

C  
A - P  
A - B - A  
L

**Capacity Building in Forest Policy  
and Governance in Western Balkan  
Region**

COST-CAPABAL 1st Policy Brief

**NATIONAL FOREST PROGRAMMES IN THE  
WESTERN-BALKANS: TOWARDS A NEW  
GENERATION OF NFPs**



# National Forest Programmes: What and Why?

## What is a National Forest Programme (NFP)?

The formal definition of a National Forest Program is so wide that it gives the floor to two types of usual connotations:

### **The UN definition**

As recommended by the UN General Assembly in June 1997, basing on the 1995 definition provided by the International Forum of Forests (IFF) and on the guidelines formulated by FAO in 1996, a National Forest Program is a holistic and iterative *comprehensive process* englobing all public decisions related to forest sector development, thus including policy formulation and implementation, evaluation and related legal and institutional outcomes. As a generic expression covering a wide range of appraisals and actions, a NFP process is supposed to be inclusive of stakeholders and the public, and managed by the public authority in a way that enhances criteria resulting from the international dialogue on forests (multi-sector, multi-level, accountable evaluation and expertise). NFP formulation and implementation are supposed to be process-oriented. Since the adoption in October 2007 by the UN General Assembly of the non-legally binding instruments for all types of forests, all countries are formally called-upon to develop and implement such NFP processes. A multi-donors NFP Facility, launched in 2001 and

located in UN-FAO headquarters, has been effective up to 2012 in order to support process development through capacity building and participation promotion.

### **A common national strategic planning understanding**

This vision of NFP as a holistic process is far from rooted in the national forest policies, because of the vagueness of the term. At the country level, a NFP is usually conceived as a *strategic framework* for forest sector development, which lists the activities to be carried out and identifies the corresponding actors responsible for implementation, with an agenda for follow-up and evaluation. It is often called by the wording of “strategy”, and differs from the concept of plan in the sense that it valorises the rationale and modalities (why and how) of the public action and may refer to qualitative indicators, thus not limited to a formal set of activities evaluated by a simple percent of realization of initial quantified objectives (what). A national strategy or NFP is often used to serve as a policy basis-this is why it is a framework- for the formulation of a National Action Plan (NAP), in a result-oriented context. Whilst adhering to the UN definition, the World Bank Program on Forests (Profor) has been working closer to this vision since 2002, by supporting countries in drawing concrete lessons learnt with new economic mechanisms and new modes of governance in an instrumental thus result-oriented perspective. Among the most relevant examples of such a vision of NFP, emerge the national cases of Switzerland, and Kyrgyzstan.

## Concepts and processes

The annotated two NFP concepts are not completely exclusive of each other.

The first definition (comprehensive process) comes from a communicative rationality, and assimilates NFP to the whole policy cycle. In this sense, a NFP includes all public initiatives aiming at defining objectives, selecting options, carrying out actions, evaluating results and deciding on further possible inflexions, through a permanent dialogue between the public authority from one hand and the stakeholders and the public from another

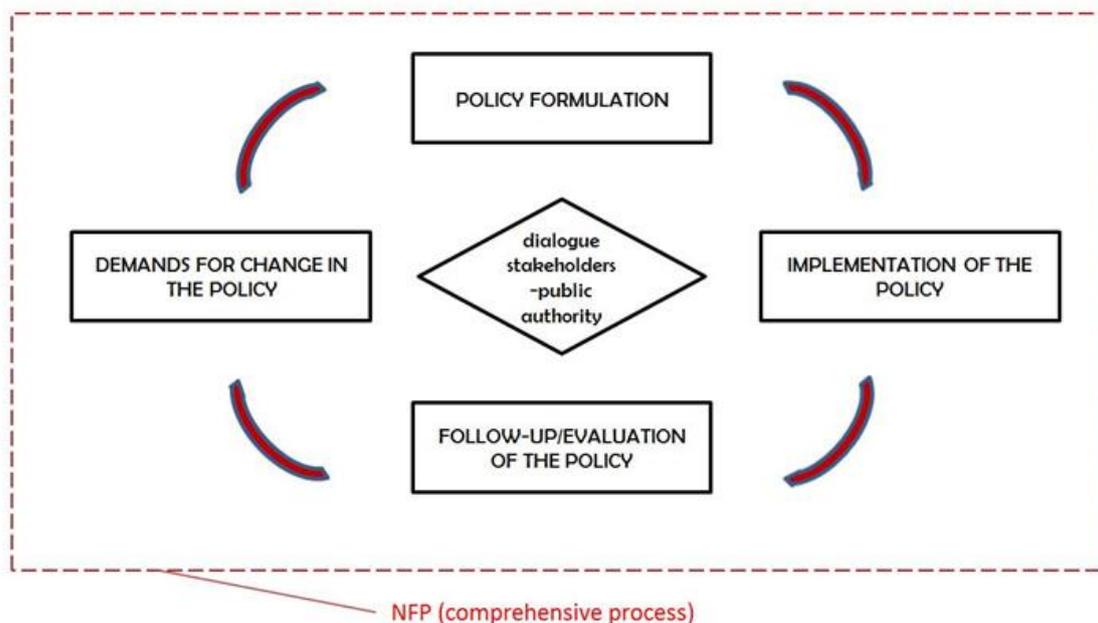
The specific actions to be carried out may considerably differ from a country to another one, whilst they basically result from a dynamic interactive discussion, which is framed by the social, cultural, and economic and policy contexts.

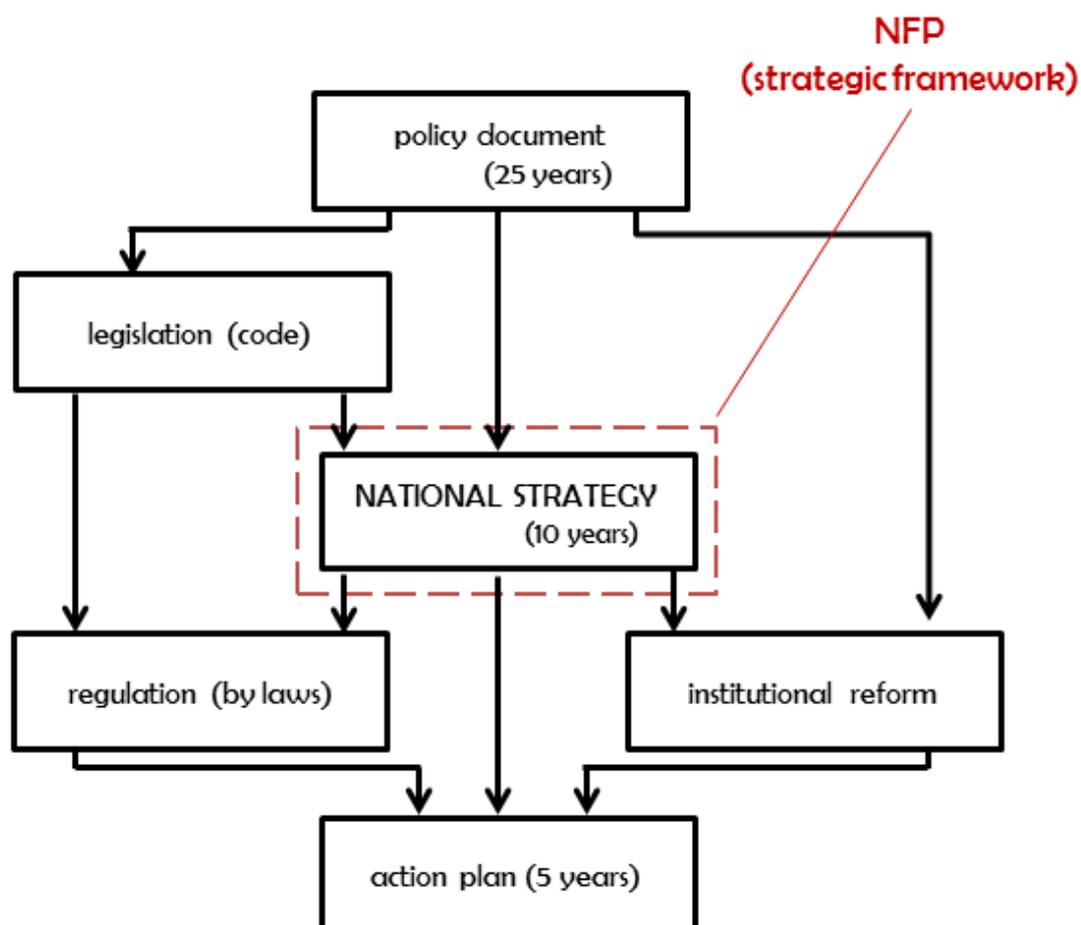
There is finally no unique methodology for approaching this type of NFP, except the globally asserted idea of actors' participation and inclusion. In those conditions, it

can be said that most of the countries have a more or less formal NFP, and in the world arena there have come situations where some donors with weak NFP were conditioning their assistance to countries beneficiaries to the elaboration of a more strict NFP process than they had at home. As a result, the flexibility in concept and approach has contributed to the disaffection for NFPs in SFM promotion in some countries. More concrete is the second vision that considers NFP as a strategic framework, thus makes it correspond to a specific step in the programming of public actions previously defined by the national statement for forest policy orientation.

In this instrumental rationality, NFP comes to a programming document to be used as a basis for elaborating the annual or pluri-annual plans of operations. In this vision, a NFP precisely defines the activities to be developed by both public and private actors committed in, through detailing their related responsibilities.

### *The policy cycle process*





*The elements of a policy process*

Both the formulation and implementation of those NFPs are supposed to be inclusive. In reality, this basic aspect has been often neglected, due to a general reluctance of the forest administration in charge of strategic programming from one side, and to the existing legally binding methodologies and procedures made compulsory for national planning activities (usually 5-year plans) from another.

Finally, many of those national strategic plans for forestry development were not conceived and applied in a context of dialogue with stakeholders, and still resulted as sole conventional administrative documents (and not real NFPs).

## **Why to apply a NFP?**

Although some experiences with NFP formulation were not success-stories, there is a lot of reasons why it may be still relevant in the forest sector to adopt both the vision for a comprehensive process and the objective to be equipped with a sound strategic programming document.

Identifying the future of forests in the country is useful:

### **Because it provides an explicit and transparent strategic planning framework for forestry public actions:**

Starting with a detailed diagnosis of the present situation at the national/regional levels, a NFP defines (or reminds) the objectives and strategic lines of the policy, then plans the activities to be carried out, mentioning their expected results, the capacities (human, financial) to be mobilized, the barriers to overcome, together with the related responsibilities (who does what, how and in which timing). It also includes a mechanism for follow-up, monitoring and evaluation for possible review.

Whilst elaborated in order to serve as a strategic basis for public action, NFP gives clear and transparent elements for the commitment of the public authority and the stakeholders involved in the process, as well as for the possible donors or international agencies that need such elements before defining their assistance.

### **Because it supports a social dialogue for partnership between State and the civil society:**

Whilst State and more generally public bodies are obviously those in charge of carrying activities derived from public choices, it is now widely admitted that the most efficient and effective results always come from actions that are appropriated by the beneficiaries.

On this regard, as a participatory procedure, NFP process/framework provides an instrument to develop a good co-operation between public and private actors.

### **Because change has become a keyword for forest policy and planning:**

Forest activities have to be considered in the framework of social, cultural, economic and policy context, as well as a part of a broader system including other land use modalities (landscape scaling for a sustainable use of space and resources) and other ecosystem dynamics. The context of forestry actions is characterized by change (global change made of social and climate change). In the search for a better resilience of forests to these changes, adaptive management appears as a way to conciliate sustainability and adaptability to modifications in the biosphere creating disturbances. NFP may be the right way at the right scaling to address this important issue for the future of the forests at the country level.

## For a new generation of NFPs: How to proceed?

### 1. How to go beyond the State as the sole regulator

In all Western Balkans countries the State is driving force and sole regulator of the National forest policy. Civil organizations are struggling to be an equal partner to the State. Additional strength of the State arises from different types of the instruments for the formulating, adopting and implementation of the forest policy. Currently, the process of adopting and implementation of NFP concept in general depends on the position of ministries or agencies in charge for forestry and its capacities to be the driving force of the implementation phase. An important role for the civil sector may lie in the phase of implementation, where civil society can be an independent supervisor of the process and point out the shortfalls of the policy. This would require better forest policy education and knowledge of forest policy implementation, as well as participatory channels to empower the civil society in forest policy formulation and decision making.

### 2. How to overcome the low consideration for the full value of the forests

Still, in the perception of forests timber value and value of forest soil are predominant, while other values such as of social or cultural functions of forests are not included. This relates to the fact that the main income for the forestry sector comes from timber sale and rent of forest soil. With a higher inclusiveness of the society and linkage to international processes, the value of forests could be expanded towards the provision of ecosystem services, an

issue that is currently high on the agenda for policy making in natural resources management.

### 3. How to address forest management issues with a broader vision

The forest administration specialists often complain on the lack of consideration of forest issues by politicians. Considering forest as a part of a broader level of landscapes could induce visions and actions that would give more sense to forestry interventions in connection to other types of land use. This would help rationalizing the question of land tenure, and open the forestry world to other sectors. By raising attention of policy and decision makers interest in conserving and developing forest resources a broader vision in the land use context shall be developed.

### 4. How to bridge gap between discourse and reality in the national strategies

In all of WB countries, there is discussion among forest professionals about other forest functions, role of forestry and private forest owners in environmental issues, rural development and development of eco-tourism, but implementation of all this aspects in forestry is still missing. Different stakeholders are included in the phase of forest policy formulation, but when it comes to the adoption and implementation of the policy, stakeholders other than state representatives are not represented sufficiently. This is neglecting that the public can have important role in the process of formulation of forest policy. Hence, the role of private sector has to be strengthened and go beyond the rather low level of consultation towards more civil power in policy making.

### *Further reading*

- Elsasser P. 2002: Rules for participation and negotiation and their possible influence on the content of a National Forest Programme. *Forest Policy & Economics* 4,291-300.
- Glück P. and Humphreys D. 2002: Research into National Forest Programmes in a European context. *Forest Policy & Economics* 4,253-258.
- Glück P. et al. 2010: The preconditions for the formation of private owners' interest associations in the Western Balkan region. *Forest Policy & Economics* 12(4) 250-263.
- Humphreys D. 2004: *Forests for the future: National Forest Programmes in Europe*. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxemburg.
- Savenije H. 2000: *National Forest Programmes: from political concept to practical instrument in developing countries*. National Reference Center for Nature Management, Wageningen.
- Schanz H. 2002: National Forest Programmes as discursive institutions. *Forest Policy & Economics* 4,269-279.
- Sepp C. and Mann S. 2012: Are National Forest Programmes valid instruments for improving governance? *ETFRN News* 53,177-185.
- Vuletic D. et al. 2010: Forest-related conflicts in the South-East European region: regional aspects and case studies in Albania, Bosnia-and-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia. *EFI Proceedings* 58,117-130.
- World Bank(The) 2009: *Roots for good forest outcomes: an analytical framework for governance reforms*. Report n°49572-GLB, Washington DC.

Authors:

Prof. Dr. Gérard BUTTOUD, University of Tuscia, Viterbo, Italy

Dr. Nenad PETROVIC, Faculty of Forestry, Belgrade, Serbia

Dr. Bernhard WOLFSLEHNER, EFI and BOKU, Vienna, Austria

