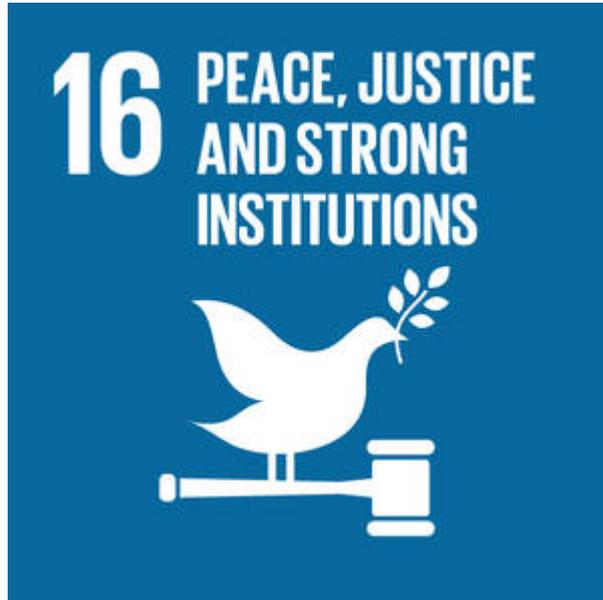# Public Forestry Institutions

Basic knowledge

Public forestry institutions contributes to SDGs:

The purpose of this module is to equip forestry directors, facilitators and decision-makers with the basic tools for carrying out assessments of public forestry institutions, supporting the design of change processes, and measuring organizational change. The module provides information, guidance and examples of tools for assessing and strengthening public forestry institutions so they can perform their functions more effectively and efficiently.

What are forestry institutions?

Effective institutions are critical for improving forest management and development. They are public, private or mixed-ownership organizations operating at a local, subnational, national or international level that are formed to advance public or private interests in forestry. Forestry institutions include:

- public forestry agencies and enterprises;
- other ministries and public agencies (e.g. environment, energy and water);
- educational, training and research organizations;
- private-sector organizations (e.g. producer organizations);
- civil-society organizations;
- the informal sector; and
- international organizations and initiatives.

Forestry institutions can vary significantly depending on whether they are public or private, such as in their objectives and challenges and the extent to which they are reliant on market forces. For example, forest smallholders may organize themselves into forest producer organizations to improve access to markets, technology, resources and policy processes, thus overcoming certain economic constraints arising from their small size. Forest producer organizations are an example of a private forestry institution, and they can contribute to the social and economic objectives of their members and also help improve their forest management practices.

Public forestry institutions

Public institutions, on the other hand, have a mandate to maintain and improve the public values provided by forests and their sustainability. Their functions (elaborated on in Box 1) typically encompass regulation (e.g. regulating the use of public forests through law enforcement and taxation), management (e.g. planning, inventorying and mapping), and facilitation (e.g. by providing extension services and guidance, and supervising forest management). Public institutions may also conduct research and training, thereby generating knowledge and trained personnel for the implementation of SFM.

Globally, about 80 percent of forests are under public ownership, and public forestry institutions therefore play a critical role in the promotion of SFM. Even when public forestlands are leased to private companies or communities (for example through concessions), public agencies play key roles in, among other things, designing, allocating and enforcing contracts, providing information and mediating disputes.

The importance of effective public forestry institutions for SFM

Many countries are facing significant challenges in putting their forest policies and legislation into practice (including to improve SFM). These challenges can be traced to the weak knowledge, capacities and resources that public forestry institutions often have at their disposal as well as to inadequate policy instruments and institutional arrangements. Weak capacities can mean that inadequate guidance is provided to forest users, illegal activities continue to take place in forests, forestry decisions are made without current and accurate information, and conflicting interests are not fairly addressed. Weak public institutions not only endanger the effective implementation of policies, they can also compromise the implementation or sustainability of projects. Effective forestry institutions are essential for good forest governance.

Box 1: Functions of public forestry institutions

Policy and regulatory functions

- Develop, implement and monitor forest policies, legislation and regulations
- Regulate the use of public, communal and private forests (e.g. law compliance, taxation, auctioning and permitting)
- Contribute to international processes related to forests

Forest planning and management functions

- Manage public forests, including planning, policing, inventorying and mapping, and silvicultural operations, including afforestation/reforestation, logging and the protection of forests from fire, pests and diseases
- Support and approve management planning and implementation in private forests
- Monitor and report on key forest indicators (e.g. forest area, volumes and annual allowable cuts) and provide information to government, the legislature, international bodies and the general public

Facilitating functions

- Coordinate and facilitate partnerships with other sectors and stakeholders, balancing sectoral interests
- Support local communities and the private sector in the management of forests and trees, including through the provision of information and technical assistance
- Support forest users by providing education and training, and strengthen the knowledge base through research and extension

Related modules

- Development of forest-based enterprises
- Forest policy

Characteristics of effective public forestry institutions

Public forestry institutions that contribute and adapt successfully to policy and legislative change share a number of characteristics. For example, they:

1. Invest in developing **strategic management skills** such as communication, facilitation, multistakeholder decision-making, participatory approaches, conflict management, public service competencies, leadership and management. Strategic management skills are critical for the success of today's public forestry institutions because forest policy decisions are increasingly being made in collaboration with multiple stakeholders; strategic management skills enable institutions to leverage the resources and capacities of those stakeholders to achieve shared goals. Such skills can also be applied in the revitalization of technical extension services to help forest users deliver forest goods and environmental services sustainably.

2. Increasingly **focus on results**, including by measuring results through effective systems of monitoring and evaluation. A focus on results enables the operationalization of the institution's mission and vision into specific, measurable, achievable and time-bound outputs and outcomes. A focus on results also means seeking more efficient ways to deliver services, such as by delegating or outsourcing responsibilities to decentralized levels or to other stakeholders, and maintaining flexibility in how outcomes are achieved. The measurement of results also informs organizational structures and capacity development priorities and drives resource mobilization strategies and efforts. Countries can increase their focus on results by adopting performance management approaches (such as results-based management) and adopting a limited number of priorities.

3. Identify ways to **contribute to wider development goals**. Successful forestry institutions see how forest administration fits within a broader picture, adopt a longer-term vision (and accordingly are avoid continually having to expend their energies addressing "emergencies") and see their work as serving other stakeholders. Recent efforts to mainstream national development goals into forest policies and their implementation go in this direction.

4. Upgrade the **technical knowledge and skills** of their staffs to enable them to focus on results, manage information and people more effectively, and contribute to broader development goals. Areas where new knowledge and skills are required include climate change, timber legality and verification, financial and economic analysis, community forestry, and the use of information technology to improve efficiency and transparency.

Assessing and strengthening public forestry institutions

Based on FAO's experience in a number of countries, public forestry administrations may wish to consider the following interrelated actions when embarking on a process of adjustment and strengthening in response to emerging societal needs and ambitions.

1. Forest policy and institutional review
The institutional environment (e.g. the policy environment, other stakeholders, political realities and financial resources) within which an institution operates greatly affects its work and can be the underlying cause of poor performance. Interventions to strengthen a public forestry institution must be grounded in a solid understanding of this environment. For example, it is not uncommon for forest policies to envision only a limited role for non-state actors, thus leaving the public institution with a burden of responsibility that is not commensurate with its resources. Policies may also lack harmonization, thus providing contradictory guidance. A public-sector review process initiated by government may provide an opportunity for a forest policy and institutional review, as might projects that aim to improve forest governance. A forest policy and institutional review is a process that identifies the policies, strategies and plans that are relevant to forests (e.g. national development policies, poverty reduction strategies and forest policies). It clarifies the consistency, conflicts and gaps in the objectives and approaches of these policies. A forest policy and institutional review also identifies public and private stakeholders (e.g. though stakeholder mapping), their mandates, and the arrangements that exist for them to work productively together.

2. Assessment of organizational performance
An organizational assessment is a systematic review of how an organization has been performing, what factors are impeding performance, and **how the situation can be improved**. Having identified (in the forest policy and institutional review) the issues that are external to the organization, this assessment addresses the internal functioning of the organization. Depending on its scope and the resources available, it may cover:

- strategic leadership (e.g. good governance and the clarity, quality and use of strategies and plans);
- technical, strategic and organizational capacities (e.g. skills, technology, information management and policy instruments);
- human, financial and material resources (e.g. staff levels and budgets, by key function);
- programme and process management (e.g. the efficiency of decision-making, including the delegation of responsibilities);

- transparency (e.g. of information and decision-making processes);
- oversight and accountability;
- motivation (e.g. the presence of incentives and rewards); and
- the division of authority and coordination within and across agencies.

Organizational assessments are helpful in identifying the need to revise functions, structures, managerial procedures and information management systems and in refocusing the strategic priorities of an organization. They can also be useful in drawing up action plans and identifying the resources needed to implement them. Self-assessments are particularly helpful in building internal awareness of the need for change and identifying practical solutions. Depending on its purpose, scope and available resources, an organizational assessment may focus on specific organizational functions or address organizational performance more broadly. Successful organizations appropriately track selected key performance indicators.

3. Design and implementation of change process

Institutional reviews and organizational assessments provide a picture of the current situation in terms of organizational performance, the institutional environment within which the administration operates, and the organization's capacity to fulfil its mandate. They also allow a comparison between the current situation and the stated objectives, requirements and operating principles, thereby identifying the gap between the current and desired state. An understanding of this gap can be used to prioritize changes and related support activities (e.g. in a capacity-development program). It can also help define decisions and activities that will bridge the gap, such as choosing a different instrument to implement the policy or instigating institutional arrangements that enable better intersectoral and inter-agency coordination. Having identified the gap between the current and desired state, a change process needs to be designed and implemented, which requires certain key "ingredients". For example:

- The process must have a high-level champion (e.g. a minister, permanent secretary or forestry director) with the will and influence to see the change through.
- The process will benefit from the support of a change team tasked with building momentum and continuity through communication about the importance of the change, the vision of where the organization is heading, and the strategy to get there.
- Effective processes have short-term unambiguous "wins" that reassure staff they are on the right path.
- Quite often, capacity-development interventions need to be part of the change process – not only to modify how the organization works but also to equip staff with new skills and competencies, where needed.

The change process may also involve a revision of how the organization funds its activities. For example, some countries have decided to allow their forestry administrations to retain forest revenues rather than send them to the treasury. Other countries have established national forest funds. Some countries have decided to create separate units specifically tasked with the search for alternative sources and mechanisms to finance policy implementation.

Because organizational change may affect people's work, the involvement of the entire organization is important to ensure acceptability. To obtain "buy-in" by all staff members, some of whom may feel threatened by the change, their concerns must be addressed appropriately.

4. Measuring and learning

Institutional adaptation and strengthening is not a one-time intervention. The environment in which most forest-related organizations operate is continuously changing, possibly at an accelerating pace. Organizations need to institute processes to track how they are doing and to anticipate change so as to take advantage of emerging opportunities and challenges. Recent emphasis on results-based management provides an opportunity for public forestry institutions to more clearly articulate the outcomes they seek to achieve and the indicators they will use to measure progress.

E-learning

Istituzionalization of forest data

This course is designed for individuals who have an interest in establishing and developing a national forest monitoring system (NFMS), and to learn about the institutionalization process. The course targets legal experts, ministries, government officers, academia and private sector...

Further learning

Azevedo, T., Purnama, B., Bosworth, D., Collins, S., Farrell, J., Kanel, K., Konkin, D. & Torres-Rojo, J.M. 2014. *Public forest agencies in the twenty-first century: driving change through transparency, tenure reform, citizen involvement and improved governance*. Megaflorestais. May 2014.

Shaheduzzaman, Md. 2012. *Situation analysis and capacity needs assessment in the Ministry of Environment and Forests and its agencies.* Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and FAO.

Wollenberg, E., Anderson, J. & López, C. 2005. *Though all things differ: pluralism as a basis for cooperation in forests.* Bogor, Indonesia, Center for International Forestry Research. 112 pp.

Wollenberg, E., Edmunds, D., Buck, L., Fox, J. & Brodt, S. 2001. *Social learning in community forests.* A joint publication of CIFOR and the East-West Center. Bogor, Indonesia, Center for International Forestry Research. 209 pp.

World Bank. 2008. *Forests sourcebook: practical guidance for sustaining forests in development cooperation*. Washington, DC. 402 pp.

Credits

This module was developed with the kind collaboration of the following people and/or institutions:

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