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NEAR EAST FORESTRY COMMISSION

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**Forests and range: adapting to global changes for sustainable
development**

NATIONAL FORESTRY PROGRAMMES

What is an nfp?

1. A national forest programme encompasses a wide range of approaches for formulating, planning and implementing forest policy at national and subnational levels. It is a country-specific process which provides a framework for the development of the sector and for collaborating with other jurisdictions on issues which affect the sustainable management of forest and tree resources. As one of the most important outcomes of international forest policy dialogue, the nfp is the first commonly agreed framework for sustainable forest management which is applicable to all countries and to all types of forests. Hence, an nfp serves as a framework to put international agreements on sustainable forest management into practice, including the Non-legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (NLBI) adopted by member states of the United Nations Forum on Forests in 2007.

2. Nfps are guided by a series of principles that indicate which aspects should be taken into account to make an nfp work in practice and how to conduct the process. These can be clustered broadly into three groups (FAO, 2006):

- i. *National sovereignty and country leadership*: Countries have an acknowledged right to manage and use their forests in accordance with their own environmental policies and development needs and assume full responsibility for preparation and implementation of the nfp.

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- ii. *Consistency within and integration beyond the forest sector:* means ensuring coherence among the economic, environmental and social objectives and roles assigned to forests in a country. Forestry should also be part of wider national development frameworks such as poverty reduction and sustainable development strategies.
 - iii. *Participation and partnership:* All stakeholders who depend on or benefit from the use of forest resources or who decide on, control or regulate access to forests should be actively involved in the nfp. Partnership means bringing stakeholders together to implement joint activities.
3. The broad definition leaves the nfp concept open to country-specific interpretation and adaptation. However, it is not a mere process of government planning, but extends to the whole cycle of forest sector development, i.e. analysis, policy formulation and planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation, in a fully participatory way.

Achievements

4. In the countries of the region, the development of nfps varies to a great extent – which is in part a reflection of their diversity with respect to forest and tree resources and their relative importance in the countries. Although they may not have an nfp per se, many countries have revised their forest policies in recent years or have developed a new forest policy. Countries that have received FAO support in this endeavour include Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan and Syria. The new policies generally incorporate elements of the three nfp principles mentioned earlier.
5. Eight countries in the region (Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Pakistan, Sudan, Tunisia, Uzbekistan, Yemen) have established a partnership with the National Forest Programme Facility, a multi-donor initiative to support nfps hosted by FAO. Activities supported by the NFP-Facility in these countries aim, *inter alia*, to foster sharing of forestry related information among stakeholders including the development of communication strategies; measures to enhance stakeholder participation in the nfp process, especially civil society; and capacity building of relevant stakeholders on nfp-related issues such as policy analysis, institutional issues or participatory forest management.

Challenges

6. In some countries, the national forest programme is either seen as a mere planning document or – in the cases where there is donor support – as a development project. It is important that countries take full ownership of their nfp. National forest programmes implemented in accordance with the nfp principles could be an excellent vehicle to fully realize the potential contributions of forests to poverty reduction and enhanced rural livelihoods. In reality, however, many countries have not yet achieved “integration beyond the forest sector”, i.e. harmonization of sector policies and integration of forestry into broader national development strategies. For example, an analysis of the nfps and national poverty reduction strategies in 10 African countries carried out by FAO in the recent past showed that integration, if at all, existed mainly only on paper with little action on the ground (FAO, 2008). In countries of the Near East region better coordination of sector planning for forestry with range and water management would be of particular importance, especially in view of the challenges the region will face in adapting to climate change. Nfps could provide a platform for such coordination.
7. Lack of integration into national development programmes is often also a result of the poor visibility of the forest sector and its perceived low importance for national development, especially in low forest cover countries. It is often overlooked that poor rural populations depend directly on tree and forest resources for subsistence and income generation. Support to the development of small scale tree or forest-based enterprises that are often based on non-wood forest products can boost income generation of rural people, especially of women.

8. Full participation of non-state stakeholders in the nfp process is becoming more common as many countries have established multi-stakeholder fora to support the process. It is now widely recognized that enhanced stakeholder participation in nfps brings a number of concrete benefits, for example, increasing efficiency and impact, reducing conflicts over forest use and management or increasing transparency in policy making and implementation (FAO, 2009). However, stakeholder participation is still a challenge in countries that have little tradition of civil society participation in policy decisions or where the private forest sector is not well developed.

Conclusions and recommendations to the Commission

9. National forest programmes provide an excellent tool for forest policy development and implementation at the national and sub-national level and for promoting sustainable forest and rangeland management. If implemented in accordance with the general principles they can contribute to improving governance in the forest sector through broad participation of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and to enhancing the livelihoods of rural populations.

10. Delegates are invited to consider the following questions on ways to enhance national forest programmes in the region:

- i. What needs to be done to achieve better integration of nfps into national development strategies and priorities in the region?
- ii. What institutional changes and capacity building measures are required for more effective participation of all relevant stakeholders in national forest programmes?
- iii. What role should FAO play in helping countries to develop and implement nfps more effectively and in accordance with the principles?

References

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