



Department of Water Affairs and Forestry

**Participatory Forest Management
Policy & Practice in South Africa**

1. Introduction

The Chief Directorate: Forestry (CD:F) within the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAFF) is undergoing a reorientation and transformation process in line with the new South African democratic principles and evolving international standards. This includes an effort to increase the share of benefits that formerly disadvantaged South Africans derive from the country's forest resources. The Chief Directorate now strives to consider local people's forest-based needs, their management capabilities, and intends to empower them through sharing with them decision making over resource utilisation. This approach is termed participatory forest management (PFM).

The basis for this transformation has been the formulation of new forest policies and legislation since 1994. By 1997 the new Government had reviewed its policies in terms of a new White Paper and developed the National Forestry Action Programme. In 1998 this was translated into the National Forest Act which set out new legislation based on the premise of sustainable forest management.



2. Forest profile

South African forest resources fall into three different types: commercial plantations, indigenous forests and extensive woodlands. The table below highlights the current pattern of ownership. The government has redefined the role of the state with respect to forests. The state is withdrawing from a direct role in commercial plantations and is in the process of leasing plantations on long leases to private sector partnerships. (See poster 2). Where indigenous forests are concerned the CD:F is implementing a policy of participatory forest management discussed in more detail below.

Table 1

Forest	Plantation (ha)	Indigenous	Woodlands (ha)
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ownership		forest (ha)	
Private sector	1059,900	170,000	
State	270,400	177,600	
Community: On state land in communal areas	156,700	52,400	
TOTAL	1,487,000 ha	400,000 ha	23,000,000 ha

3. The Policy of the Government of South Africa

The 1996 “White Paper on Sustainable Forest Development” reflected a break with the narrow and parochial concerns of the past. This new policy direction aimed to improve the living conditions of South Africa’s people, particularly the rural poor, through promoting sustainable forest development. The new forest policy emphasises participation of stakeholders in policy development and in management decision-making.

(Box 1)

In terms of industrial forestry, the government undertook to promote equitable access to the opportunities and benefits arising from industrial forestry, such as through equity-sharing arrangements or facilitating land reform.

State forests would be managed through partnerships with local communities, recognising the department’s legal responsibility to the nation. Government will support communities and local authorities to develop and implement management of this kind.

(Box 2)

4. Forestry Law and PFM

The mandate for the government’s role in the forest sector is derived from the National Forests Act 1998 (Act 84 of 1998) (NFA) and the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, 1998 (Act 101 of 1998) (NV&FFA). This has set out new legislation based on the premise of sustainable forest management.

(Box 3)

Under this Act, the Chief Directorate: Forestry is obliged to:

- Address sustainable utilisation and management of state forests;
- Promote economic and social development and utilise the developmental potential of forestry;
- Give the South African people a greater access to the country’s state forests;
- Improve equability in the distribution of benefits flowing from state forest resources; and
- Conserve forest biodiversity.

These obligations are set out in nine principles that must be considered and applied in a balanced way to all official decisions affecting forests. The Act also

sets out provisions to facilitate the involvement of communities and other stakeholders in forest management. These include:

Rights of Access

Section 19 states that “Everyone has access to State forests for purposes of recreation, education, culture or spiritual fulfilment.”

Licence Exemptions

Section 24 (6) indicates that the Minister may exempt persons or classes of persons from the licensing provisions if the intended activity is for domestic, cultural, health or spiritual purposes.

Community Forestry Agreements

Section 29 (1) states that any community wishing to do anything in a State forest for which a licence is required; to manage a State forest or part of it, whether alone or jointly with an organ of state; or both, may make an offer to the Minister to enter into a community forestry agreement with him and any other person or organ of state who must by law consent.

5. PFM in the Chief Directorate: Forestry

What is PFM in the South African context?

Considering that participation means different things to many people it becomes difficult to provide a precise definition of PFM. *PFM* in the CD: F has emerged as the new integrated approach to promote sustainable forest management in South Africa. It involves recognising the rights of those whom forest management concerns and, considering South Africa’s new political dispensation, forestry has an imperative to adapt to increasingly participatory agendas.

(Box 5)

An underpinning vision of the Chief Directorate: Forestry is for PFM to be a self sustaining process that will contribute to meeting the basic needs of previously disenfranchised rural communities through conservation and sustainable use of forest resources.

Why is PFM needed in South Africa? The example of the indigenous forests

In the past, indigenous forestry in South Africa had a narrow focus: that of yielding a limited amount of hardwood timber and providing a recreational resource to a privileged minority of the country’s people. Forestry, as practised, was basically ‘nature conservation’ and was characterised by:

- Fences and fines against unauthorised utilisation (largely by poor rural people);
- A lack of social concern in management;
- No focus on the potential of forestry to contribute to poverty alleviation;
- A primary interest in the flora and fauna of the forest and its protection, instead of its utility;

- Little interest in the yield of non-timber products, non-commercial products and cultural and spiritual services of forests.

Consequently, the majority of people, especially the poor rural communities, were deprived of access to forest resources, which made an important contribution to their livelihoods. This led to conflicts between rural people and DWAF over forest resources and resulted in alarmingly rapid resource depletion. Realising the need to involve communities in conservation, and with the hindsight of past experience, it has become clear that an alternative approach is required. These changes represented a change of emphasis within forest conservation from a 'fences and fines' approach to one in which more holistic strategies or approaches were adopted. A comprehensive *Participatory Forest Management* programme has been established and is advocated as a solution to the past shortcomings in forest management.

Participatory indigenous forest management concerns the ways in which DWAF will work with communities and other stakeholders to develop and implement a management partnership. It is hoped that through PFM approaches, the Directorate: Indigenous Forest Management (D:IFM) will create and maintain the vital relationships and linkages needed among stakeholders to ensure both social and ecological sustainability in forest management.

The PFM Framework of the Directorate: Indigenous Forest Management

PFM is now seen as vital to the new vision of the D:IFM. It has been adopted as 'best practice' and will become the approach of the directorate in all its dealings regarding indigenous forest management (IFM). The purpose of the PFM framework therefore is to provide a plan for implementing this new indigenous forestry approach. The ongoing transformation within the CD:F and the increasing role of participatory approaches in natural forest management promise further, wider-reaching changes that have to be planned in a strategic and coherent manner. The framework accommodates the political and personal transformations that changing the relations between the forester and those who participate in forestry involves. It explores the need for broader institutional changes to ensure policies and planning can be locally relevant and adaptable to changing realities on the ground.

It is hoped that as the result of the development of this framework, there will be a shared internal understanding of, and a common vision for PFM within the Chief Directorate. The programme framework seeks to indicate how the new paradigm can be institutionalised and understood, as well as propose how it will be facilitated at the operational level. However, because the forests are located in different social, cultural and institutional settings, it should always be borne in mind that each initiative may require particular policy and implementation arrangements. It is with such an understanding that required inputs, expected outputs, activities and indicators will be different in each area where PFM is implemented.

Furthermore, the programme framework provides the instrument for examining whether current policy and legislation enables or constrains the achievement of the IFM objectives. It assists in identifying the challenges, lessons learnt and future plans of the D: IFM.

Within an overall PFM framework, D:IFM seeks to address issues such as:

- Providing rights to access forest resources and the benefits therein by rural people;
- Addressing past imbalances through corrective action in both equity and gender;
- Improving relationships between different forest stakeholders;
- Improving communities' sense of ownership over forest management decision-making;
- Providing the mechanism to encourage and promote the establishment of down stream opportunities that are beneficial to both the Department and the community.

6. Putting policy into practice

Having invested heavily in the development of new policy and legislation and the processes of transformation they require, the CD:F is now getting to grips with complex realities of implementation. The other posters in this series examine:

- How communities can benefit from partnership in the management of plantations (Insert poster title)
- Attempts to involve communities previously excluded from access and use of indigenous forests in participatory forest management (Insert poster title)

- Box 1

“Contrary to the traditional view of forestry as the science of managing forested land, forestry today is about the relationships between people and the resources provided by the forest. It includes the use and husbandry of the wood, fruits and other products that come from trees, as well as the wildlife that dwell in the forest.”

White Paper on Sustainable Forest Development, 1996

Box 2

Emphasis on community-based methods in managing resources

“The Government will place special emphasis on the development and application of community-based methods of managing forested resources and sharing the benefits obtained, wherever appropriate, *i.e.* in the forests and woodlands of the former homelands, and wherever else local communities have the right, moral or otherwise, to the benefit of the resource. Protection of forests and woodlands will be reinforced by promoting the sustainable harvesting of indigenous resources, to provide benefits and commercial opportunities to local communities. Government will consider incentives to promote sustainable management of these resources.”

White Paper on Sustainable Forest Development, 1996

The Principles of the National Forests Act, 1998

- Natural forests must not be destroyed save in exceptional circumstances where, in the opinion of the Minister, a proposed new land use is preferable in terms of its economic, social or environmental benefits.
- A minimum area of each woodland type should be conserved
- Forests and must be developed and managed so as to
 - Conserve biological diversity, ecosystems and habitats;
 - Sustain the potential yield of their economic, social and environmental benefits;
 - Promote the fair distribution of their economic, social health and environmental benefits;
 - Promote their health & vitality;
 - Conserve natural resources, especially soil and water;
 - Conserve heritage resources and promote aesthetic, cultural and spiritual values;
 - Advance persons, or categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination.

PFM Principles

In order to ensure that the PFM policies and legislation of the Department are efficiently implemented and to guide the practitioners on the ground, eleven PFM principles have been adopted. These principles will help ensure that the participatory approach will become the routine for the Department and allow a flexible but focused approach for the participatory management of State forests.

People centred: For effective forest management, the Department must build an understanding of the impact of forests on rural livelihoods to ensure that people become a priority and that they become architects of their own development.

Participatory and holistic approach: Participatory management will be encouraged as a routine and a style of promoting the involvement of local people in forest management wherever possible.

Sustainability: Forest management will be implemented in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner.

Transparency: Forest management will be based on transparency and honesty and implemented with a common vision amongst stakeholders.

Equity: Forest management will promote a balanced, fair and gender-sensitive approach.

Benefits: Forest management will strive to ensure tangible short and long-term benefits to local and other stakeholders through, for example, the development of markets and enterprises to increase the values of the forest produce and the development of sustainable harvesting practices.

Remedial measures: Forest management will ensure that mechanisms are in place to address fairly any conflicts that may arise.

Capacity building: The process of indigenous forest management will promote local empowerment by building capacity and utilising appropriate indigenous knowledge.

Cultural and traditional values: Forest management will be based within the current legal and policy framework of South Africa whilst acknowledging cultural and traditional authority.

Partnerships: An integrated approach to forest management will be encouraged through partnerships with various stakeholders.

Dynamic approach: The Directorate will maintain a pattern of continuous consultation and feedback amongst stakeholders, ensuring that the lessons learned can be applied to modify the process if necessary.

