

Extracts from 'Forestry tactics: Lessons from Malawi's National Forestry Programme'

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In this issue, we have departed from the norm in the Tips for Trainers section. The following extracts, taken from the IIED Forestry and Land Use Programme's book **Forestry Tactics: Lessons from Malawi's National Forestry Programme** give some examples of the process used to develop a national strategy for sustainable forestry, and some of the participatory approaches, used by the National Forestry Programme in Malawi. The diagram illustrates the process, and how the 'ground-truthing' exercise, a way of linking national-level strategic planning processes with local-level realities, was used to incorporate valuable local knowledge into the decision making process.

The National Forestry Programme

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.

Planning for a 'long enough but short enough' process

In March 1999 DFID's NFP Adviser – a member of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) began the first of a number of short visits to Malawi... Together with the NFP Co-ordinator 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.

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 guide to the process (Figure 1) thus spelled out the expected steps for the NFP process.

Photo: Pippa Bird



Busy Forestry Department extension stall at the launch of the NFP

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.

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, CURE, with experience in forestry and particular expertise in these approaches.
- 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 to 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, that is, 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.

Acknowledgments

Forestry Tactics: Lessons from Malawi's National Forestry Programme

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Discussion paper

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Acronyms

DfID – UK Department for International Development

PROFOR – UN Agencies' Programme on Forests

CURE – Co-ordination Unit for Rehabilitation of the Environment. PO Box 2916, Blantyre, Malawi.

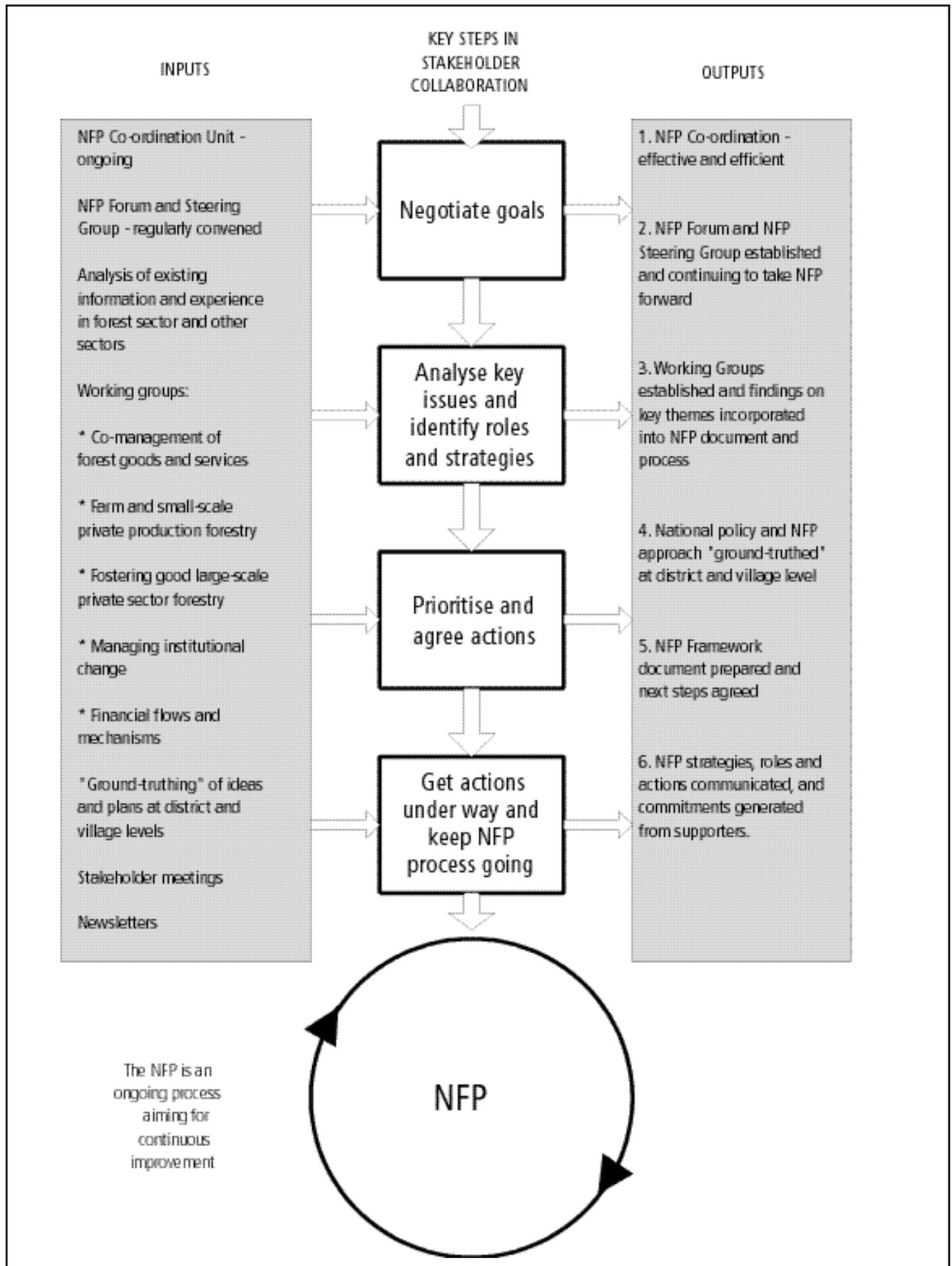
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Figure 1



Notes