

Government of India
Ministry of Environment & Forests
(Forest Policy Division)

NOTE ON REVIEW OF NATIONAL FOREST POLICY, 1988

Administration and Regulating Laws on Forests can be traced back to the British period in India which gave the recognition of forest resource as an immensely valuable natural resource as well as its important role in maintaining eco-system services. The first National Forest Policy was enacted in 1894 vide circular resolution No. 22-F dated 19th October, 1894 under Chapters VIII and IX of Dr. Voeleker's Report on the Improvement of Indian Agriculture.

2. The National Forest Policy, 1894 underlined the management of State forests in British India. Later on, another attempt was made for review of National Forest Policy and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture vide resolution No. 13-1/52-F dated 12th May, 1952 adopted National Forest Policy, 1952. However, over the years, forests in the country have suffered serious depletion due to over exploitation and other reasons such as- tremendous pressures arising from ever-increasing demand for fuel wood, fodder and timber; inadequacy of protection measures; diversion of forest lands to non-forest uses without ensuring compensatory afforestation and essential environmental safeguards.

3. National Forest Policy, 1988 (NFP) was enacted with the basic objectives of maintenance of environmental stability, restoration of the ecological balance. It laid emphasis on people's participation through Joint Forest Management Programme and together with Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 helped in stabilization of country's forest area over the last two decades in spite of huge demand on forest land for development and the ever increasing pressure for forest produces. As a progressive policy, it highlighted primary functions of forests in maintaining ecological and environmental balance and preservation of biodiversity, four years before UNCED (Rio Earth Summit).

4. NFP has now completed more than 25 years. There have been a lot of developments in related policies at both National and International level in view of –

- (i) Implementation of Joint Forest Management (JFM), which came into effect in 1990 pursuant to the National Forest Policy, 1988 and its growth over the last 20 years leading to creation of over 1.16 lakh JFMCs and its impact on forest management.
- (ii) UN Conference on Environment & Development (Rio Summit) in 1992, where forests were considered very important part of sustainable development. However, the Forests as a sovereign matter were kept under voluntary arrangement leading to evolution of Forest Principles. The Global Forest Policy was discussed under Intergovernmental and of Forests (IPF) and subsequently IFF (Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF).
- (iii) Enactment of Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 transferring ownership of Minor Forest produce to Gram Sabhas.
- (iv) Direction of Hon'ble Supreme Court in various forestry related Writ Petition especially, in the light of Godavarman & others in W.P.(C) 202 of 1996.
- (v) UNFF (United Nations Forum on Forests) was set up in 2000 by resolution of UN General Assembly as an important component of International arrangement on Forests which has been in continuance from 2000-2015.

- (vi) National Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and importance of forests in biodiversity conservation.
- (vii) Setting up of National Forest Commission and its recommendations for improvement of forestry sector.
- (viii) Enactment of the Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, which recognizes and vests forests rights in the STs and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers simultaneously upholding their role and responsibilities in conservation and management of forests especially community forest resources and also in biodiversity conservation.
- (ix) In 2006, UN adopted the four Global Objectives on Forests.
- (x) In 2007, UN General Assembly adopted a resolution for implementation of Non-Legally Binding Instruments on All Types of Forests (NLBI) which was internationally agreed by the all member countries of United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF). India is also a member country and is prepared for implementation of NLBI. There are 25 policy measures which are required to be implemented according to NLBI. Though many of these are being implemented in varying degree but NFP needs to be aligned to conform to international development in forestry sector while maintaining national interests.
- (xi) GIM being started as a convergence of various development programme carried out by multi-stakeholders at landscape level.
- (xii) Rio+ 20 Conference on UNFCCC outcome document reaffirms for implementation of NLBI. Forests have significant role in gradual transition towards Green Economy and Green Growth.
- (xiii) UN Conventions viz. UNFCCC, UNCBD, UNCCD have recognized significant role of forests in attaining targets under these conventions.
- (xiv) Post 2015 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals has recognized the role of Forests in Sustainable Development and has two Forest related SDGs (SDG-6 and SDG-15)
- (xv) Importantly, inadequacy of financial support to the forestry sector, in spite of tremendous scope for employment, poverty reduction, food security in various forestry activities etc. has not received due attention.
- (xvi) Forest sector governance architecture in the wake of PESA and FRA needs to be harmonized.

5. From the above it can be seen that the role of forests has increased immensely in poverty reduction, combating hunger, generation of employment especially for forest dependent communities and in addressing food, water and energy security of the country.

6. The Forests have multiple functions and has multi-sectoral linkages, therefore, the Policy should remain robust and relevant in the coming decades of high growth path that India is expected to follow.

7. As policy evolution is a dynamic process, the proposed exercise will holistically take into account futuristic scenario to cater to the next 20-30 years in the context of emerging issues and challenges which will impact forests and forestry sector viz. demographic and socio- economic

changes, urbanization, globalization, sustainable development challenges, changing legal and policy environment, increasing demand of forest products and biomass based renewable energy, need to increase resilience of society to the climate change, biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, need of forest products, SFM, huge investment requirement for rehabilitation of degraded forest and other lands, thrust to agro-forestry, as well as in Industrial Tree Plantations outside natural forests, certification of forest products, etc.

8. The review of NFP has the objective of looking at the policy holistically to find out and address the gaps in view of later developments in related natural resources sector policies and legislations both at National as well as global levels and building stronger cross sectoral linkages for effective implementation of the National Forest Policy. This will include working on Means of Implementations (MoI) for greater resource mobilization to achieve the policy goals. It would also be desirable to give role and responsibilities to various stakeholders/ organization/ departments/ private sectors/ industries/ people for meeting the objectives.

9. **Issues for Review:**

- How far the goals of NFP, 1988 have been achieved- need for an objective assessment?
- Progress on State Forest Policies and learning from policies of other nations.
- Incentives to high forested States?
- Measures to support low forest cover states in increasing forest and tree covers
- How to conserve existing forests in the wake of various challenges- demographic changes, growing affluence leading to expanding demand for land for food, infrastructure, settlements?
- Addressing forest degradation & fragmentation?- Around 80% of forest cover is open and medium density.
- Enhancing forest cover & productivity?
- Forests, wildlife & biodiversity seen as separate entity not as a part of same ecosystem.
- Human wildlife conflict on the rise?

Court related matters

- Implementing various orders of Hon'ble Supreme Court & other Courts?
- Forest users and offenders treated with same yardsticks?
- Over legislations with conflicting goals?-Harmonization of legal frameworks FRA, PESA?

Cross Sectoral issues- Forest & Sustainable Development

- Sustainability of landscapes?
- Forest & water, Forest- Agriculture Sustainability and Food Security
- Forests and economics/ livelihoods- Next level of JFM?
- Forests -Employment, water & food security, sustainable agriculture, sustainable cities.
- Greening of non forest lands/ ToFs, Supporting Agroforestry & Urban Forestry.
- Future of Forest Based Industries and its implication?
- Trade of forest products- Timber, NTFPs, Medicinal Plants
- Ownership & protection issues
- Carbon rights?

Means of implementation?

- Meeting needs of trained manpower/ professional - Capacity Building?
- Ownership / roles and responsibilities of related sectors / stakeholders/ corporate/ industries?
- Strengthening forest finance?

- Forestry research- declining support.
- Scientific & technical support

Meeting International obligations

- International Arrangement on Forests (Post-2015), UNFF, UNFCCC, UNCCD, UNCBD ITTO, etc.
- Meeting challenges/ threats from climate change on forests - leading to change in forest types, structure, health, density of forests, species migration.

10. A Core Committee headed by the DGF&SS has been constituted by the Ministry. Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) Bhopal has been tasked by the Ministry to support the Core Group of the Ministry in objective review of the Policy and prepare a Zero Draft of Policy for consideration. IIFM has since started the exercise. The Ministry has written to PCCFs of all States to nominate a nodal officer for submission of comments and inputs on behalf of the States. DGF&SS has also written to Chief Secretaries in this regard for facilitating comments/ inputs from all concerned stakeholder departments/ sectors.

11. IIFM is seeking comments from States and all relevant stakeholders. Review is to be completed soon.

States/ UTs are requested to give their suggestions at the earliest preferably before 15th September, 2015 to Director IIFM at the email director@iifm.ac.in & policy@iifm.ac.in with copy to subhaash.chandra@gmail.com.