenda 21 requests governments "to prepare and implement, as appropriate, national forestry action programmes and/or plans for the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests" which "should be integrated with other land uses". Furthermore, the governments agree to "reviewing and, if necessary, revising measures and programmes relevant to all types of forests and vegetation, inclusive of other related lands and forest based resources, and relating them to other land uses and development policies and legislation" and "promoting adequate legislation and other measures as a basis against uncontrolled conversion (of forests) to other types of land uses" (Chapter 11 'Combating Deforestation', Agenda 21, UNCED 1992)

<sup>4</sup> Regional approaches to pushing nfps are also beginning to kick in. The process at, and between, Ministerial Conferences on the Protection of Forests in Europe which started in 1993, has recently culminated in European forest ministry-level agreement on an "approach to nfps in Europe" (MCPE, 2002). Meanwhile the European Union requires nfps or equivalent programmes as a prerequisite for acquiring forest subsidies according to the EC Regulation on Support of Rural Areas within Agenda 2000 (Glück *et al*, 2003).

- Study and policies on underlying causes of deforestation/degradation
- Integrating conservation and sustainable use, with provisions for environmentally sensitive forests, and for addressing low forest cover
- Codes of conduct for private sector
- Monitoring, evaluating, reporting nfps

Although there is probably no single example of a contemporary nfp that has achieved optimal systems for all of the above, there are a handful of governments with civil society and bilateral supporters which are leading the way<sup>5</sup>.

An FAO “global nfp survey” survey carried out in 1999 based on questionnaires completed by 145 country “focal points” (mostly leading lights in national forest departments) found that 48% of all countries are implementing nfps, while 26% are planning them. The percentage is higher in OECD countries – where some 75% are implementing nfps. Only 44% of non-OECD countries are implementing nfps, while 31% are planning them. Many nfps were judged to be “stalled”, the reasons given being lack of institutional, human and financial capacity, as well as lack of adequate policies, poor institutional co-ordination and deficient mechanisms for public participation. About half of the countries surveyed in Asia-Pacific and Latin America-Caribbean countries had stalled during the planning phase (FAO, 2003).<sup>6</sup>

There are two “big beasts” at international level which, although slow to evolve, are planning to support nfps in a concerted way:

- *Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)* – which has recently boosted its support for government nfp initiatives in a range of countries by establishing the *Nfp Facility* – which is a joint initiative with several bilateral donor organisations, aiming to: strengthen the information and knowledge base for national forest programme implementation; and, improve processes and mechanisms which enable governmental and civil society actors to share and use this knowledge. Over a period of five years, the Facility aims to work in some 60 FAO member countries supporting governments that are implementing nfps, and strengthening global knowledge sharing on forestry. The estimated budget for the five-year period is around US\$ 32 million, operating a two-pronged strategy: (i) through direct country-level support (country Cooperation agreements with funding up to \$300,000 over 3 years, plus a small grants facility for grants of up to \$20,000) and (ii) through information services.
- *World Bank* – Only recently has the World Bank begun to give vocal support for nfps. In its revised forest strategy (World Bank 2002) the Bank puts significant emphasis on its aim to support creative nfps, putting particular stress on increasing accountability, enhanced coordination, partnerships amongst actors and institutional reform. A specific *Programme on Forests (PROFOR)*, formerly housed in UNDP, is in place to coordinate this. PROFOR’s intentions are strong on governance, livelihoods and finance initiatives for nfps, however it currently has only limited human and financial muscle.

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<sup>5</sup> A list of nfps currently making progress and generating useful lessons along the way would include: Malawi, Uganda, Brazil, Costa Rica, Vietnam, India, Finland, Germany and Australia.

<sup>6</sup> Glück *et al* (2003) distinguish between ‘substantive’ nfps and ‘non-substantive’ or ‘symbolic’ nfps in the context of Europe on the basis of whether in practice they show a high degree of participation, collaboration, inter-sectoral coordination, iteration, adaptation and learning and whether they produce well-defined policy targets and instruments, then go on to meet/implement them. The authors note that with the exception of Finland, no country in Europe has yet implemented a substantive nfp.

A third big beast takes is observable in the form of several significant international efforts which have emerged over the last year or two to combat illegal logging and the power of some forest industries to run amok. These include the East Asian, the European, and the African Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) processes, which are based on government-to-government agreements. The control of illegal and corrupt forestry requires the implementation of measures in countries that import timber, and simultaneous supply measures in countries that produce timber. As these processes evolve it is likely to become increasingly apparent that approaches to address illegal and corrupt forestry must involve more aspects of governance than just law enforcement – they must involve fundamental rights, institutional roles, policy sticks-and-carrots, and systems by which decisions are actually put into action and monitored. The nfp is potentially the ideal integrating framework needed at national level within which to work out such systems, and an emphasis on their development can be anticipated from the FLEGT processes in the coming years.

### **Ways forward**

It can be concluded that, at present, whilst most countries can claim to have something which looks a bit like a national forest programme, few have the whole evolved animal in their possession. Many countries have made progress with participation – getting actors involved (or responding a bit when actors demand involvement) – but there are few which keep this moving with a programme that continues to improve and adapt and that integrates and coordinates different actors and sectors. Indeed, a paradox of many international SD commitments is that the widespread agreement on the need for ‘country-driven, holistic’ processes is not matched with implementation.

If nfps are to succeed they need to avoid the mistakes of previous internationally driven calls for forest sector plans. Many NFAPs, FMPs, FSRs and the like 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 because they failed to engage with political and economic reality to show not only what needs to change, but also how it can change, and how such change can be sustained. Many one-off institutional reform approaches have left legacies of huge and unsustainable recurrent transaction costs.

Nfp proponents need to continue to learn these lessons, and to be both inspirational and practical if they are going to stand a chance of success. They need to fight their corner - or join forces - with those trying to integrate many sectors in approaches that might otherwise ignore or swamp them, such as poverty reduction strategies and NSDSs. They also need to find the practical means to allow them to steer the following main *phases* of effort to:

- Engage properly with those who can plant or manage trees for the benefit of local livelihoods
- Enable negotiations between those with competing claims to negotiate on a reasonably level playing field
- Engage again to agree prioritise from the results of multiple negotiations
- Sustain action in prioritised areas to the point where sustainable outcomes are achieved.

At the moment, sources of inspiration and support for this are thin on the ground. The main international programmes being nurtured to support nfps (e.g. the FAO Nfp

Facility and PROFOR in the World Bank) are thus promoting the need for work through partner networks to optimise links, establish complementary capabilities, and generate and spread learning. However, these larger initiatives need the inputs of smaller agile agencies around the world to help make them work. One promising approach is a forest governance learning network initiated in southeast Asia by RECOFTC, another is a forest governance learning group being facilitated by IIED with partners initially working in African countries. The strengths of these efforts lie in their independence, experience, light institutional procedures and participation in flexible networks of motivated people – who can form and spread opinion.

Experience suggests that the best hope of making progress through these phases lies in developing local *processes* and *systems* that bring together the best that exists locally, and filling gaps where needed with the help of international thinking. Such processes are central to effective implementation and cooperation. They include:

- *Political processes* that install and maintain forestry's potential and nfp priorities at high level, and provide the means to review progress and revise policies
- *Participation systems* that enable equitable identification and involvement of stakeholders, including previously marginalised groups, and create space and responsiveness for negotiating agendas, vision, roles, objectives, definitions and partnerships
- *Local-benefit 'screening' processes* that ensure that the forest sector keeps working to optimise its contributions to poverty-reduction and local livelihoods
- *Information and communication systems* that generate, make accessible and use interdisciplinary research and analysis, form clear baselines, and get vision and plans well communicated with strong 'stories'
- *Monitoring systems* that can pick up and communicate the key changes in forest and human well-being
- *Financial systems* that generate and manage adequate resources and ensure investment conditions internalise externalities and promote cost-efficiency
- *Human resource development systems* that promote equity and efficiency in building social and human capital, with an emphasis on holding on to tacit knowledge (whilst planning for an inevitable high turnover of key people) and promoting innovation and 'change agents'
- *Extra-sectoral engagement processes* that put synergies and potential conflicts with other sectors and macro-plans at the heart of nfp thinking and action
- *Planning and process management systems* that demonstrate efficiency (strategic, not overly comprehensive actions with realistic timeframes), transparency, accountability and therefore legitimacy in decision-making.

In addition to sorting out forestry, and increasing its contribution to society, there is some evidence that nfps can be effective vehicles for developing good governance in that wider society. This is particularly the case where improving access to natural resources is one of the lynch-pins to addressing rural poverty - as in large parts of Africa and some parts of Asia and Latin America. This will be one of the crucial tests for judging the evolution of nfps and similar beasts over the next few years.

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