

# Guatemala's national forest programme – integrating agendas from the country's diverse forest regions

*E. Oliva Hurtarte, E. Sales Hernández and I. Bustos García*

*A highlight of Guatemala's national forest programme is a focus on policy dialogue at the subnational level through Forest Policy Round Tables in the country's nine forest regions.*

Guatemala's national forest programme (NFP) has been running continuously for 17 years. Formulation of the NFP began in 1989 under the name "Forest Action Plan for Guatemala" and has continued since 2003 under the title "National Forest Programme". This article outlines the advances that have been made in the implementation of the NFP, particularly:

- consensual formulation and approval of the National Forest Agenda for 2003–2012, which determines the actions that have to be implemented under the NFP for the development of the forest sector during that period;
- monitoring of international forest-related agreements;
- organization and implementation of new Forest Policy Round Tables in the country's nine forest regions.

The creation and operation of the Forest Policy Round Tables is especially important in a country of such great cultural diversity. The process of their organization and the progress they are making – for example in the definition of regional forest agendas – provide a solid basis for sustainable forest development.

## THE SETTING

Guatemala's location in Central America on the bridge between two major continental masses (Figure 1), and its diversity in terms of soil, topography, rainfall, temperature, altitude, etc., are responsible for the presence of a wide range of ecosystems and species.

Guatemala has 3.9 million hectares of forest, accounting for 36 percent of its land area (FAO, 2006). Almost 70 percent of the forest area is concentrated in

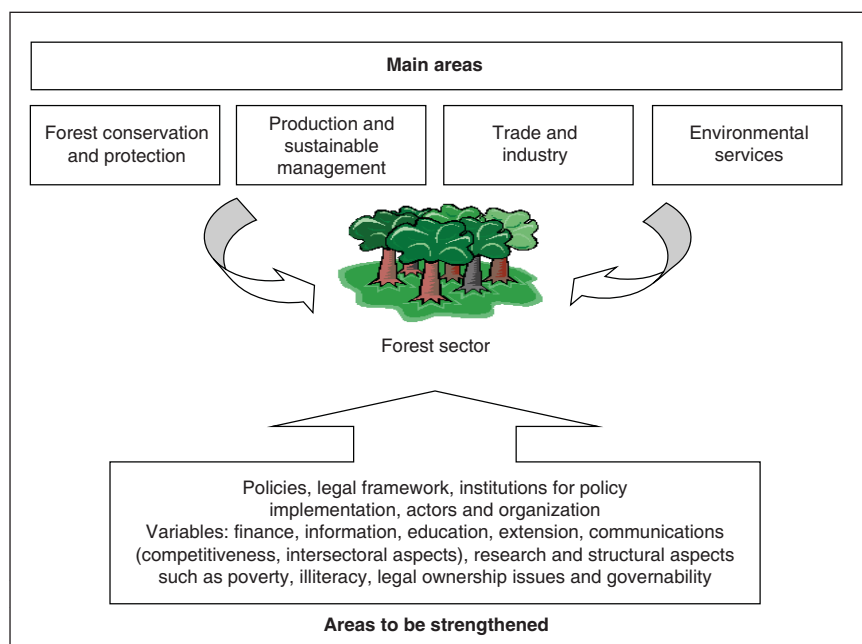
three departments – Petén (52 percent), Alta Verapaz (10 percent) and Izabal (7 percent) – and 54.6 percent of the total is located within protected areas. Some 37.8 percent of forest lands are State owned, 38 percent private property and 23.1 percent municipal or community property. Since 1990, about 54 000 ha of forests have been lost each year, while an average of 10 000 ha of plantations has been established each year.

The existence within the country of four major ethnic groups (Maya and Xinka indigenous groups, mestizos or ladinos, Afro-American Garifunas and whites) is an important sociodemographic feature. The Mayas are divided into 20 ethnic groups, with different languages and customs. Indeed, 23 languages are spoken in the country, and there are at least as many cultures. The country's multicultural wealth is of great significance in the

1  
Geographical location of Guatemala



**Edwin Oliva Hurtarte** is Coordinator, and **Ebal Sales Hernández** is Coordination Assistant, of the National Forest Programme of Guatemala, National Forest Institute (Instituto Nacional de Bosques, INAB), Guatemala City, Guatemala. **Ignacio Bustos García** is Regional Advisor for National Forest Programmes, FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago, Chile.



## 2 Areas of National Forest Agenda activity

and one cross-sectoral support area (institution building). Proposed solutions to forest problems were adopted as the National Forest Agenda for 2003–2012 (Figure 2).

In view of the success of the Forest Action Plan in raising consciousness of the importance and problems of forest resources, promoting and implementing action and strengthening the linkages among forest-related institutions, INAB decided to support its continuation in the form of an NFP starting from 2003. Guatemala's NFP is based on the concept agreed on in 1997 within the international dialogue on forests, particularly the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). A permanent project to coordinate implementation of the NFP was created within the INAB structure.

design and implementation of forest and environmental policies, which must arise from a consensus of the population.

### BACKGROUND: THE FOREST ACTION PLAN FOR GUATEMALA

In 1986, the Government of Guatemala applied for support from FAO to draw up a plan that would govern the use, management and conservation of forest resources, defining short-, medium- and long-term objectives, aims and strategies. In 1989 a start was thus made on drawing up the Forest Action Plan for Guatemala, with support from FAO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Germany, the Netherlands and the United States. In 1991 the basic document and project outline were submitted for consideration by the various national sectors. In March 1992 the plan was presented to the international community.

The Forest Action Plan for Guatemala had a ten-year time frame and remained in force until March 2003. It identified 29 actions and 17 projects covering five main areas: forestry in land use, fuel-

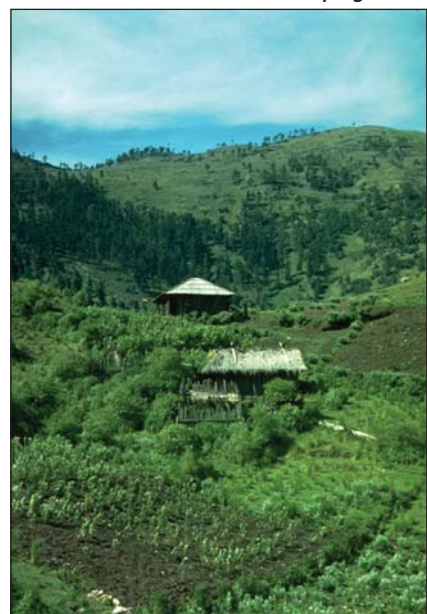
wood and energy, ecosystem conservation, forest industries, and institution building (MAGA and FAO, 2003).

### EVOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL FOREST PROGRAMME

The Forest Action Plan for Guatemala was revised in late 2002 and early 2003. A consensual view of the country's forest sector was obtained through an analytical process involving 450 people from all over the country and from various sectors. Institutions managing the process included the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food; the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources; the National Council for Protected Areas; and the National Forest Institute (Instituto Nacional de Bosques, INAB). The process enjoyed input from individual and institutional advisers, expert and regional consultative bodies and a Forest Action Plan implementation office.

Revision of the Forest Action Plan for Guatemala focused on analysing and developing strategic objectives for four main areas of the forest sector (forest conservation and protection, production and sustainable management, trade and industry, and environmental services)

*Agriculture and forest land: land-use planning is a key objective of Guatemala's national forest programme*



FAO/FOJ/06/705, BRAUNZ

It works in close relationship with local forest authorities and various organizations, particularly with the subnational Forest Policy Round Tables.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE NFP

In Guatemala, the NFP is seen as a process for defining and agreeing on a new concept of forest and environmental development to be attained through participatory analysis, design, and implementation of the policy, strategy, mechanisms and actions proposed in the National Forest Agenda. Its aim is to achieve sustainable forest and environmental management, through sustainable productive and protective forest activities, so that “by the year 2012 the development of the Guatemalan forest sector will be based on principles of sustainability, thus contributing to human well-being and economic, social and environmental development; to land-use planning; and to the shaping of a forest culture within the country – through participatory management by all the stakeholders” (Programa Forestal Nacional de Guatemala, 2003). As part of the NFP framework, national legislation promotes forest development and is

fully in accord with the National Forest Agenda.

The specific objectives of the NFP are:

- to ensure space for dialogue and analysis in forestry;
- to establish a regulatory framework and guidelines for sustainable forest management;
- to identify strategies, actions and projects for development of the forest sector;
- to provide the forest sector with technical, financial, economic and institutional support to enable its public, private and community management – for example land-use planning, technical assistance, the Forest Education System (a network integrating forestry education institutions and the forest authority, for harmonization of programmes and policies), funding from the Forest Incentive Programme, and decentralized administration of forest resources involving municipalities, among others;
- to position issues of forests, their products and processes on the agenda of the country’s economic and social sectors;

- to foster a culture of forest production and conservation and contribute to land-use planning;
- to pilot discussions within forest fora to achieve consensus on the regulatory framework, the priority actions and how to implement them, and to establish synergies among the different actors pursuing forestry development and sustainable forest management.

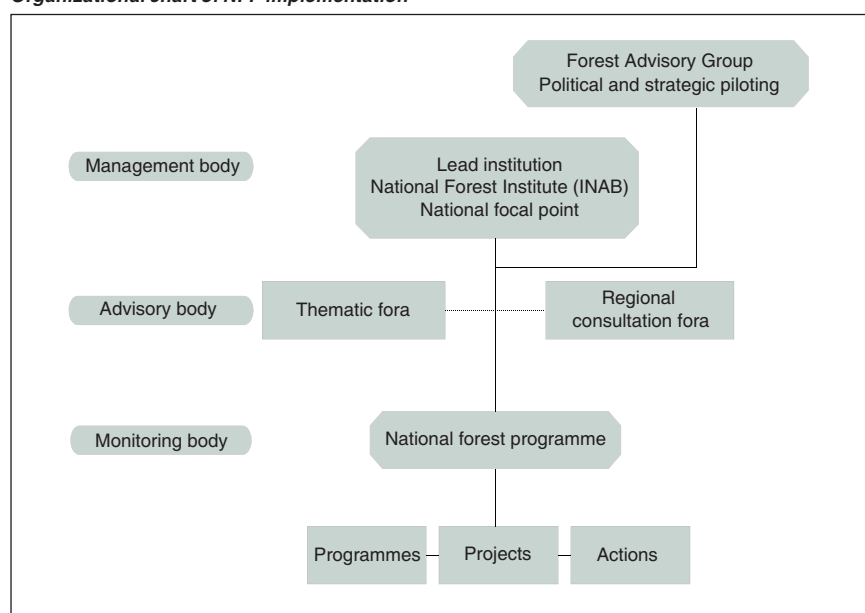
### IMPLEMENTATION

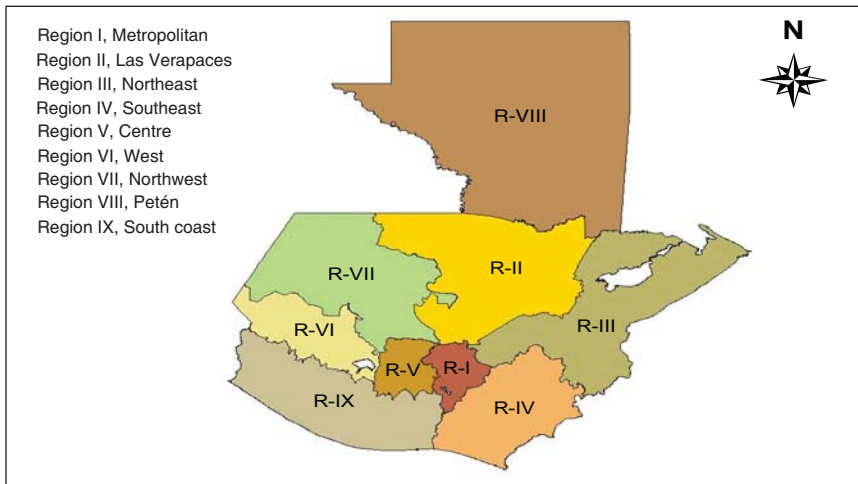
The NFP implementation strategy envisages three separate bodies responsible for management, advisory services and monitoring (see Figure 3). The NFP Implementation Support Project within INAB coordinates and supports the various actors implementing the NFP. It supports, for example:

- research, analysis and discussion on proposals for investment and allocation of technical and financial resources;
- the development of a portfolio of projects for implementing the National Forest Agenda;
- the operation and maintenance of a forest information system;
- an increase in forestry extension;
- technical support to public and private forest-sector bodies monitoring institutionalization of participatory planning and gender equality;
- monitoring of the implementation of the National Forest Agenda and the NFP in general.

In December 2003, INAB entered into a three-year cooperation agreement with the Netherlands to implement an institution-building strategy, including a component for support to NFP implementation with special emphasis on mechanisms for dialogue among institutions. The agreement addressed the demand for greater participation of interest groups, both thematic and geographical, in order to overcome the constraints of the legal framework and public forest management. The

3  
**Organizational chart of NFP implementation**





4  
**Location of Guatemala's  
 forest regions**

most important constraints identified were:

- centralization and lack of accountability in decision-making;
- the lack of a broad, ongoing, participatory dialogue with local civil-society groups;
- the small importance attributed to cultural factors in forest management practices;
- the lack of mechanisms and incentives to ensure accountability of public management to society;
- the considerable effect of changes in government, which hamper continuity in agreed long-term policies and strategies and in trained technical staff;

- the weakness of the legal system in enforcing legislation and other forest regulations.

Public and private forest-sector interest groups were thus identified in each region, and relations were established between them and the national and regional authorities. This task entailed the establishment of formal agreements, the definition of internal rules of procedure and measures to obtain legal status. This led to the creation and strengthening of regional Forest Policy Round Tables and thematic fora addressing topics relevant to the organization of forestry activities, such as the National Standards Council for Sustainable Forest Management and the Environmental Services Group.

From the outset, medium- and long-

term plans were developed encompassing training of staff from local organizations in strategic planning, participatory appraisal to identify forest potential and problems, and the formulation of a forest development agenda for each region, including the preparation of strategic and operational plans, which have been progressively put into effect.

#### FOREST POLICY ROUND TABLES

Forest Policy Round Tables (*Mesas de concertación y política forestal*) are autonomous mechanisms for subnational dialogue, made up of about 30 organizations or groups including the central government, local authorities, NGOs, civil-society bodies and private companies involved in the production, conservation, protection and use of forest resources. Their aim is to promote socio-economic development through activities in line with national forest policy and to find solutions to problems affecting the sector within the framework of regional forest agendas.

Following the establishment of the first Forest Policy Round Table, the Las Verapaces Round Table, in 2002, INAB began to promote round tables on the same model through information activities and provision of organizational and technical support and financial resources. Round tables have since been set up in each of the nine forest regions defined by INAB (Figure 4).

**Forest Policy  
 Round Tables at  
 work in Regions  
 I and III**



E. OLIVA



*Mayan woman going to collect fuelwood: Guatemala's NFP considers the diversity of forest stakeholders to overcome longstanding causes of resource degradation and involve them in sound and sustainable forest management and use*

Conceptual, methodological and operational guidelines were drawn up and regional presentations were made on the NFP process and the National Forest Agenda to the various stakeholders. The round tables were planned and established with input from local stakeholders.

The Forest Policy Round Tables are relevant to the geographic, cultural and productive features of each of the country's regions. They also act as advisory bodies for feedback on the NFP in general and the National Forest Agenda in particular, contributing not only to sustainable management of forests and forest land, but also to environmental sustainability in general and to good governance.

The Forest Policy Round Tables:

- discuss, analyse and propose solutions to the forest problems of their individual regions, facilitating dialogue among the various actors in the forest sector and other sectors concerned with forest management at both the regional and national levels;
- support the formulation of national forest policy, and propose and imple-

ment actions needed to strengthen the regional and national forest services to this end;

- promote optimal use of the regions' forest potential for socio-economic development and job creation through diversification of productive structures and services and the formulation, design and management of regional and national forest projects;
- propose and implement activities to train staff and build their capacities so that they can undertake better jobs throughout the forest sector.

#### **Achievements in implementing Forest Policy Round Tables**

The creation of the round tables – in itself a major achievement in terms of the importance and progressive influence of these participatory mechanisms – has allowed progress to be made in establishing dialogue at the regional and national levels to focus on the improvement and sustainability of forest management processes and Guatemala's forest development in general. Other achievements include:

- joint involvement of regional actors from the public and private sectors, universities, cooperatives, NGOs, community organizations and aid agencies, focusing on forests;
- recognition that the Forest Policy Round Tables are representative of the forest sector in their respective areas;
- formulation of regional forest development agendas, following the example of the agenda agreed by the Las Verapaces Forest Policy Round Table;
- dissemination of the National Forest Policy and the National Forest Agenda.

#### **SUPPORT OF THE NATIONAL FOREST PROGRAMME FACILITY**

The National Forest Programme Facility supports Guatemala's NFP through a three-year partnership set up with INAB in February 2004. Through this arrangement, ten organizations of peasant farmers and indigenous people, NGOs and university institutions have carried out participatory activities to strengthen the Forest Policy Round Tables, formulate and launch departmental and local plans and agendas for sustainable forest management, improve forestry education and boost forest certification by supporting the determination of national standards for sustainable forest management. Preparations are currently under way to launch new activities for six more organizations. It is notable that in Guatemala the Facility funds have never been used by the government institution, INAB, but have rather been allocated by INAB to these partner organizations to broaden and increase the participation of various national and local stakeholders in the NFP.

#### **CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR NFP IMPLEMENTATION**

National and regional forest stakeholders have raised a series of issues for implementation of the NFP in terms of pursuing the National Forest Agenda and

improving conditions for social, economic and environmental development by enhancing the role of forestry at the regional and local levels. They have particularly emphasized the following challenges:

- improvement of living conditions, job generation and incomes for families, communities and regions through the production of forest goods and services;
- organization of economic and financial resources and other necessary conditions to implement the priority projects on regional agendas, involving a greater number of better-trained actors;
- involvement of multiple sectors in formulating and implementing policies and strategies that are well coordinated at the national and regional levels and that further sustainable forest management;
- regional-level consolidation and institutionalization of the Forest Policy Round Tables as lead forest agencies in the nine regions;
- promotion of a “forest culture” that, while taking into account the social, economic and ethnic diversity and different interests of the various stakeholders, involves them all in the sustainable use and sound management of forests and watersheds, with the aim of overcoming longstanding and complex causes of resource degradation.

## CONCLUSIONS

Seventeen continuous years of participatory formulation and implementation of the Forest Action Plan for Guatemala and the NFP demonstrate the constant interest of successive national governments and the various stakeholders in carrying this process forward. Important achievements of the NFP include:

- letters of agreement with the National Forest Programme Facility and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) to support

programme and project investment and execution;

- development of an institution-building strategy for INAB, with support from the Netherlands;
- monitoring of Central American forestry strategy and international agreements on forests;
- revision and modification of the regulations governing forestry administration;
- improvement of forestry curricula;
- organization and implementation of Forest Policy Round Tables.

It is especially noteworthy that the various actors have adopted the principles and aims of the NFP, a factor that encouraged the creation of the Forest Policy Round Tables in all the country’s forest regions. These round tables have already begun to contribute to well-planned forestry development and will be increasingly successful inasmuch as they spring from the very roots of the country’s rich cultural diversity. ♦



## Bibliography

**FAO.** 2006. *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2005 – Progress towards sustainable forest management*. FAO Forestry Paper No. 147. Rome.

**Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganaderia y Alimentacion (MAGA) & FAO.** 2003. *Plan de Acción Forestal para Guatemala. Memoria a 10 años*. Guatemala City.

**Programa Forestal Nacional de Guatemala.** 2003. *Agenda Nacional Forestal de Guatemala*. INAB/MAGA. Guatemala City. ♦