

A general discussion on National Forest Programmes

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Abstract

This paper mainly reviews the NFP process, as discussed by the IPF panel and European workshops in this field. It focuses on three issues i) basic terms, objectives and principles or elements of the concept NFP, ii) evaluation of national forest programmes, with justification, strengths and weaknesses, iii) implementation of NFPs, including requirements for success. Finally gaps in NFPs and priorities for future action are discussed.

During the last years national forest programmes have received considerable attention as the reference framework for sustainable management. The following elements are considered as the most important: 1) participatory mechanisms 2) holistic and inter-sectoral approaches 3) national sovereignty 4) long term and iterative process 5) capacity building 6) effective co-ordination and conflict resolution schemes.

A specific conclusion, which already can be drawn, proves that procedural instruments are too weak to achieve the NFP's objectives. Generally the following three limiting factors are recognised: funding, institutional capacity and co-ordination among all interested parties at the national and international level. However, the fact that issues of forest policy are back on the political agenda is seen as very advantageous.

The overall conclusion is that the NFP process is far from rooted in national forest policies. The major problem is the vagueness of the term. Further clarification of the meanings and dimensions of the elements and principles is required.

Key words: *National Forest Programmes, IPF.*

1. Introduction

In the international forest policy discussion of the last decade, **national forest programmes (NFPs) have received considerable attention as the reference framework for sustainable management**, conservation and development of all types of forests world-wide. The topic is considered by Humphreys (1999) as a key international and intergovernmental process on forest conservation and related issues since the 1970s.

UNCED opened the scope for a new quality of discussion on forest issues. First of all this discussion included all forests world-wide and secondly it prepared the ground for a comprehensive and holistic approach towards forest management within the framework of

sustainable development. In chapter 11 on "Combating Deforestation" of Agenda 21 it is stated that national states should work... b) to prepare and implement, as appropriate, national forestry action programmes and/or plans for the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests. These programmes and/or plans should be integrated with other land uses (UNCED 1992, Agenda 21, Chapter 11). In the process of implementing Agenda 21, the International Panel of Forests (IPF), mandated by the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), has put forward the **concept National Forest Programmes as a conceptual attempt to guide forestry in the UNCED signatory states towards sustainable forest management**. The final report of IPF to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development states: " **The Panel: a) Encouraged countries, in accordance with their national sovereignty, specific country conditions and national legislation, to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate national forest programmes, which include a wide range of approaches for sustainable forest management,...**" (UN-CSD-IPF 1997, §17). A National Forest Programme is considered by IPF as a comprehensive forest policy framework, meant to be a generic term for a wide range of approaches to sustainable forest management within different countries and to be applied at national and sub-national levels, based on a set of basic principles (Egestad, 1999)

According to its mandate, the formulation and implementation of NFPs is also one of the focal points of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), which was established to continue the intergovernmental policy dialogue on forests and to consider and advise on the need for legal and other arrangements covering all types of forests.

However, the primary role and support of FAO to this process should not be underestimated. Already in 1983 FAO prepared a priority action programme. As a result, the Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TPAP, later renamed into Tropical Forests Action Programme) was adopted by the World Forestry Congress in Mexico in 1985 as an international framework for forest related action. In 1995 FAO announced that TFAP no longer existed as an international framework, but in order to continue the momentum of international support of forest-related initiatives, FAO decided to concentrate on supporting individual National Forestry Action Programmes (NFAP). This led to a new focus on a more generic concept of a national forest programme capturing the various national approaches to forestry development (Liss, 1999). In support to this idea, **the FAO** subsequently prepared a guideline for the process of formulation, implementation and monitoring of National Forest Programmes. The "**Basic Principles and Operational Guidelines**" recommends a participatory planning and implementation approach that encourages the involvement of all forest-dependent actors at local, national and global levels and the development of a partnership between them, emphasising national sovereignty regarding the management of forest resources and the need for country leadership and responsibility. Planning was explained as an iterative process which involves all stakeholders and takes the relation of forestry to other sectors into account as well. This set of principles formed the basis for discussion on IPF elements for NFPs.

It can be concluded that **a consensus on the concept of NFPs was reached after more than a decade of international debate on the most feasible achievements** of the objectives of conservation and sustainable management of forest resources while satisfying the increasing

demands for forest goods and services of a growing population world-wide. Achieving consensus on the concept of NFP within the IPF was a long and hard-fought negotiation process involving a series of compromises. These are reflected in the term as well as in the definition of national forest programmes (Michaelsen, 1999).

Today, however, it must be stated that **the meaning of NFPs is not clear, even not for experts**. This reveals a.o. from the assumed number of countries already involved in this process. In this context Agenda 21 mentions that country-driven national forestry action programmes and/or plans under the Tropical Forestry Action Programme are currently being implemented in more than 80 countries. However, Glück et al. state that there are only a few European countries which have experiences with national forest development plans, forest strategies, forest concepts or however national forest programmes are called (Glück et al., 1999). Nevertheless Ball & Michaelsen claim that national forest programmes, under varying approaches, are being implemented in some 142 countries (Ball & Michaelsen, 1999). It means that the concept of NFPs is still unclear and that it needs more clarification.

2. Basic terms, objectives and principles or elements of the concept NFP

Long lasting discussions within the IPF resulted after two years in an understanding of the concept of National Forest Programmes, expressed by a common definition, the formulation of the objectives and the elaboration of operational principles.

2.1. Definition of National Forest Programmes

Today scientists mainly refer to the general definition of National Forest Programmes as given in the IPF Final Report of February 1997 (UN-CSD-IPF, 1997). The panel agreed that the term "national forest programme" was explained as **a generic expression for a wide range of approaches to sustainable forest management within different countries, to be applied at national and sub-national levels, based on basic principles** (see further). National forest programmes are comprehensive forest policy frameworks for the achievement of sustainable forest management, based on a broad inter-sectoral approach at all stages, including the formulation of policies, strategies and plans of action, as well as their implementation, monitoring and implementation. They should be implemented in the context of each country's socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental situation. They should be integrated into the country's sustainable development strategies and into broader programmes for sustainable land use, in accordance with Chapters 10 to 15 of Agenda 21. The activities of other sectors, such as agriculture, energy and industrial development, should be taken into account. Thus, national forest programmes, reflecting the holistic approach of UNCED, represent an approach to overcome the fragmented nature of forest related efforts at the country level into the process of sustainable development (UN-CSD-IPF, 1997, §8).

In the follow up meetings of IPF the deliberations at the second session of the IFF in Geneva 1998 considered national forest programmes **"to be a viable framework for addressing forest sector issues, including implementation of proposals for action in a holistic,**

comprehensive and multisectoral manner". It is in the hand of each country to define what this framework means. In most cases, it will include review and enhancement of:

- forest and forest related policies and legislation;
- institutional framework and national capacity;
- participation of local and/or indigenous communities.

Within the IPF process the **terminology shifts regularly**. In the 1996 secretary-general's report of the IPF to the CSD the term is understood to be a generic expression for a wide range of approaches to the process of planning, programming and implementing forest activities in countries. National forest programmes comprise both the planning of forest sector-activities, including the formulation of policies, policies and action plans, and their implementation, including monitoring and evaluation (UN-CSD-IPF, 1996, §25). A remarkable shift is the transition from National "Forestry" Programme, as originally used by the FAO, towards national "Forest" Programme. The term Forest Sector is meant to encompass all biological, ecological, social, economical, cultural and religious dimensions of trees and forests. It includes not only all components of the forest ecosystems, either natural or man-made, including single trees or rows of trees in rural areas, but also all human activities related to the existence as well as industrial and non industrial utilisation of these ecosystems and trees, as well as the human beings, actors and/or beneficiaries of these activities, particularly those that live in and around these forests. According to Liss (1999) the shift from *forestry* to *forests* reflects the new spirit and wider approach of the NFPs aiming at any activity related to forests and not only to the forestry sector in a narrow sense. Egestad (1999), however, apparently has an opposite meaning. He claims that forest often refers to the biological system, whereas forestry refers to the management of this system as part of a society. Therefore, the use of National Forest Programme could imply a narrowing of the concept.

Looking to national documents about this subject a **series of varying names** is quoted, such as "**action plan**", "**national strategy**", "**strategic plan**", "**policy concept and guidelines**", "**forest development programme**". But in general all these terms seem to correspond to the concept of "national forest programme" as endorsed by the IPF. In many countries the words "programme" and "plan" are used interchangeably. But a formal or informal management plan, of course, cannot be considered as a "national" forest plan. The expression NFP is normally used to designate the process used by a country, at national or sub-national level, to deal with forest issues, including planning and implementation of forest and forest-related activities. The expression NFP refers to the results of the planning process (UN-CSD-IPF, 1996).

As the above definition(s) are on one side quite clear, but at the other side rather vague, it is not surprising to read the wide range of different understandings of NFPs brought forward in international discussion groups. NFP is seen as (Boon et al., 1999):

- substantial new policy framework;
- empty policy concept;
- comprehensive policy instrument;
- organisational tool of forestry to sustainable development;
- global framework for planning and action;
- strategy for the role of forestry in sustainable development;
- an open process for future activities;

- object of research;
- just another (new) name for forest policy.

Although such like understandings have a common background and approach, they do not facilitate the international and national discussions.

Egestad (1999) concluded that an NFP might be defined as a comprehensive policy framework. And the planning processes should be holistic, flexible, adaptive and integrated at all levels. Furthermore IPF is stressing, that NFP is a political process in the sense that orientations and decisions are the outcomes of debates, negotiations, controversies and compromises on the part of all interested actors (UN-CSD-IPF, 1996).

2.2. Purposes of NFP

It is a bit remarkable, but the objectives of NFPs are not defined in the final report of IPF on forests in 1997 to the CSD. During the deliberations of IPF in its first sessions, the delegates approached these objectives on a hesitating way. They considered NFP as the main tool for planning and implementation of forest related activities. The quantity and quality of plans and programmes, national, regional and international initiatives related to forests were viewed as a good testimony of government's commitment to the conservation, management and sustainable development of forests. In 1996 IPF claimed that **the goal of a national forest programme is to ensure the conservation, management and sustainable development of forests, to meet local, national, regional and global needs and requirements, through fostering national and international partnerships for the benefit of present and future generations** (UN-CSD-IPF, 1996).

According to this formulation **three specific themes are stressed:**

- **sustainable development of forests (and not sustainable management of forests; what's the difference?);**
- **the world-wide scale;**
- **the fostering of partnerships.**

Also IFF did not define clear objectives at its second session, held in Geneva 1998, although some clarifications were given and progress was made. The deliberations of IFF considered national forest programmes **"to be a viable framework for addressing forest sector issues, including implementation of the IPF's proposals for action in a holistic, comprehensive and multisectoral manner"**. IFF underlines that it is in the hands of each country to define what this framework means. In most cases, however, Michaelsen (1999) means that it will include review and enhancement of:

- forest and forest-related policies and legislation;
- institutional framework and national capacity;
- participation of local and/or indigenous communities.

The realisation of these objectives requires the establishment, by each country, of a local focal point to guide and co-ordinate the implementation and assessment process of NFPs.

The rather vague definition and description of both the term National Forest Programme and its objective explain the broad series of quotations concerning NFP's purposes. In the case study of the Baden-Württemberg NFP the aim was to analyse the environmental, social and economic values and to develop strategies and measures for sustainable forest management deriving from national priorities. The elaboration and discussion are seen as an open and transparent process including participation of all relevant groups of stakeholders. Boon et al. (1999) claim that at the Freiburg Seminar in 1998 NFPs were conceptualised in the European context as processes, which – by providing an impetus or request for rethinking – aim to stimulate or initiate changes or improvements in existing structures, approaches, and procedures in the respective national forest sectors by ensuring social benefits and the public interest. They confirm that the discussion of the purposes of NFPs inevitably led to a semantic discussion on the meaning of words and general considerations. It was noted, that the purpose of NFPs varies according to whether we focus on the national or international level, and whether we relate it to planning, implementation or evaluation. At the national level, the main purpose/objective of an NFP is **“to enhance forest policy planning including transformative aspects”**. It was discussed whether it was the tool or just another tool in a series of instruments. Another purpose of a NFP is to bring stakeholders together and compare attitudes. Also, the purpose of a NFP could be/is **to be a tool to achieve political commitment**.

In general the quotations show that **a national forest programme is meant to act as a framework or tool to ensure the conservation and sustainable development of forest resources**. But the best formulation is most probably given by Glück et al. (1999): **the main objective is to improve the present situation of forests**. National forest programmes are one of the most endorsed policy means for ensuring sustainable forest management in the sense of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro 1992.

2.3. Principles and elements of NFPs

Since NFPs are the core point of many discussions a lot of basic principles, key actions, specific elements, key elements, principle elements, issues to be taken in consideration, etc. have been formulated. The result of all this was not only a progress in the understanding of the process but also again a confusion. However, it can be assumed that there is no real distinction between all these terms, although a more standardised terminology should be accepted.

FAO (1996) launched the first principles, explaining that “the preparation and implementation of the National Forestry Programme is guided by **a series of basic principles**. The application of these basic principles should enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of national planning and implementation of forestry activities and contribute significantly to the achievement of sustainable forestry development. It is stressed, however, that the application of these basic principles will, of course, need to be adapted to the specific national context (political, social, economical, environmental). The eleven principles are (In the FAO publication *basic principles and operational guidelines* the purpose of NFP is added as the first principle, which is why this

set of principles consists of 12 rather than 11 principles. Otherwise the principles are identical. Egestad, 1999):

- 1. National sovereignty and country leadership**
- 2. Partnership**
- 3. Participation**
- 4. Holistic and intersectoral approach**
- 5. Long-term iterative processes**
- 6. Capacity-building**
- 7. Policy and institutional reforms**
- 8. Consistency with the national policy framework and global initiatives**
- 9. Raising awareness**
- 10. National commitment**
- 11. International commitment.**

Apparently, these principles were not adopted by the IPF. In the IPF reports to the CSD the presented initial eleven principles are no longer in effect. Instead they are replaced by another set of basic principles. However, the spirit of these principles was incorporated in the document of the IPF process (Glück, 1999).

The Secretary-General's report of September 1996 to the CSD (UN-CSD-IPF, 1996) underlines that, at the national level, actions to be considered to overcome the obstacles depend on the political, social and economic situation of each country. However, some key actions should be considered by all countries such as:

- decentralisation of the operational planning and implementation; establishment of intersectoral co-ordination and consultation;
- true involvement of interested parties at all levels, in particular indigenous people, local communities and women;
- redefinition of the role of the public sector and private institutions;
- development of incentive systems;
- provision of access to training and education opportunities for all sectors;
- establishment of a strong national leadership for donor co-ordination when necessary;
- simplification of administrative procedures and bureaucracy.

At the global level, actions to be considered for supporting the efforts of countries include:

- harmonisation of international agreements;
- enhancement of co-operation between international institutions;
- mobilisation, reinforcement and better utilisation of international assistance as well as private sector financing;
- establishment of innovative partnership mechanism;
- respect for national leadership.

In its final report IPF makes, a bit surprisingly and leading to confusion, a distinction between "specific elements" and "key elements". In §9 the Panel emphasised a number of **specific elements** that need to be considered during the development and implementation of national forest programmes:

1. **The need for appropriate participatory mechanisms to involve all interested parties**
2. **Decentralisation, where applicable**
3. **Empowerment of regional and local government structures**
4. **Consistent with the constitutional and legal frameworks of each country**
5. **Recognition and respect for customary and traditional rights of, inter alia, indigenous people, local communities, forest dwellers and forest owners**
6. **Secure and land tenure arrangements**
7. **Establishment of effective co-ordination mechanisms and conflict-resolution schemes.**

In §10 IPF claims that, regardless of the approach adopted by individual countries, national forest programmes, as long-term iterative processes, should recognise the following as **key elements**:

8. **National sovereignty and country leadership**
9. **Consistency with national policies and international commitments**
10. **Integration with the country's sustainable development strategies**
11. **Partnership and participation**
12. **Holistic and intersectoral approaches**

Next to these 12 specific and key elements IPF formulates in § 17 still a set of items, which should be taken into consideration. These topics are mostly referring to or simply repeat some of the above mentioned specific and key elements:

- consistency with national, sub-national or local policies and strategies, and – as appropriate – international agreements;
- partnership and participatory mechanisms to involve interested parties;
- recognition and respect for customary and traditional rights of, inter alia, indigenous people and local communities;
- secure land tenure arrangements;
- holistic, intersectoral and iterative approaches;
- ecosystem approaches that integrate the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of biological resources;
- adequate provision and valuation of forest goods and services.

Meanwhile this set of elements/principles has been regularly discussed by scientists. One of the best descriptions of the concept of national forest programmes can be found in the so-called "practioner's" guide of the Six-Country Initiative in 1998. Principles and elements of the Baden-Wuerttemberg NFP are built on this description of the concept. Main principles are (Reining, 2000):

1. consistency with the constitutional and legal framework;

2. consistency with international agreements and partnerships;
3. holistic and inter-sectoral approaches to forest development and conservation;
4. long term and iterative processes in planning, implementation and monitoring.

At the Freiburg meeting in May 1998 a condensed list of elements was given by the organisers to the working group members, who had to rank these elements:

Elements	ranking W.G.1	ranking W.G.2
- appropriate participatory mechanisms	1	2
- effective coordination mechanisms and conflict resolution schemes	2	1
- holistic and intersectoral approaches	3	3
- national sovereignty and consistency with international commitments	4	4
- respect for customary and traditional rights of local communities and forest owners	4	8
- decentralisation	4	6
- empowerment of regional and local government structures/ capacity building	4	6
- legal framework	8	4

Partially contrary to the Freiburg results, one year later at the Tulln meeting the working groups gave another ranking. W.G.1 agreed that **NFPs are notably characterised by** (Buck, 1999):

- a. **participation;**
- b. **inter-sectoral/holistic approaches;**
- c. **long-term commitment;**
- d. **capacity building.**

The Tulln W.G.2 expressed several overarching principles during the discussion, of which the following were first and foremost (Rametsteiner, 2000):

- a. NFPs are based on national sovereignty and they are to be designed according to and within the specific national contexts;
- b. NFPs are different from national plans in that they are more long-term, process-oriented, iterative and with a different underlying rationale to planning;
- c. to be useful, NFPs have to be adaptive to national, situation and case specificities.

It can be concluded from the above that **the following topics are considered as the most important elements: 1. participatory mechanisms 2. holistic and inter-sectoral approaches 3. national sovereignty 4. long-term and iterative process 5. capacity building 6. effective co-ordination and conflict resolution schemes.**

Ad 1: Participatory mechanisms

The IPF underlined that **all concerned actors will be invited to participate in the decision making process as well as in the implementation of the actions** jointly decided upon. These actors will normally include different government sectors, particularly those that are closely related to the forestry sector, government institutions at the sub national and local levels, the private sector, community based organisations and non-governmental organisations (UN-IPF-CSD, 1996).

Participation can be made possible to different degrees that range from providing people with information to involving them in decision making. There are many levels at which participation can happen, such as at the technical or political level, at local, regional or national level, etc. Participation should be considered as an opportunity for forest owners to communicate their needs and to raise awareness of their presence in other groups of society, as well. Furthermore it is to be recommended to build on the existing and the established structures for participation (Rametsteiner, 2000).

The possibilities of bringing in various interests, of reconciling competing interests and of raising awareness on forests and forestry issues are identified as most relevant strengths of participation. However, there is still a considerable lack of experiences in most European countries and there is a need to explore and develop appropriate participatory mechanisms and processes. It is also noted that forest owners show a defensive attitude regarding the issue of participation, as they perceive participation as bearing a certain danger of implying or leading to undermining ownerships rights or decision sovereignty. To be successful participatory mechanisms require institutional assistance and adequate conditions for the participation of individual stakeholders. The effectiveness also strongly depends on the commitment and willingness of all parties involved to share responsibility (Buck, 2000).

Participation can be identified as a major new characteristic of the concept of NFPs. The provision of appropriate participatory mechanisms is seen as a new paradigm, constituting a more decentralised approach to policy planning and contributing to the enhancement of the effectiveness of forest related policies through consensus building (Buck, 2000).

Ad 2. Holistic and inter-sectoral approaches

This element cannot be separated from the participatory approach. It is considered as a precondition for any problem-solving approach. Two different dimensions of inter-sectoral aspects are identified. The first is land-use related, including sectors as agriculture, infrastructure and tourism. The second dimension is related to the further processing and marketing of forest goods and services (Rametsteiner, 2000). **A holistic and inter-sectoral approach includes identifying of the mutual impacts of the related sectoral policies.** One should be aware of the existence of conflicting interests of different sectors about forests and also of the existence of a multi-responsibility distribution for forest issues in society (Boon et al., 1999). **NFPs should be integrated into wider programmes directed towards sustainable development and they should notably consider rural development and land-use programmes.** The integration of forest related policies is seen as a strength of NFPs. This approach will bring with it the establishment of new networks of actors and the fostering of existing ones. However there is also a lack of experience in integrated and inter-sectoral policy planning. Exchange of

information and experiences at the pan-European level is to be recommended. It should be focused on workable structures that have the potential to enable a continuous exchange of opinions and information (Buck, 2000).

Ad 3. National sovereignty

There is **little discussion on the importance and value of national sovereignty** and country leadership. **However the consistency with international commitments should not be neglected.** It must be accepted that international commitments, by definition, restrict national sovereignty. This leads, of course, to a permanent tension between these two aspects. International initiatives, such as non-legally binding international instruments, often provoke a pressure for changes on the national level and for implementation of international agreements. The principle of consistency is considered to be of importance on all levels: the pan-European, the national and the sub-national level. The mechanisms of information and education should play a key role between the national and sub-national levels (Mayer, 2000).

Ad 4. Long-term and iterative process

The NFP process is described as a continuous cycle, including planning, monitoring and evaluation of national forest policies. **A long-term orientation should be ensured by continuous adaptation of the strategy to changed conditions,** e.g. to changes in the environment as well as to the acquisition of new knowledge. In this context appropriate monitoring tools have an important role (Buck, 2000).

The iterative process is considered to be of equal importance at all scale levels. But the importance might increase from the pan-European to the sub-national level (Mayer, 2000).

Ad 5. Capacity building

Capacity building can be translated **by empowerment of regional and local government structures. It should be based on decentralisation** and related to the principle of participation. Capacity building is a central precondition for any problem-solving approach. Adequate participatory mechanisms depend on adequate assistance, capacity and the effectiveness of national and/or sub-national institutions involved. The question arises where the decision making level should be located. Two possible meanings are occurring: i) the decision must be made at the lowest level possible ii) the decision must be made at the appropriate level, which is not necessarily the lowest level.

Capacity building can also be increased by adequate education programmes and activities directed towards raising awareness of forests and forestry. Once again the usefulness and importance of exchanging information at the pan-European level is underlined (Buck, 2000).

Ad 6. Effective co-ordination and conflict resolution schemes

Co-ordination is considered as one aspect of rational problem solving. It is the political aspect of capacity building. **Successful co-ordination and conflict resolution assure the ability for decision making.**

Effective co-ordination and conflict resolution schemes form the central element and include all other elements. Therefore, they are considered as the most important prerequisite for successful

implementation (Boon et al., 1999). Rational problem solving requires at least the following elements:

- goal setting;
- flexibility to innovation (although innovation itself is not necessarily good);
- implementation;
- evaluation.

To achieve this principle, research both in science and social science, is needed.

3. Evaluation of national forest programmes

Egestad (1999) points out that elaborated arguments for propounding the above basic principles/elements are not provided by the process documents. NFP should therefore be considered a normative and politically defined concept at present. The concept prescribes an adaptive, holistic and integrated policy approach and propagates an ideal democratic approach to planning processes.

3.1. Justification

Monitoring and evaluation of national forest programmes are directly imposed by the IPF report in §17. NFPs represent a choice of institutions and instruments among the many available. To demonstrate the superiority of this choice requires that an NFP be subjected to comprehensive evaluation. NFPs should include provision for internal evaluation in terms of meeting their own objectives according to recognised criteria. Comprehensive evaluation requires that the NFP itself be measured against alternatives and against the wider objectives of the forest policy community (Rayner, 1999).

Ball and Michaelsen (1999), taking into consideration the replies to a questionnaire, conclude that six themes are highly relevant to assessing the progress which has been made and the weaknesses and positive aspects of the various national approaches: the process, partnerships, planning frameworks, institutional capacities, reforms and constraints.

By the way, it can be mentioned that the IPF panel recognised the need for national forest programmes to be based on a sound economic valuation of forest resources, including environmental services and non-timber products. The panel also recognised the need for an external economic and commercial environment that is supportive of national forest programmes (UN-CSD-IPF, 1997).

Rayner (1999) claims that the **specific conclusion** that might be drawn from the Canadian experience is that **procedural instruments are too weak to achieve objectives** and a NFP needs to be backed up by substantive policy instruments in critical areas, most likely in the form of incentives. Where the fiscal or institutional climate makes this impossible, the NFP is likely to fall short of expectations. The second and more general conclusion, that Rayner draws, concerns the importance of taking comprehensive evaluation seriously. Indeed NFPs are not without competition, they are a choice amongst alternatives. At least two serious competitors

have emerged. One is the eco-certification movement, essentially a non institutional market-driven response to the consumer boycott threat. The other is a focus on sub-national initiatives. In both cases the result is confusion of standards, criteria and indicators that makes the development of a fair international forest regime more difficult. **NFPs will have to demonstrate that they are the best institutional choice** for the job if they are to survive and prosper. If they cannot do so, they will be remembered only as another passing policy fashion.

3.2. Strengths and weaknesses

A clear understanding of the concept National Forest Programme is an important basis for an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of this concept. Scientists up to now identified only a few strengths of the concepts whereas a lot of weaknesses are already underlined.

The strengths are anyway not negligible (Michaelsen, 2000; Reining, 2000; Schanz,2000):

- the **political consensus** generated by the IPF/IFF process;
- the chance to get the important **issues of forest policy back on the political agenda** again;
- the **flexible approach** which allows each country to determine what it understands to be its national forest programme, according to national conditions and development priorities;
- the opportunity to construct a new, **common basis for the dialogue** with all interested groups;
- the **commitment of major stakeholders** through its process character.

Contrary to the strengths **several weaknesses were already recognised** (Boon et al., 1999; Egestad, 1999; Reining, 2000; Reunala, 2000;

- The main weakness of the NFP might be **its vagueness**. This reveals itself by the formulation of the process:
 - NFP is a generic expression for a wide range of approaches to sustainable forest management;
 - NFPs are comprehensive forest policy frameworks for the achievement of sustainable forest management, based on a broad inter-sectoral approach at all stages.
- The **concept does not mention how the principles/elements must be met** and how they will result in sustainable forest management.
- We cannot expect to solve all forest-related problems in one year.
- The **NFP in one country can be completely different from the NFP in another country** (contrary to strength of flexibility). Michaelsen (2000) recognises fundamental differences when applied in countries, which are:
 - high-income countries with high forest cover;
 - high income countries with low forest cover;
 - low income countries with high forest cover;
 - low-income countries with low forest cover.

Boon et al. (2000) mention **several reasons for present differences in approaches, structures, and procedures** concerning the formulation and implementation of NFPs in different European countries. Some of them are:

- constitutional structure in the context of federal or unitary state;
- state society relations in the context of the degree to which society and individuals of the society identify themselves with the state;
- degree of organisation in society in view of institution and capacity building;
- property distribution on one hand concerning ownership structures and on the other concerning property rights;
- availability of financial resources;
- concerning the opportunities for and sums involved in providing compensations/subsidies/grants to forest owners;
- planning traditions in relation to existing planning frameworks.

From their side Boon et al. (1999) identified several key deficits and related causes or explanations. They distinguish between three extra-sectoral causes or country settings as key deficits:

1. intersectoral approach: strong conflicts between administrative institutions and between sectors;
2. decentralisation: different perception of "states" responsible for the forest sector;
3. effective co-ordination and conflict resolution.

The causes of these deficits are mainly related with:

- lacking incentives;
- lack of training in communication and co-operation for ministry staff;
- deficits in interdisciplinary research (integrated concepts).

The question can be put what significance should be given to the above strengths and weaknesses since actually there are no criteria available for assessing the status of formulation and implementation of NFPs. In that sense some scientists conclude that it is impossible to identify strengths, weaknesses and deficiencies in NFPs (Boon et al., 1999). Anyway, Reunala (2000) points out that, according to the Finnish experience, NFP basic principles of national sovereignty, consistency with the constitutional and legal framework of the country and consistency with international agreements are necessary and natural foundations for a NFP. Other basic principles are easily acceptable in the Finnish conditions as well, but their application raises some questions.

4. Implementation of NFPs

4.1. Requirements for success

The success of a national forest depends on the country capacity to overcome a series of obstacles. In this respect the IPF Panel recognised soon four major categories (UN-IPF-CSD, 1996): policy and instrumental reforms, investment programming and funding, capacity building and international co-operation. In its final report **IPF refers to the following three limiting factors:**

- 1. funding;**

2. institutional capacity;**3. co-ordination among all interested parties at the national and international level**

Generally, co-ordination is strongly stressed. Hogl (1999) examines questions about inter-sectoral and multi-level co-ordination, namely potential obstacles and incentives concerning these two dimensions of co-ordination. He concludes by emphasising two central questions:

- which incentives and/or disincentives will allow national actors to enter or not to enter inter-sectoral programme co-ordination?
- What are the potential advantages and disadvantages which national actors might have to face in the course of the co-ordination of NFPs at the EU level?

Looking at the Austrian forest policy subsystem, he claims that **there are some indications which do not allow to expect that inter-sectoral co-ordination will be stimulated from within.** The dominant policy community is a closed network of public and private actors which is very reluctant to perform a policy change. It is predicted that there will be no policy change other than it is imposed by superior jurisdiction or by developments outside the forest policy subsystems. **Moreover, there are some serious obstacles regarding the co-ordination of NFPs at the European level.** The complexity of EU decision making involves uncertainty regarding its outcomes. Therefore, forestry interest groups favour national strategies of interest intermediation.

Multi-level co-ordination is mainly referring to three levels: the country, regional and international level. Firstly, it should be envisioned to develop national forest programmes within the overall national planning for sustainable development. Liss (2000) points out that each country with its own specific planning mechanisms has to identify the relevant levels and the requirements for harmonisation of policies, planning frameworks and measures which effect forests in one way or another. This includes sector concepts, the fiscal system, administrative procedures, public investments and incentives or disincentives for forest –related private sector activities. Reunala (2000) recognises that co-ordination of national and sub-national programmes is a new task in Finland. From his side Reining (2000) underlines the progress of international agreements. Since Rio the international forest-related instruments are getting more and more specific. Their impact is even going far behind the national level. Also forest units at the operational level have to deal with the issues coming from the international forest regime.

Schanz (1999) concludes that it is obvious that the points to the success or failure of NFPs, not only in Europe, will be the potential and limitations in the creation and design of institutional structures, as well as their co-ordination capacity and adaptability. Glück (1999), in his study on the significance of a forest policy framework, examines the chances of NFPs to make substantial contributions to the enhancement of sustainable development of forests, the final objective of NFPs. He claims that **significant influential factors seem to be:**

- **the capability of countries to agree on an operational definition of SFM by means of principles, criteria and indicators;**
- **the existence of an international legally binding instrument on forests;**
- **pressure from outside;**
- **financial incentives and the structure of decision making.**

Liss (2000) strongly focuses on the development of partnerships, including partnership agreements for forest sector development between governments, NGOs and the private sector. As a result of the 1998-99 FAO global survey Ball & Michaelson (2000) mention the following **key areas where efforts are required:**

- **awareness and decision making;**
- **institutional set-up and international co-ordination; partnership and conflict resolution;**
- **capacity building and development of human resources;**
- **financial resources and innovative financial mechanisms;**
- **the role of the regional forestry commissions.**

From the above it can be concluded that the successful achievement of NFPs is not for tomorrow. Success is depending on many unpredictable factors. It looks like that the elaboration of an optimal NFP and the ensuring of sustainable forest management is still an illusion.

4.2. Practical implementation

Tarasofsky (1999) distinguishes **the following steps in the NFP process:**

- **national forestry statement;**
- **forest sector review;**
- **identification of key issues and priorities (based on the forest sector review);**
- **forest policy formulation;**
- **strategy development;**
- **action plan for a planning cycle;**
- **investment programme for public sector.**

To be successful each of these steps requires commitment and ownership by all major entities whose actions relate to forests. The whole procedure, however, looks almost impossible and tremendously time and energy consuming. Nevertheless, Liss (2000) develops these steps more detailed and focuses still more on the inclusion of stakeholders in order to make a national forest programme a really broad-based participatory process carried by all sections of society. In this sense he mentions the following elements:

- **national forest statement:** a political expression of a countries commitment towards sustainable forest management;
- **sector review:** to understand the forest sector and its relations to other sectors;
- **policy, legislative and institutional reform:** an inter-sectoral process of policy formulation and institutional development in favour of sustainable development;
- **strategy development:** definition of strategies to implement policies towards sustainable forest management;
- **action plan:** a bundle of measures defined for one planning cycle according to the national development planning;
- **investment programme:** prioritised public sector investments and incentives for private and non-governmental sectors;

- capacity building programme: to assist the governmental and non-governmental sectors in fulfilling their roles and mandates;
- monitoring and evaluation system: of national forest programme and decentralised forest programmes to provide continuous feedback on NFP implementation progress, impacts and efficiency;
- co-ordination and participatory mechanism, including conflict-resolution schemes: effective vertical and horizontal co-ordination and communication within the forest sector and with other sectors, at all levels and in interaction with the international level.

With the above futures, Liss (2000) claims that a national forest programme can serve as a means of promoting, prioritising and co-ordinating both public and private investments towards sustainable forest management without neglecting the needs and interests of the various actors, the balance between private and public interests, the economic dynamics and potential of the private sector and the regulatory functions of the state. In this context, the national forest programme is a technical process in the sense that the identification of goals, policies, strategies and mechanisms for implementation are based on accurate information. It is a political process in the sense that the choices between the available options are the outcomes of debates, negotiations and compromises of relevant stakeholders.

Reining (2000) describes the design of the Baden-Wuerttemberg NFP Process. He states that it was immediately clear that this concept is known by only a few people, what was not really surprising. Therefore the **NFP was planned in three steps: information, elaboration and political endorsement.**

The objective of step 1 is to create interest in the project and a certain understanding. Very important in this context is that the NFP process is designed as an open process. This means different opinions have to be discussed in a transparent manner. In addition it has to be assured that the NFP is understood as an ongoing process. **Step 1 is also meant to identify the interested groups.** In Baden-Wuerttemberg about 25 parties wanted to be involved in the NFP process. Therefore co-ordination is extremely important and efficient structures are needed. Step 2 is the **elaboration of the NFP.** This is a **prepared by a small core group** which elaborates papers as a basis for guided discussions and compiles the manifold contributions received. The relevant issues of discussion during the NFP process are:

- forest and climate change (e.g. the role of forests as a carbon sink, political strategies on forest decline);
- forest and biodiversity (e.g. silvicultural strategies, protected forest areas within multifunctional forests);
- wood as a natural raw material (e.g. the productive function of forests, innovations, employment);
- social benefits of forests and forestry (e.g. valuation of the multiple benefits of forests, particularly the non-marketable forest goods and services).

As a result of this discussion, strategies for further implementation of the NFP must be developed.

Step 3 aims to get the envisaged NFP report endorsed on the political level. But this step does not mean that the process stops here. On the contrary, it will be the starting point from which the further dialogue continues.

4.3. Gaps in NFPs and priorities for future action

It is obvious from the above presentation and discussion that much more in-depth research is needed in order to process the strengths, weaknesses and deficiencies of approaches towards the formulation and implementation of NFPs. Boon et al. (1999) made the following **ranking of gaps concerning the principles and elements of NFPs**:

- 1. intersectoral approaches;**
- 2. effective co-ordination and conflict resolution;**
- 3. integration with country's sustainable development strategies;**
- 4. partnership and participation;**
- 5. consistency with international commitments;**
- 6. decentralisation;**
- 7. national sovereignty.**

To overcome these gaps a number of possible approaches were identified:

1. forest data bases:
 - forest data base should serve as a starting point;
2. appropriate accounting of the forests' benefits:
 - creation of incentives to promote social and environmental services of forests;
 - establishment of budgetary accounts on environmental and social issues (and implementation of them in co-ordination with other tools);
 - development of forest benefit assessment tools;
3. actual planning and implementation:
 - decentralisation of planning processes;
 - communication and co-operation training;
 - introduction of strategic and flexible planning approaches;
 - differentiation of the various planning and implementation levels; this implementation can be normative, strategic or operational;
- design of appropriate mechanisms of vertical and horizontal co-ordination .

Ball & Michaelsen (2000), as the outcome of the FAO global survey, pointed a.o. to the following concrete proposals for action:

- assist countries in reviewing institutional capacity, identifying weaknesses and constraints, and developing proposals for improvement;
- study how valuation of forests and forest land could be undertaken;
- help countries strengthen participatory mechanisms for involving the public in the NFP process;
- discuss policy reform, the recognition of traditional or/and customary rights, and implementing privatisation;

- discuss decentralisation as a strategy to increase participation;
- call for financial and other support from the international community to guarantee progress in NFPs;
- identify areas for specific donor action, such as training, institutional strengthening and field projects;
- disseminate the results to the public at large and policy and decision makers in particular in order to raise awareness of the need to give more adequate attention to national forest programmes.

5. Conclusions

Although the formulation of NFPs is a paramount topic of the UNCED follow-up, **the idea is far from rooted in national forest policies of all countries.** Nowadays NFPs are hardly discussed on the scientific platform, together with some first specifically oriented research projects, but this process is not known by the different stakeholders. Nevertheless some similar processes might be identified in many countries, aiming at a sustainable forest management.

As a main result of the past discussions **some valuable results can be drawn:**

- **the approach and specific elements/principles of NFPs are relevant;**
- **further clarification of the meanings and dimensions of these elements and principles is required;**
- **differences in importance might depend on the respective levels at which they are applied;**
- **importance of a co-operative and co-ordinated approach;**
- **NFPs will always remain an issue of national sovereignty;**
- **the process can be applied on a voluntary basis.**

The major problem is obviously the vagueness of the term, what is, however, unavoidable. Let us repeat some short statements concerning national forest programmes as formulated by scientists (Boon et al., 1999):

- NFP is not a plan or a product, but a process;
- a participatory process that should create the will to act and ensure commitments at all levels;
- an iterative and continually evolving process;
- an NFP should not have a narrow focus, but rather span across sectoral boundaries;
- NFPs should mobilise political support and facilitate international collaboration.

Anyway more in-depth research is needed towards the formulation and implementation of NFPs. Various questions need to be answered if NFPs are to remain in the sphere of a substantial approach. They include questions about the necessary degree of centralisation or decentralisation in the formulation and implementation of NFPs, about how to ensure values and to secure rationality and accountability in public participation processes and about the institutional basis and the focus of monitoring efforts (Schanz, 2000). Other fruitful research

projects might be a comparison of NFPs and the evaluation of NFPs as compared to traditional forest policy measures.

In order to realise a world-wide sustainable forest management, all countries will have to tackle the challenge of elaborating national forest programmes in meeting their commitments and achieving their specific goals in line with the international standards.

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