

# **Concept:** Improved Public Participation in Georgian Forest Management Planning and Implementation

Updated

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Since 1998, CENN, a non-governmental organization, has been dedicated to promoting green growth and sustainable development across the South Caucasus by collaborating with local communities and national governments. With a strong presence in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, CENN's team of over 60 professionals and a network of volunteers deliver high-quality services that address environmental challenges through innovative solutions. Drawing on 26 years of experience and over 250 complex projects, CENN excels in managing large-scale international initiatives, fostering cooperation between diverse stakeholders, and enhancing governance. Their expertise includes cutting-edge technology, participatory planning, result-based management, and establishing public-private partnerships, all aimed at improving environmental, economic, and social outcomes.

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## **Abstract**

Georgia's approval of its Forest Code in 2020 underscores the country's commitment to sustainable forest management, ecosystem protection, and community involvement. However, existing forest management planning (FMP) processes do not fully capture the needs of forest-dependent communities, leading to potential conflicts and gaps in stakeholder engagement. To address these challenges, CENN, in collaboration with GIZ's ECO. Georgia project, NFA and MEPA, developed and tested the Improved Public Participation Approach (IPPA). The IPPA framework emphasizes the co-production of forest management decisions through participatory tools, including Local Advisory Councils (LACs), ecosystem service mapping, and structured public consultations.

The IPPA aims to enhance informed decision-making, conflict prevention, and local stakeholder engagement in the development of FMPs. The approach provides stepwise protocols for engaging communities, ensuring their input is reflected in forest governance decisions. It fosters a collaborative process that promotes sustainable forest management, gender equality, and socio-economic benefits. By incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives, the IPPA seeks to strengthen forest governance in Georgia and contribute to long-term regional development and biodiversity conservation.

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## 1. Abbreviations

ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
CENN	Caucasus Environmental NGO Network
DES	Department of Environmental Supervision
ES	Ecosystem Services
FMP	Forest Management Plan
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
IPPA	Improved Public Participation Approach
LAC	Local Advisory Council
LAG	Local Action Group
LoP	List of Participants
MEPA	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture
NFA	National Forestry Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management

## 2. Executive Summary

Georgia made significant progress in forest governance with the approval of its Forest Code, which prioritizes the sustainable management of forest resources while ensuring the protection of ecosystems, biodiversity, and community well-being. Central to the Forest Code is the mandate for public participation, requiring the involvement of local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and stakeholders in the development and implementation of Forest Management Plans (FMP). Despite this, current processes do not adequately reflect the needs of forest-dependent communities, leading to potential conflicts over forest resource use.

CENN, in collaboration with GIZ's ECO.Georgia project and other stakeholders, has tested and updated the Improved Public Participation Approach (IPPA) to address these gaps. This approach aims to enhance local ownership, ensure informed decision-making, and foster sustainable forest management (SFM) through inclusive, evidence-based public participation. In 2023, CENN initiated testing of the IPPA model, with the goal of achieving equitable stakeholder involvement, conflict prevention, and enhanced socio-economic benefits, including gender equality and poverty reduction.

The IPPA introduces stepwise protocols for increasing public involvement in the FMP process, including stakeholder identification, participatory mapping of ecosystem services, and more. Through a series of

meetings, fieldwork, and public consultations, local communities and other stakeholders provide viable input into forest management decisions. The final goal is to achieve co-decision, ensuring that forest management plans are reflective of local needs and sustainably managed for long-term benefits.

Key to this process is the establishment of Local Advisory Councils (LACs) that serve as platforms for ongoing dialogue and collaboration between the National Forestry Agency (NFA), local municipalities, and communities. The overall aim is to create a sustainable, participatory framework that ensures the long-term success of forest governance in Georgia.

### 3. Background Information and Project Framework

In 2020, Georgia approved the Forest Code, marking a significant step in its commitment to managing and conserving the country's forest resources. The Code emphasizes the protection of forest ecosystems, biodiversity conservation, and the promotion of social and economic prosperity. A crucial aspect of the Code is its focus on public participation in forest management. It mandates that the government engage with local communities, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders during the creation of forest management plans, ensuring that information about forest resources and management actions is accessible to all interested parties.

The Forest Code underscores the importance of effective communication as a fundamental component of forest management planning (FMP) and implementation. Currently, the modus operandi requires a series of measures such as introductory meetings, fieldwork questionnaires, and public presentations to promote participatory planning. These efforts aim to increase public awareness and facilitate a collaborative approach to forest management, incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives.

However, despite the Forest Code's provisions, the current FMP process may not fully account for the interests and needs of local stakeholders, particularly their reliance on forest ecosystem services. This oversight can lead to conflicts during the implementation of forest management plans. The level of attention being paid to expanding ordinary citizens' responsibilities in the policy process emphasizes the importance of considering the effects these procedures may and will have on policy decisions and those involved in them. Existing mechanisms and instruments for community engagement and participatory approaches need improvement, and local communities often lack the awareness and technical capacities required to participate effectively in forest management planning.

As derived from ECO.Georgia's 2023 document<sup>1</sup>, the current baseline situation is described on the following graph:

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<sup>1</sup> Concept: Improved Public Participation in Georgian Forest Management Planning and Implementation, ECO.Georgia, GIZ, 2023

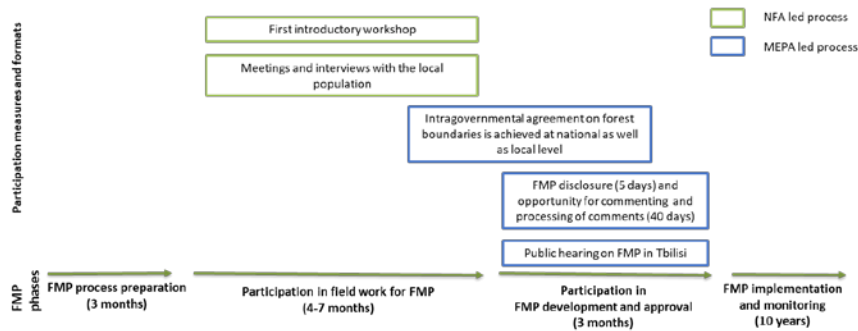


Figure 1: Baseline situation of participation in forest management planning and implementation

Within the ECO.Georgia project, in 2023, CENN initiated the testing of the improved public participation model that was developed by GIZ and NFA, with the objective of increasing stakeholders' sense of ownership in sustainable forest management (SFM) processes and implementing targeted public participation. The new approach (Figure 2) is designed to enhance public participation among forest-dependent stakeholders. This approach can be adopted by the NFA, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA), and local municipalities to ensure more inclusive and sustainable forest management practices.

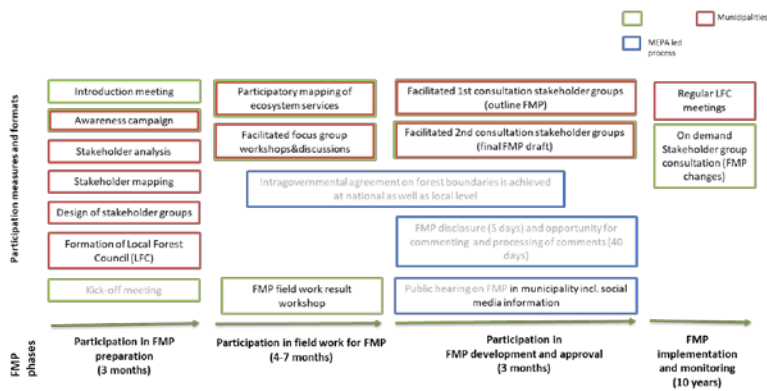


Figure 2: New approach to participation in forest management planning and implementation<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

Such improved public participation would achieve several important goals:

1. **Informed Public Participation:** Ensuring that local communities have access to relevant information, such as the impacts of different forest management practices on their livelihoods.
2. **Enhanced Local Knowledge:** Fostering more effective and locally relevant decision-making through increased local knowledge of SFM implementation.
3. **Sustainable Decision-Making:** Contributing to the long-term sustainability of SFM through evidence-based and locally relevant decisions.
4. **Gender Equality and Poverty Reduction:** Promoting gender equality and sensitivity, and reducing poverty by intentionally increasing women's participation and income-earning potential.

Effective stakeholder engagement, as defined by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), involves individuals or groups with vested interests in forest management activities. Engaging stakeholders leads to better decision-making, improved biodiversity conservation, and enhanced benefits from forest resources. When forest management plans are agreed upon within the community, their implementation faces fewer risks and conflicts, helping to avoid additional costs that can be endured by the NFA. Participatory forest management also enhances biodiversity conservation and the preservation of cultural sites, as local populations have a better understanding of these elements.

#### 4. Testing Methodology of the IPPA Document

Improving public participation in forest management planning and implementation in Georgia is a gradual, long-term process that requires stepwise adjustments. The ultimate vision is to achieve a level of "co-decision and co-production," where power is equitably distributed among all stakeholders involved in forest management. Achieving this balance will yield several key benefits:

- Improved conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms
- Enhanced adherence to social and environmental safeguards in forest governance
- Strengthened local self-governance, empowering communities
- Fostering regional economic development through increased employment and income opportunities

The establishment of municipal forest management systems is envisioned as a critical milestone towards this goal, with a full rollout anticipated in the coming years. However, the current level of public participation remains limited due to both formal and informal institutional constraints in Georgia. To bridge this gap, intermediary steps are necessary to pave the way for deeper stakeholder engagement.

In this context, innovative participation formats must be introduced to stimulate new approaches within the National Forestry Agency (NFA), civil society, municipal authorities, and local communities. These new formats will serve as catalysts for change, encouraging a collaborative spirit and reshaping existing power dynamics.



Starting in 2023, CENN, in coordination with GIZ, NFA, MEPA and other stakeholders initiated the testing of the new methodology, as given in Figure 2.

In particular, the process focused on the process evaluation of public participation and its outcomes with two main objectives:

- Analysis of the participation processes.
- Review of the IPPA testing phase.

The testing of the new approach provided information that were categorized into themes or topics identified in Figure 2: New approach to participation in forest management planning and implementation, use qualitative and quantitative analysis to assess the process of each issue; implement surveys; and employee the following criteria for analysis:

Criteria for Testing Improved Public Participation in Georgian Forest Management Planning and Implementation

1. Timely dissemination of information to the public about the start of the public consultation process.
2. Use of diverse methods to involve and identify forest-dependent stakeholders and actively engage with them instead of involving the “broad public.” Utilize various consultation formats to enhance engagement and improve effectiveness. For instance, face-to-face or online meetings, focus groups, conferences, surveys (physical or online), and collect comments through web pages or social media throughout the process.
3. Ensure widespread access to details about the public consultation. The criteria evaluates efforts to share the consultation notification across various channels, including online platforms (official website, social media) and traditional media (newspaper, TV, leaflets). Notably, sending announcements solely via email to potential stakeholders does not meet the criteria for public engagement.
4. Assessment whether the Forest Management Plan has been publicly disclosed and if interested individuals or organizations can easily, readily and expeditiously access the documentation.
5. Assessment whether the Forest Management Plans (FMP) were presented in clear and easily comprehensible language. MEPA is encouraged to produce FMPs in plain language, particularly when the content of the document necessitates specialized knowledge for better understanding.
6. Participants of public consultations / hearings provide feedback or comment on the FMP or subject matter of the workshop / meeting.
7. Use of diverse methods to involve a broader audience. Utilizing various consultation formats to enhance engagement and improve effectiveness. For instance, face-to-face or online meetings, focus groups, conferences, surveys (physical or online), and collect comments through web pages or social media throughout the process.
8. Diverse mechanisms for collecting feedback: Comments on the document, web page, or social media; phone input from community members; spoken feedback during meetings; and written feedback in chats, Google forms, or other online survey formats.
9. Consultations with LACs on FMP phases. Engagement in the early stages of FMP development enables communities to make meaningful contributions to the FMP.

#### **IPPA testing methodology:**

- Categorize feedback into themes or topics to identify common issues.
- Use qualitative and quantitative analysis to assess the significance and prevalence of each issue.
- Prioritize feedback based on its impact on the IPPA testing phase.
- Implement Surveys at each public consultation.

The main operating question during the testing process was:

- How can participation formats and processes be improved to maximize the value and impact of public input in FMP decision making?
- How the IPPA should be implementable, and how should responsibilities and competencies be distributed among the responsible parties (NFA, MEPA, Municipalities, and Communities)? Furthermore, to what extent should there be mechanisms in place to ensure efficient implementation, and what specific mechanisms would be most effective?

As a result, concrete protocols were developed and the new approach to participation in forest management planning and implementation has been amended to fit the needs on both formal and informal institutions.

The overall objective of this document is to increase public involvement in the planning and execution of forest management planning and implementation by providing the NFA with step-wise tools and protocols for different mechanisms.

## **5. Updated IPPA Protocol**

Calls for greater public participation in environmental planning are widely endorsed, appearing in both national and local policy documents, as well as being promoted by environmental organizations and local communities. These appeals are grounded in the democratic principle that individuals have the right to engage in public policy-making. The focus is on ensuring access to decision-making processes, fostering active participation, and ensuring that this involvement directly influences policy outcomes.

Public participation is seen as a means to align policy decisions with the values and preferences of society. While technocratic approaches argue that experts can deduce societal values and incorporate them into the policy process, there are significant concerns about the inherent biases, assumptions, and potential manipulation within such methods. Without specialized knowledge, stakeholders are often vulnerable to these limitations. Thus, technocratic approaches cannot replace direct public involvement in bridging the gap between societal values and policy.

Furthermore, public participation is not merely a tool for improving outcomes but a fundamental right. People are entitled to a voice in policy decisions and should not be bypassed by technocratic methods. In this sense, public participation is a key measure of the legitimacy of the policy process.

Strategies or policies that have undergone significant processes involving public participation, have a greater chance for wider acceptance and less conflict, hence increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the governmental institutions.

Another argument can be put forward is that the effectiveness of policy implementation and public participation can lead to better outcomes. This can mean that the policy development and implementation as interconnected, suggesting that public participation should not only reflect societal values but also aid in executing the policy. The focus here is on how participation can enhance the effectiveness of policy delivery. Greater community participation can provide valuable information, including public preferences and specific local knowledge that governmental agencies may lack. This local insight helps prevent inappropriate developments that may arise from centralized planning. What is more, significant reason for public participation is its potential to reduce conflicts during the policy process. Engaging stakeholders early on can prevent disagreements later and help avoid delays or breakdowns.

### 5.1 Improved Public Participation Approach (IPPA) – the Protocols

The “New approach to participation in forest management planning and implementation” was tested between November 2023 and August 2024. The testing period included a number of meetings with stakeholders, development of knowledge materials and observations for the most effective protocols that can be implemented by NFA to achieve the highest efficacy in including local communities for developing and at a later stage, taking part in the implementation stage of forest management plans. As a result, the following changes were made to the Figure 2:

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Figure 3: The Updated Improved Public Participation Approach				MEPA & NFA led process
				Municipalities
Participation measures and formats	Stakeholder analysis and identification	Participatory mapping of Ecosystem Services	Facilitated consultation focus group discussions with stakeholder groups on final draft of FMP	Regular on demand LAC meetings and stakeholder group consultations (FMP changes)
	Introductory meeting for LAC creation	Facilitated focus group workshops and discussion		
	Formation of LACs	Intragovernmental agreement on forest boundaries is achieved at national as well as local level		
	Design of Stakeholder Groups		FMP disclosure (5 days) and opportunity for commenting and processing of comments (40 days)	
	Awareness Campaign			

	Kick-Off Meeting	FMP field work results workshop	Public Hearing on final FMP		
<b>FMP Phases</b>	Participation in FMP preparation (2-3 months)	Participation in field work for FMP (4-7 months)	Participation in FMP development and approval (3 months)	FMP implementation and monitoring (10 Years)	

The following chapter explains each format protocols in detail.

### 5.1.1 IPPA Stepwise Protocols

The new mechanism foresees several new formats to be implemented during FMP planning and implementation. The details of the formats are provided in the following overview tables per phase:

Format title	Objectives	Involved Stakeholders	Required resources	Duration
<b>Phase 1 - Participation in FMP preparation</b> <b>Duration: 3 months</b>				
1. <a href="#">Stakeholder analysis and Identification</a>	Analyse the forest dependency of stakeholder groups in the respective forest district and identify relevant stakeholder groups to be included in the participation approach.	Lead: NFA & MEPA	1 or 2 NFA / MEPA staff	25 Days
2. <a href="#">Introductory Meeting for LAC Creation</a>	Initiation of a political process between MEPA/NFA and local city halls. Inform the local governments about the FMP objective and the process, creation of LACs, kick-off meeting, ES mapping and more.	Lead: NFA and MEPA Secondary Lead: Municipal City Hall Invited stakeholders: Village trustees, city hall representatives, local communities, NGOs, LAG, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Laptop and a projector</li> <li>PPT on FMP</li> <li>Conference hall</li> <li>Lo</li> <li>Handouts on FMP</li> <li>Designated MEPA, NFA and City Hall employees for community mobilization</li> </ul>	14 Days
3. <a href="#">Formation of LACs</a>	Formation of a group, which accompanies the FMP development process and its implementation. The LAC is to be formalized / institutionalized, as part of the city hall governance system.	Lead: Municipality City Hall Secondary Lead: NFA and MEPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAC Decree</li> </ul>	20 Days
4. <a href="#">Design of Stakeholder Groups</a>	Based on the stakeholder analysis and LACs, select representatives of stakeholders and assembly them into designated groups.	Lead: NFA and MEPA, LAC. Secondary Lead: Outsourced company (in cooperation with LAC) to support NFA.	1 or 2 NFA / MEPA staff, LAC	5 Days
5. <a href="#">Awareness Campaign</a>	Inform the public and stakeholder groups on the	Lead: NFA and MEPA, Municipality City Hall, LAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Laptop and a projector</li> <li>PPT on FMP</li> </ul>	14 Days

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	start of FMP process, its objective and potential for getting engaged in the process.	Invited stakeholders: Village trustees, city hall representatives, local communities, NGOs, LAG, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conference hall</li> <li>LoP</li> <li>Handouts on FMP</li> <li>Designated MEPA, NFA and LAC for community mobilization</li> </ul>	
6. <a href="#">Kick-Off Meeting</a>	Officially kick-start the FMP process for entire municipality.	Lead: NFA and MEPA, Municipality City Hall, LAC  Invited stakeholders: Village trustees, city hall representatives, local communities/representatives of all identified stakeholder groups, NGOs, LAG, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Laptop and a projector</li> <li>PPT on FMP</li> <li>Conference hall</li> <li>LoP</li> <li>Handouts on FMP</li> <li>Designated MEPA, NFA and LAC for community mobilization</li> <li>Printed forest maps</li> </ul>	14 Days
<b>Phase 2: Participation in field work for FMP</b> <b>Duration: 4-7 months</b>				
1. <a href="#">Participatory mapping of Ecosystem Services</a>	It allows more accurate spatial mapping of ecosystem uses and values on a local scale to be undertaken and can provide a rich data set for FMP based on local knowledge. The tool can ensure that interests of the stakeholder groups are heard, spatially mapped and taken into account in forest management planning. Thus, it can significantly help to identify and prevent potential conflicts. In the context of ecosystem services valuation and mapping, LACs, local communities and regional NFA staff provide spatially explicit information about ecosystem service provision, use and value (both monetary and non-monetary).	Lead: NFA and MEPA, Municipality City Hall, LAC  Invited stakeholders: Village trustees, city hall representatives, local communities/representatives of all identified stakeholder groups, NGOs, LAG, LAC, Regional NFA staff, DES.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Printed A0 maps of municipal areas</li> <li>Laptop and a projector</li> <li>Google Earth</li> <li>PPT on Ecosystem services and mapping</li> <li>Conference hall</li> <li>LoP</li> <li>Stickers</li> <li>Board</li> <li>Markers</li> </ul>	60 Days
2. <a href="#">Facilitated focus group workshops and discussion</a>	Introduce and validate the ES Mapping results, gather additional local knowledge and needs and document potential forest use conflicts and economic opportunities.	Lead: NFA and MEPA, Municipality City Hall, LAC  Invited stakeholders: Village trustees, city hall representatives, local communities, NGOs, LAG, LAC, Regional NFA staff, DES.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Laptop and a projector</li> <li>Google Earth</li> <li>PPT on Ecosystem services and mapping results</li> <li>Conference hall</li> <li>LoP</li> </ul>	30 days
3. <a href="#">FMP field work results workshop</a>	Present and discuss the results of the field work, considering ES mapping results too, and their implications for SFM and the potential usage conflicts and presentation of next steps for FMP development.	Lead: NFA and MEPA  Invited stakeholders: Village trustees, city hall representatives, local communities, NGOs, LAG, LAC, Regional NFA staff, DES.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Laptop and a projector</li> <li>Google Earth</li> <li>PPT on field work results and FMP net steps</li> <li>Conference hall</li> <li>LoP</li> </ul>	30 days
<b>Phase 3: Participation in FMP development and approval</b>				

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<b>Duration: 3 months</b>				
1. <a href="#">Intragovernmental agreement on forest boundaries is achieved at national as well as local level</a>	Reach agreement between government bodies (MEPA, Ministry of Economy, Public Registry, Municipalities etc.) on issues like land borders, licenses etc.	Lead: NFA and MEPA, City Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conference hall</li> <li>LoP</li> <li>Laptop and a projector</li> <li>PPT on forest boundaries, licences, etc.</li> </ul>	10 days
2. <a href="#">Facilitated consultation focus group discussions with stakeholder groups on final draft of FMP</a>	Present and discuss the final FMP draft and its implications for SFM and the potential usage conflicts. Collect stakeholder views and inputs. Identify local initiatives for joint SFM between NFA and local stakeholders and agree on possible support mechanisms. Check if agreements in FMP are reflected and if not, why. Reach agreement on final draft of FMP with respective stakeholder groups and document final decisions and disagreements	Lead: NFA and MEPA, LACs  Invited stakeholders: Village trustees, city hall representatives, local communities, NGOs, LAG, regional NFA staff, DES.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conference hall</li> <li>LoP</li> <li>Laptop and a projector</li> <li>PPT on final FMP draft</li> </ul>	20 days
3. <a href="#">FMP disclosure (5 days) and opportunity for commenting and processing of comments (40 days)</a>	Disclosure of the FMP to the designated municipality stakeholders for additional commenting.  Comments (if any) after public disclosure need to be incorporated and/or responded in an justified manner why they are not taken up	Lead: NFA and MEPA, LACs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 or 2 NFA / MEPA staff, LAC</li> </ul>	40 days
4. Public Hearing on final FMP	Officially present and discuss the final FMP draft to general public in the municipality and collect additional comments (if any)	Lead: NFA and MEPA, City Hall, LACs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conference hall</li> <li>LoP</li> <li>Laptop and a projector</li> <li>PPT on final FMP</li> <li>Stickers</li> <li>Board</li> <li>Markers</li> <li>Handouts on FMP</li> <li>Microphones</li> </ul>	20 days
<b>Phase 4: FMP implementation and monitoring (10 Years)</b>				
<b>Duration: 10 Years</b>				
1. Regular on demand LAC meetings and stakeholder group consultations (FMP changes)	Monitor the implementation of FMP and serve as main first contact point for grievances of local population. Active engagement in preparation of Annual Plans	Lead: NFA and MEPA, City Hall, LACs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>	10 Years

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### 5.1.2 Phase 1 - Participation in FMP preparation

Duration: 3 months

#### 1. Stakeholder analysis and Identification

**Goal:** Analyse the forest dependency of stakeholder groups in the respective forest district and identify relevant stakeholder groups to be included in the participation approach.

**Duration:** 25 Days

The initial step towards improving public participation in the development of FMPs is to understand and identify who the stakeholders are. Incorporating stakeholders' opinions is valuable for improving decision-making processes and FMP implementation. In addition, successful engagement with stakeholders ensures legitimization of issues and facilitates a closer alignment between MEPA, NFA and Municipalities.

Hence, the forestry sector is characterized by a complex and dynamic environment, involving a wide spectrum of stakeholders with varying degrees of influence and interest. These stakeholders range from those who may be hostile or obstructive (i.e. citizens going against new responsibilities) to those who are conciliatory and collaborative. Given this diversity, it is essential to employ flexible, adaptable, and often specialized engagement tools to ensure successful interactions with each group. A critical step in this process is the classification and categorization of stakeholders, which is a prerequisite for effective stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholders can be analyzed based on several dimensions, including their salience (the importance of their role), frames of reference (their perspectives and values), and networks (their connections and influence within the sector). These elements help to understand the varying interests and potential impacts of each stakeholder.

A wide range of entities qualifies as stakeholders in forestry, including individuals, groups, neighbourhoods, organizations, institutions, societies, and even natural environments. Broadly, the following stakeholder groups are identified:

- Communities
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- Government bodies (City hall, Gov. Agencies, etc.)
- Private sector entities
- Academia
- Religious Institutions

The key differentiating factor among stakeholders lies in the existence and nature of their stake. A stakeholder must have a "claim" to be recognized as such, meaning that they can either affect or be affected by the issue at hand. The fundamental challenge, therefore, becomes determining which claims are legitimate and should be acknowledged, and which should not.

Descriptive stakeholder identification adopts an inclusive approach, considering almost every entity with even a remote connection to the issue as a stakeholder. In this sense, a stakeholder is any actor—whether an individual or a group—who is influenced by a decision or has the ability to influence that decision. Stakeholder analysis using this definition must be both pragmatic and rational, focusing on explaining the reality of the situation. This means that the analysis must consider not only stakeholders with formal,

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contractual, or institutional claims but also those with moral or legal stakes that may exist outside formal institutional structures.

This broader approach ensures that all relevant voices are considered, including those indirectly affected by forestry policies, and that the analysis is comprehensive enough to account for the complex interplay of interests and influences in the sector.

It is crucial that the stakeholders within the project are representing the interests, roles, contributions of women and men, promoting equitable participation and sustainable forest management.

It should be also noted that sometimes stakeholders are marginalized people or groups that have little or no influence over decision-making processes. They tend to be ignored, misrepresented or underrepresented. Examples are women, IDPs, LGBTQI+ community, Persons with disabilities, ethnic/religious minorities, single/multiple child parents, etc. Marginalization may be related to a range of factors, including gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, remoteness, inaccessibility, political connections, culture and religion.

#### Protocol for Stakeholder Analysis and Identification

Assuming the above mentioned postulation, the following protocol ensues:

#	Task	Description
I.	<b>Identify key stakeholders, primary and secondary stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Key Stakeholders</b> - People, groups or institutions who can significantly influence and/or provide information on other community members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NGOs</li> <li>• Village Trustees</li> <li>• City Hall Employees</li> <li>• Private Sector</li> <li>• NFA regional representatives</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Primary Stakeholder</b> – Forest dependent communities, directly affected.</li> <li>• <b>Secondary Stakeholders</b> - Forest dependent communities, indirectly affected.</li> </ul>
II.	<b>Conduct internal desk study</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review stakeholders within NFA and MEPA.</li> <li>• Request stakeholder information from partner Gov. Agencies, NGOs (i.e. CENN, GIZ, GFA, etc.).</li> </ul>



III. <b>Initiate Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face-to-Face meetings with key stakeholders (NFA regional representatives)</li> <li>• Telephone conversation with key and primary stakeholders (NFA regional and central representatives).</li> <li>• Local communities seldom use e-mails. Utilize FB groups, phone calls, community leaders.</li> <li>• Classify stakeholders according to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NTFP use</li> <li>○ TFP use</li> <li>○ Husbandry and Farming</li> <li>○ Other</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Outcome:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of contacts and identified stakeholders</li> </ul>

**Commented [MU10]:** They are not listed above, under the key stakeholders

**Commented [MU11]:** So, you suggest three different classifications, if I understand correctly:  
1. Sectoral on p15 (communities, governmental, non-governmental, private sector ).  
2. Primary/secondary  
3. Forest use types

Probably will be helpful to come up with a chart/map/visualization to display an overall picture and also display interlinkages/overlaps among these different classifications

**Commented [Ma12R11]:** Annex added

## 2. Introductory Meeting for LAC creation

**Goal:** Inform the local representatives about the FMP objective and the process

**Duration:** 14 days

**Dependency:** List of contacts and identified stakeholders (Outcome of Activity 1 - [Stakeholder analysis and Identification](#))

After completing the stakeholder analysis and establishing key contact points, the next step is to organize an introductory meeting with municipal stakeholders. This meeting aims to inform local communities and city hall representatives about the upcoming Forest Management Plan (FMP) activities. It will also cover and lay foundation to the establishment of Local Advisory Councils (LACs), Ecosystem Services (ES) Mapping, and other related matters. The ultimate goal of this meeting is to encourage community involvement in the FMP process, commence the political process for establishing LACs and to gather valuable information about local forests.

The introductory meeting can be conducted at a national level, where the high level representatives from municipal city halls can be invited by NFA and MEPA. Possibly an outsourced company designated to develop an FMP can be invited as well. The goal of the meeting is to present the IPPA concept which considers a formalization of LACs in respective municipalities.

Two scenarios are considered: Where LAC creations are agreed upon with city hall mayors and the scenario where the LAC is not created – hence the city hall refuses to form such a group.

### Scenario 1 – LACs created and formalized based on national political dialogue

The establishment of Local Advisory Councils (LACs) is the result of a political agreement between the forestry agency and local self-government, rather than a byproduct of technical activities. To ensure that the process is conducted at the appropriate level, it is essential for senior representatives—such as a chief or deputy from the forestry agency—to engage directly with responsible parties. This process should be

elevated to the national level, with LACs being formed through high-level negotiations. Local representatives, and especially private companies, lack the authority to lead such political processes.

#### **Protocol for high-level negotiations on LAC creation.**

##### **Initiate High-Level Negotiations:**

- Begin by organizing a meeting between senior representatives from the National Forestry Agency (NFA) and high-ranking officials from local self-government bodies (City hall mayors and deputy mayors).
- Clearly outline the objectives IPPA concept, LACs, emphasizing their role in supporting sustainable forest management and community involvement.
- Secure political buy-in by discussing the benefits and strategic importance of LACs in achieving national forest management goals.

##### **Designate Lead Representatives:**

- Appoint senior officials to lead the discussions and act as primary contacts throughout the process.
- Identify responsible parties within local self-government who will represent their municipality in the formation of the LACs.
- Ensure that both parties have the authority to make decisions and commitments on behalf of their respective organizations.

##### **Define Roles and Responsibilities:**

- Establish a clear framework for the roles and responsibilities of both the NFA and local self-governments in the creation and operation of the LACs.
- Discuss and agree upon the composition, duties, and expectations of LAC members.
- Outline how the LACs will facilitate communication and cooperation between the forestry agency, local authorities, and community members.
- Present the LAC decree and initiate the signing of the document.

#### **Scenario 2 – LAC decree not signed by a city hall**

If an agreement cannot be reached, an alternative scenario will be activated. This scenario involves the simultaneous progression of both technical and political issues while redistributing competencies to informal initiative groups within the city hall. This approach ensures that key processes continue to move forward despite any stalemate in negotiations, empowering initiative groups to take a more active role in addressing the challenges at hand.

Hence, we offer an alternative protocol for informal LAC initiation:

#### **Protocol for Introductory Meeting**

#	Task	Description
I.	<b>Preparation and Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Scheduling:</b> Set a date and time that accommodates the majority of stakeholders. Schedule time for an individual meeting with the municipality Mayor.</li> <li>• <b>Venue Setup:</b> Arrange the room in a theatre-style format with officials and presenters at the front, and audience seating arranged in rows. Ensure that there is adequate space for public participation.</li> <li>• <b>Develop an Agenda and PPT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Agenda:</b> Develop a clear agenda outlining the topics to be discussed, including FMP activities, LAC establishment, ES Mapping (See Agenda variation on <b>Annex 1 – Introductory Meeting Agenda</b>).</li> <li>○ <b>Presentation:</b> Prepare a formal presentation of the FMP and relevant processes, LAC, Municipal forest boundaries. Ensure that the presentation is accessible and understandable for all stakeholders (See <b>PPT examples on Annex 2 – What is FMP and LACs</b>).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Contact Points:</b> Based on a list of contacts and identified stakeholders, establish contact points and communicate with all identified stakeholders before the meeting.</li> <li>• <b>Means of communication:</b> Telephone, regional employees, Facebook groups, local radio, local television, e-mail.</li> <li>• <b>Request contact points</b> to mobilize other stakeholders.</li> <li>• <b>Materials:</b> PPTs, printed information on FMP, LoP, markers and blackboard, Projector, Laptop, Microphones (As needed).</li> </ul>
II.	<b>Meeting with the Municipal Mayor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the process of FMP and the importance of the City Hall's involvement.</li> <li>• Agree on informal LAC formation. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Involvement of the Municipality in the FMP process</li> <li>2. Need of community engagement (City Hall Departments, Village Trustees, Local Communities)</li> <li>3. Agreement on LACs</li> <li>4. ES Mapping Mobilization</li> <li>5. Assistance and contact point designation from the City Hall for community engagement</li> </ol> </li> </ul>
III.	<b>Introductory Meeting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly explain the process for public participation in FMPs. Provide a designated microphone or area for speakers and enforce time limits to ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak.</li> <li>• Provide space for stakeholders discuss and identify forestry concerns that can be addressed.</li> <li>• Initial meetings may involve one-way communication from officials to the public. Plan for a structured approach to questions and responses.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mark all concerns and questions on sticker notes for visibility to the participants.</li> <li>• Agree on the creation of LAC and its participants.</li> <li>• Provide feedback to participants on how their input will be used and the next steps in the FMP process.</li> </ul>
IV.	<b>Post-Meeting Follow-Up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Documentation:</b> Record all questions, comments and discussion issues. Summarize key points and concerns raised during the meeting.</li> <li>• Use the meeting LoP as the basis for the next steps in the IPPA approach.</li> </ul>
	<b>Outcome</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of LAC agreed</li> <li>• Initial stakeholder group formed (LoP)</li> </ul>

### 3. Formation of LACs

**Goal:** Inform the local representatives about the FMP objective and the process

**Duration:** 20 days

**Dependency:** Creation of LAC agreed (Outcome of Activity 2 - [Introductory Meeting for LAC creation](#))

Local Advisory Councils, or LACs, will function as advisory bodies in the field of forestry and will be actively involved in community mobilization and involvement. Their goal is to serve as platforms for structured, ongoing dialogue between various stakeholders and decision-makers in the context of sustainable forest management and forest management planning and implementation.

Public mobilization requires resources. Designated personnel from NFA/MEPA will need to conduct numerous calls to gather local communities as well as city hall representatives. The circumstances are further more challenging due to the fact that the municipal staff have no official responsibility to attend FMP processes.

For such matters, a decree is developed, which institutionalizes the correspondence between NFA/MEPA and the municipal city halls. The decree (**See Annex 3 – LAC Decree**), signed by the mayor of a city hall, designates its staff to mobilize the community, participate in FMP processes as set out in Improved Public Participation Approach methodology (Figure 2) and request meetings with NFA as needed.

In particular:

- Facilitate coordination among stakeholders involved in forest management planning to enhance data collection, analysis, and the exchange of opinions.
- Promote public awareness and engagement throughout the Council's activities.
- The LAC will coordinate with the NFA through designated contact persons at the local, regional, and central levels.

The structure, functions, and decision-making mechanisms of the LAC:

### Structural Overview

The LAC is composed of representatives from local government. Its membership includes:

1. **Government Representatives:** The mayor, deputy mayor, and heads of key municipal services such as economic development and village administrative units.
2. **Community Representatives:** Members from local administrative units, ensuring grassroots participation.

The council operates under the direction of the mayor, who chairs the meetings, ensuring alignment with municipal strategies and priorities.

### Functions and Responsibilities

The LAC is designed to serve as a multi-functional body, with responsibilities that span stakeholder engagement, policy coordination, and public awareness regarding forest management planning and its implementation. Its key functions include:

1. **Facilitating Stakeholder Participation:** The LAC ensures that local stakeholders, including forest-dependent communities, are actively engaged in the planning and implementation of forest management strategies. It acts as a platform for dialogue and coordination among various actors.
2. **Coordination with the National Forestry Agency (NFA):** A central responsibility of the LAC is to collaborate with the NFA. This includes participation in forest management planning and providing feedback for refinement. Such coordination ensures that local insights inform national forest policies.
3. **Raising Public Awareness:** Transparency and public involvement are critical to the LAC's mandate. Through regular updates and consultations, the council fosters a culture of accountability and inclusiveness in forest governance.

### Decision-Making Mechanisms

The LAC employs structured decision-making processes to ensure effective governance:

1. **Regular Meetings:** The council convenes at least biannually, with provisions for extraordinary sessions. These meetings are chaired by the mayor or their delegate and are governed by predefined agendas.
2. **Thematic Working Groups:** To address specific challenges, the LAC can establish temporary working groups composed of experts and stakeholders. These groups focus on data collection, analysis, and the development of targeted solutions.
3. **Documentation and Voting:** Decisions are recorded in meeting minutes and require majority approval. In cases of tied votes, the chairperson's decision is final. Provisions for electronic meetings ensure operational continuity.

### Oversight and Accountability

The LAC is accountable to both local and national stakeholders:

- **Collaboration with the NFA:** Regular coordination with NFA representatives at local, regional, and central levels ensures alignment with national forest management goals.
- **Expert Consultations:** The LAC can invite technical experts, civil society representatives, and other stakeholders to provide inputs, ensuring comprehensive decision-making.
- **Transparent Communication:** Decisions and actions are communicated to all relevant parties, fostering trust and engagement.

#### Role as a Mediator

The LAC serves as a critical mediator among diverse stakeholders:

1. **Bridging Local and National Interests:** By integrating local knowledge with national policies, the LAC ensures that forest management strategies are both context-specific and aligned with broader goals.
2. **Promoting Inclusivity:** The council provides a platform for marginalized voices, including forest-dependent communities, ensuring that their concerns are addressed in policy development.
3. **Ensuring Flexibility:** Through thematic working groups and adaptive decision-making, the LAC remains responsive to emerging needs and challenges.

In future, the LAC can include:

- **Community Representatives:** Members from local administrative units, ensuring grassroots participation.
- **Technical and Civil Society Stakeholders:** Experts and NGOs are engaged on an ad hoc basis to provide specialized knowledge and advocacy support.

During the testing phases, the Local Advisory Councils (LACs) have emerged as a crucial element in enhancing public participation in Forest Management Planning (FMP) processes. They have demonstrated their effectiveness in resource conservation by streamlining the mobilization of local communities and involving City Hall representatives more effectively. LACs help alleviate the workload of the National Forestry Agency (NFA) and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) by decentralizing tasks and facilitating more direct interaction with local stakeholders. Additionally, LACs offer municipalities a valuable opportunity to engage more deeply and meaningfully in the FMP process, fostering better collaboration and more informed decision-making.

#### Incorporating Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Principles in the Creation of Local Advisory Councils (LACs)

The establishment of Local Advisory Councils (LACs) represents a critical step toward participatory forest management, where all stakeholders have a voice in decision-making processes. To ensure the creation of truly representative and inclusive LACs, it is essential to integrate gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) principles from the outset. These principles aim to address systemic inequalities, amplify

**Commented [MU13]:** But the current LACs are composed only by Municipal staff/trustees, are not they? So this picture is more an initial wish and maybe a future development, but does not reflect the actual reality of and after IPPA test, right? Somewhere needs to be clarified

**Commented [Ma14R13]:** Agreed. This model is deleted.

underrepresented voices, and create equitable opportunities for all, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups.

#### *Promoting Women's Participation in LACs*

Women in forest-dependent communities play a central role in resource use and conservation, yet they are often excluded from governance structures due to cultural norms, unequal power dynamics, and limited access to information. Including women in the formation and operation of LACs requires targeted interventions to overcome these barriers. Specific actions include:

**Setting Participation Quotas:** Establish minimum targets, such as 40% representation of women in LACs, to ensure their voices are systematically included.

**Creating Safe and Supportive Environments:** Conduct separate preparatory sessions or focus groups for women to encourage their participation in ways that respect cultural norms. Establishing safe spaces allows women to express their concerns, share their perspectives, and prepare for inclusive dialogue in mixed-gender platforms.

#### *Gender Equality in Decision-Making*

Gender equality must be embedded in the decision-making processes of LACs to ensure that decisions reflect the needs and priorities of both women and men. This includes:

**Ensuring Equal Voice:** Women's participation should go beyond numerical representation; it should focus on fostering meaningful involvement. Women should have equal opportunities to contribute to agenda-setting, decision-making, and leadership roles within the LACs. It is possible to provide women with online platforms to take part in decision making processes and meetings.

**Gender-Sensitive Facilitation:** LAC discussions should be facilitated in a manner that encourages women's participation, avoiding dominant voices or exclusionary practices. Facilitators should be trained to promote inclusive dialogue and recognize gendered power dynamics.

**Recognition of Women's Contributions:** Highlight and value women's knowledge, particularly in sustainable resource use, biodiversity conservation, and non-timber forest product management. Recognizing their expertise not only strengthens decision-making but also validates their role in forest governance.

#### *Social Inclusion as a Foundational Principle*

Social inclusion principles emphasize the need to involve diverse groups, including persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, youth, and individuals with diverse gender identities. Steps to operationalize social inclusion in the creation of LACs include:

**Identifying and Addressing Barriers:** Conduct initial gender and social analyses to identify the specific barriers that prevent marginalized groups from participating in LACs. Tailored interventions—such as accessible communication, financial support, or flexible meeting times—can address these challenges.

**Inclusive Communication Strategies:** Ensure that information about LAC formation and activities is disseminated in ways that are accessible to all groups, such as through visual aids, local languages, and alternative formats for persons with disabilities.

Equitable Representation: Encourage the participation of underrepresented groups by engaging with local leaders, NGOs, and community networks. Prioritize outreach to marginalized communities to ensure their perspectives are included in LAC discussions.

#### *The Benefits of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion*

Integrating gender equality and social inclusion principles in LAC formation enhances the legitimacy, transparency, and effectiveness of forest management processes. When women and marginalized groups are actively involved, decisions become more reflective of the diverse needs of the community, leading to more equitable and sustainable outcomes.

#### Protocol for LAC formation

#	Task	Description
I.	<b>LAC Decree Approval</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amend the LAC Decree to fit the municipal city hall information</li> <li>Send the decree to the city hall for further feedback (10 Days for approval)</li> <li>Municipal city hall signs the LAC Decree.</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Municipal LAC created.</li> </ul>

**Commented [MU15]:** I would also add "resources" column and/or highlight in the text the resources needed, including transportation and/or more human and time resources to cover villages

**Commented [Ma16R15]:** I think there is not much needed as a resource for the LAC to form. The process is carried out within the city hall.

#### 4. Design of Stakeholder Groups

**Goal:** Assemble Forest Dependent Stakeholders

**Duration:** 5 days

**Dependency:** LAC formation (Outcome of Activity 3 - [Formation of LACs](#)) and List of contacts and identified stakeholders (Outcome of Activity 1- [Stakeholder analysis and Identification](#))

It is essential to identify and categorize forest dependant stakeholders effectively. Stakeholders can be grouped in several ways, depending on their influence, involvement, or relationship to the forest resources.

#### Protocol for designing stakeholder groups

#	Task	Description
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I.	<b>Categorize Stakeholders by Influence</b>	<p>Stakeholders can be grouped based on their level of influence on the FMP, ranging from those with the highest impact to those with minimal influence. This method helps you prioritize who needs the most attention and involvement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary stakeholders: Directly impacted by or hold high influence over the FMP (e.g., TFP collectors, NFA Rangers, etc.).</li> <li>• Secondary stakeholders: Indirectly impacted or influential in the project.</li> <li>• Tertiary stakeholders: Potential influencers with expertise but less direct impact (e.g., forestry experts, NGOs).</li> <li>• Quaternary stakeholders: Minimal impact but potentially interested in the project's outcomes (e.g., media).</li> </ul>
II.	<b>Group Stakeholders by Interest or Involvement</b>	<p>To better manage stakeholders based on their level of involvement, you can classify them into three main categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-involvement stakeholders: Deeply interested and significantly impacted by the changes in the forest management.</li> <li>• Medium-involvement stakeholders: Moderately interested but less invested compared to high-involvement groups.</li> <li>• Low-involvement stakeholders: Little to no interest in the FMP and minimal effect on its success.</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder groups finalized and categorized.</li> </ul>

**Commented [MU17]:** I think we need to make sure that the methods, categories and classification here and above, in stakeholder identification step are synchronized

**Commented [Ma18R17]:** This step comes after the LAC is created. I also feel that this is the step that might be taken out by NFA as it is not a key activity and can be skipped.

Using these categories, it is possible to effectively map and prioritize forest dependent stakeholders for any meeting, desk work or workshop as envisaged in the FMP IPPA methodology. This will allow NFA and MEPA to focus engagement strategies on those who matter most to the FMP.

**Commented [MU19]:** Or effectively?

**Commented [Ma20R19]:** Typo

## 5. Awareness Campaign

Goal: Inform the public and stakeholder groups on the start of FMP process, its objective and potential for getting engaged in the process

Duration: 14 Days

Dependency: LAC formation (Outcome of Activity 3 - [Formation of LACs](#)) and Stakeholder groups finalized and categorized (Outcome of Activity 4 - [Design of Stakeholder Groups](#))

FMP (Forest Management Plan) awareness meetings are crucial because they inform stakeholders—such as local communities, government officials, and others about the objectives, benefits, and implementation process of forest management plans. These meetings ensure that stakeholders understand how sustainable forest management will impact their livelihoods, local ecosystems, biodiversity, and socio-economic development. Such transparency and proactive willingness to provide

information and listen to community feedback fosters transparency, participation, and collaboration, crucial for public participation in the FMP processes.

**The Importance of Inclusive Information Sharing and Addressing Regional-Specific Needs**

Ensuring equitable access to information for underrepresented groups is critical to fostering meaningful public participation in forest management processes. Historically, marginalized groups—such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and individuals with diverse gender identities—have faced systemic barriers to participation, including limited access to relevant information, lack of tailored communication channels, and exclusion from decision-making platforms. Addressing these challenges requires a targeted, inclusive approach to information dissemination that considers the specific needs and socio-cultural contexts of different regions.

Special importance must be given to underrepresented groups, as their exclusion often limits the development of holistic and sustainable forest management strategies. For example, women’s traditional knowledge of non-timber forest products, fuelwood use, and biodiversity conservation can significantly enhance planning and management processes. However, barriers such as literacy gaps, lack of access to technology, and cultural norms may prevent their engagement unless information is shared in accessible and culturally sensitive formats. Similarly, youth, who are critical for the future of forest governance, often lack opportunities to access and contribute to discussions due to generational hierarchies or poor outreach efforts.

Regional-specific needs must also be carefully considered. In areas with ethnically diverse populations, information-sharing initiatives should be conducted in multiple languages and dialects to ensure inclusivity. Regions with high levels of poverty or low literacy rates may require simplified, visual, or oral communication methods, such as community meetings, storytelling, and illustrative materials. Furthermore, the needs of persons with disabilities, such as hearing or visual impairments, must be addressed through tailored strategies, including sign language interpretation, braille documents, or accessible digital platforms.

The intersection of age, gender, disability, religion, ethnicity, or gender identity must also be acknowledged through an intersectional approach. For instance, women from ethnic minority groups or individuals with non-binary gender identities often face multiple layers of exclusion. Effective information-sharing processes must prioritize creating safe spaces for dialogue, where these groups feel empowered to express their needs and contribute their perspectives without fear of discrimination or bias. Recognizing regional cultural norms, including religious traditions, can further enhance trust and facilitate greater acceptance of forest management activities.

To implement these principles effectively, forest management actors—including the National Forest Agency (NFA), local advisory councils (LACs), and civil society organizations (CSOs)—must utilize diverse communication platforms tailored to the specific needs of each region. These include face-to-face meetings, radio broadcasts, visual aids, social media, and local language publications.

**Protocol for Awareness Campaign**

#	Task	Description
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I.	Identify Locations for Stakeholder Meetings  <i>Requirement:</i> Municipal city centre and at least 3 villages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform the Municipality Mayor of the start of the awareness campaign and request assistance in community mobilization and LAC.</li> <li>• In coordination with LAC, conduct a preliminary assessment of potential locations within the target area. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Criteria for village identification:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Population.</li> <li>▪ Vicinity to Forests.</li> <li>▪ "Regional centres".</li> <li>▪ Travel time.</li> <li>▪ Recommendations from City Halls and LACs.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ensure the meeting locations are accessible to all key stakeholders and have the necessary infrastructure for conducting meetings (e.g., seating, screen area for projectors, parking, etc.).</li> <li>• Consider community centers, municipal buildings, or other public venues that encourage participation.</li> </ul>
II.	Develop the Meeting Agenda and schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a village meeting schedule</li> <li>• Municipal City Centre Meeting Agenda sample, see Annex 4 – <b>Awareness Raising Agenda</b></li> <li>• Village Meeting discussion topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Community problems related to forest use</li> <li>○ What is FMP</li> <li>○ Importance of community involvement</li> <li>○ ES Mapping</li> <li>○ Formation of LACs and their role</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
III.	Mobilize Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activate LAC for stakeholder mobilization (Stakeholder groups as reference)</li> <li>• Create and distribute invitations to key stakeholders such as local government officials, community leaders, and other relevant groups.</li> <li>• Set up reminders and follow-ups through multiple channels (phone calls, emails) with LAC and other possible stakeholders to ensure maximum turnout.</li> <li>• Additionally, utilize <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Regional Facebook Groups - Generate Facebook Informational Posts</li> <li>○ Local TV Stations</li> <li>○ Local Radio Stations</li> <li>○ Local newspapers</li> <li>○ Leaflets</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
IV	Develop Informational Materials and Prepare Meeting Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Printed materials on:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What is FMP</li> <li>○ Importance of Public Participation</li> <li>○ LoP</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Equipment</b></li> </ul>

**Commented [MU21]:** Probably also consider paper based channels (local newspapers, leaflets etc), in many cases at local level, it is still the main source of information

**Commented [Ma22R21]:** Totally agree

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Laptop</li> <li>○ Projector for Presentations</li> <li>○ Sticker Notes</li> <li>○ Sticker Board</li> <li>○ Pens</li> <li>○ Papers / Notebooks</li> </ul>
V	Conduct the Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conduct the meetings with less technical language.</li> <li>● Facilitated dialogue among participants rather than a monologue.</li> <li>● Share local as well as international experiences.</li> <li>● Ask for other stakeholders to be present in future meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Kick off Meeting</li> <li>○ ES Mapping</li> <li>○ Other needs based meetings</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Outcome:</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Informed stakeholders on FMP processes, including the kick-off meeting, ES Mapping, LACs formation. More stakeholder groups are identified.</li> </ul>

## 6. Kick-Off Meeting

Goal: Officially kick-start the FMP process for entire municipality and inform the community on ES Mapping

Duration: 14 Days

Dependency: Awareness campaign (Outcome of Activity 5 – [Awareness Campaign](#))

During the kick-off meeting, the National Forestry Agency (NFA), along with MEPA and the company contracted to prepare the Forest Management Plan (FMP), will engage with the Local Advisory Council (LAC) and other community representatives to officially initiate the FMP process for the entire municipality. This meeting will serve as an introduction to the project's goals and activities, providing a platform for transparent communication between stakeholders. The contracted company will present **preliminary** forest maps, which will highlight key data on forest conditions, functional zones, and designated ecosystem services. Additionally, the meeting will outline the upcoming phases of the FMP process, ensuring that the community understands how their input and participation will shape sustainable forest management in the municipality.

Commented [MU23]: Along with MEPA too

It is important that the meeting already includes the forest baseline categorization maps as mentioned above, are essential tools used in forest management to provide an initial assessment and classification of forested areas based on various ecological, social, and economic criteria. These maps can serve as a reference point for the community understand the current state of a forest before implementing any management actions. They typically include data on:

1. Forest Condition: Information on the health, density, and composition of the forest (e.g., age of trees, species diversity, and areas of degradation).
2. Forest Functions and Zones: Identification of different functional zones within the forest, such as conservation areas, production forests, recreational zones, and protected wildlife habitats.
3. Ecosystem Services: Documentation of the services provided by the forest, such as carbon sequestration, water filtration, soil protection, and biodiversity conservation.
4. Land Use and Ownership: Delineation of land ownership and use patterns, which can include state-owned, community-managed, and privately-owned forests.

#### Protocol for a Kick-Off meeting

#	Task	Description
I.	Meeting preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In coordination with LAC, choose a convenient date and accessible venue for all stakeholders (e.g., municipal hall or community center). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Ensure the availability of equipment such as a projector, screen, microphones, and any materials for distribution (maps, brochures).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop an agenda that includes the review of FMP process and the presentation of the municipal forest maps.</li> </ul>
II	Invite Key Stakeholders and mobilize the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Send formal invitations to representatives from the Municipal city halls, the contracted company, Local Advisory Council (LAC) members, community leaders, and relevant NGOs.</li> <li>• In coordination with LAC, mobilize communities included in stakeholder groups. Also, utilize <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Regional Facebook Groups - Generate Facebook Informational Posts</li> <li>◦ Local TV Stations</li> <li>◦ Local Radio Stations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Consider sending reminders closer to the meeting date through various channels, preferably phone calls.</li> <li>• Consider organizing transportation to the venue for stakeholders and communities.</li> </ul>
III	Develop Informational Materials and Prepare Meeting Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Printed materials on:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ What is FMP</li> <li>◦ Importance of Public Participation</li> <li>◦ LoP</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Equipment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Laptop</li> <li>◦ Projector for Presentations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Commented [MU24]: Consider organizing transportation to the venue

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sticker Notes</li> <li>○ Sticker Board</li> <li>○ Pens</li> <li>○ Papers / Notebooks</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the contracted company to prepare the <b>preliminary forest maps</b> and the <b>forest baseline categorization maps</b> for presentation. These should include detailed data on forest conditions, zoning, ecosystem services, and land use patterns.</li> </ul>
IV	The Kick-Off Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Overview of the FMP Process</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Presentation by the NFA and the contracted company outlining the goals and key activities of the FMP.</li> <li>○ Highlight the timeline, phases of development, and the role of the community in shaping the plan.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Presentation of Preliminary Forest Maps and Baseline Data</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Detailed presentation of the preliminary forest maps by the contracted company.</li> <li>○ The maps should cover forest condition, functional zones, ecosystem services, and land use patterns.</li> <li>○ Allow time for questions and clarification from LAC members and community representatives.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Engaging the Local Community and Stakeholders</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Discuss how the Local Advisory Council (LAC) and community representatives will be involved in the FMP process</li> <li>○ Agree on the ES Mapping event.</li> <li>○ Outline the importance of community input in understanding forest usage, challenges, and opportunities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Outcome</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informed stakeholders on the FMP process, municipal maps, mapping on ecosystem services and their role.</li> </ul>

Effective public participation hinges on building trust between citizens and government officials. Trust, however, is not easily quantified or generalized across different situations. It requires attention to the contingent nature of knowledge, decentralization of responsibility, and the importance of interpersonal relationships. These elements are crucial in reconstructing the terms of participation and collaboration in the public discourse surrounding federal agency interactions.

### 5.1.3 Phase 2 Participation in field work for FMP

Duration: 4-7 months

#### 1. Participatory mapping of Ecosystem Services

Goal: Identify ecosystem services valued by the municipality communities and facilitate participation in the FMP process

Duration: 60 Days

Dependency: Kick-off meeting conducted (Outcome of the Phase 1, Activity 6 – [Kick off Meeting](#))

Evaluating ecosystem services (ES) is crucial for comprehending and overseeing the role these ecosystems play in enhancing the well-being of local communities. Although these communities are the main recipients of these services, their valuable insights, expertise, and information often go unnoticed in the process of Forest Management Plans.

Inclusion of local communities in participatory ES mapping can promote social learning but also lays the groundwork for establishing social capital. Additionally, it empowers the community with essential spatial information, enabling them to enhance the implementation of local Forest Management Plans (FMP). In summary, involving local perspectives not only enriches the ES assessment process but also contributes to the effective management of ecosystems for the overall benefit of the communities involved.

ES Mapping workshop can produce valuable information at low cost, especially when there is data scarcity, accessible for all users, including the NFA.

The workshop on participatory mapping of Forest Ecosystem Services comprises presentations on ES and its functions, group discussions, participatory mapping exercises, and interactive activities to engage participants.

List of participants include LACs, government agencies, local communities, NGOs, and experts and the stakeholder groups created at an earlier stage.

#### ES Mapping Protocol

- I. **Collection of General Municipal Information:** The initial step involves a comprehensive analysis of various studies and documents to identify critical data for securing ecosystem services. Basic

Commented [MU25]: Or rather implementation?

Commented [MU26]: Please, consider changing wording

Commented [MU27]: Why not to refer here also to the stakeholder groups to be created at an earlier stage?

mapping data will also be collected, including roads, rivers, settlements, forest streams, and watersheds. This information will culminate in the preparation of detailed maps, which will be subsequently handed over to the Local Advisory Councils (LACs) for further processing.

**II. Extensive Engagement with Local Advisory Councils (LACs):** Effective engagement with LACs is vital for ensuring thorough communication and information exchange. NFA's selected company should provide training on participatory mapping of forest ecosystem services to the LACs. This training will equip LAC members with the knowledge of the mapping framework and mechanisms. After training, LACs will take the maps into their communities to gather localized information based on the same participatory principles.

**III. Systematic analysis and digital conversion of the collected data:** Once the LACs have gathered data on forest ecosystem services from the local population, the contracted company will facilitate a follow-up meeting with the LACs. During this meeting, feedback on the data collection process will be discussed, and the maps of forest ecosystem services will be collected for digitization. This step ensures that local knowledge is accurately represented and incorporated into the data set.

**IV. Data Validation:** A thorough validation process will be conducted to verify the accuracy and reliability of the digitized data. This step is crucial to ensuring that the information collected reflects the true state of ecosystem services and can be confidently used in decision-making.

**V. Public hearing:** Following data validation, a public hearing will be organized to present the verified data to the community and facilitate a public discussion. This hearing aims to foster transparency, gather additional insights, and encourage community participation in decision-making regarding ecosystem services.

**VI. Incorporation of Validated Data into the Forest Management Plan:** Integration of the verified data into the forest management plan to enhance its effectiveness and relevance.

#	Task	Description
1	Define Objectives	Establish the main purpose of the ecosystem mapping, such as biodiversity assessment, resource management, or conservation planning. Clear objectives guide the selection of appropriate methods and data collection.
2	Identify Ecosystem Boundaries	Determine the geographical area to be mapped. Define clear spatial boundaries, considering natural features such as watersheds, vegetation zones, or administrative borders.
3	Review Existing Data	Collect and analyze available data, including topographic maps, satellite imagery, land use data, and previous ecological studies. This helps understand current conditions and identify data gaps.
4	Select Mapping Methods	Choose appropriate mapping techniques based on the ecosystem type and objectives. These may include field surveys, remote sensing (e.g., GIS, aerial photography), or a combination of both.



5	Classify Ecosystems	Develop a classification system for different ecosystem types present within the mapping area (e.g., forests, wetlands, grasslands). This system should be based on vegetation types, soil conditions, and other relevant factors.
6	Stakeholder Involvement	Engage local communities, landowners, and other stakeholders. Their input can provide critical insights into the ecosystem's history, usage, and current issues. The stakeholder involvement should include LAC training on mapping as well.
7	Data Integration and Analysis	Compile and integrate field data, satellite imagery, and any existing information into a geographic information system (GIS). Analyze the spatial relationships, patterns, and trends within the ecosystem.
8	Produce Ecosystem Maps	Create detailed maps representing different ecosystem types, habitat conditions, and land uses. Ensure maps are accurate, easy to interpret, and appropriately scaled for the intended use.
9	Validation and Ground-Truthing	NFA/Company should validate the ecosystem maps through additional field surveys to ensure accuracy. Ground-truthing involves comparing mapped data with real-world conditions to correct any discrepancies. It could be carried out during the inventory process.
10	Reporting and Documentation	Prepare comprehensive reports detailing the mapping process, methodologies, and findings. Include descriptions of ecosystem types, species distributions, and any identified threats or conservation priorities.
11	Develop Management Recommendations	Based on the mapping results, propose management or conservation actions. Recommendations may include protection measures, restoration activities, or sustainable use strategies.
12	Monitor and Update Maps	Establish a monitoring plan to track changes in the ecosystem over time. Regularly update maps and data to reflect new developments or environmental changes.
<i>It is better to initiate the tasks (№1-6) before the meetings. This will facilitate the quick and accurate extraction of information from local groups and stakeholders.</i>		
<i>Once the preliminary maps and methods are selected, they are presented.</i>		
<i>The meeting should be organized by the company hired by NFA, conducting the forest inventory processes. Afterward, the LAC should take the maps, process them independently, and then deliver them back to the company.</i>		

Commented [MU29R28]: Correction: I saw LACs' to be learning the techniques is mentioned below, but probably to be included here too as a step

Commented [MU28]: I think this is the most crucial step in entire chain, when the actual participatory mapping is happening, probably to be highlighted. Besides, I suggest, to also add a step/task on training LACs on FES mapping, since IPPA forested them as multipliers in FES context, no?

Commented [MU30]: Is the company meant here, conducting the forest inventory?

Commented [Ma31R30]: Correct, sentence changed.

Commented [MU32]: Is the mapping company same as the company hired by the NFA for the field work?

Commented [Ma33R32]: Yes, sentence improved.

The involvement of local services and municipal administrations within the National Forestry Agency (NFA) is essential for mobilizing human resources and ensuring active regional participation. It is of utmost importance to appoint a skilled field specialist to act as a facilitator (an NFA or a MEPA employee) throughout the process until the Forest Management Plan (FMP) is finalized. This facilitator will be responsible for moderating meetings, facilitating agreements, supporting documentation efforts, and leading stakeholder mapping and analysis.

Additionally, the selected company should play an active role not only in conducting the forest inventory but also in contributing to each stage of the FMP process. This collaborative approach will ensure that the company's expertise is fully leveraged, fostering effective and sustainable forest management practices.

For detailed ES mapping protocol, see **Annex X – ES Mapping Analysis**.

After data collection, systematic analysis and digital conversion of the collected data must be conducted, accompanied by feedback sessions with LACs to ensure accuracy and relevance. The digitized data should undergo validation to verify its accuracy and reliability. A public hearing will then be conducted to present the verified data, facilitating community discussions and promoting collaborative decision-making.

Finally, the validated data will be incorporated into the forest management plan, enhancing its effectiveness and relevance. Overall, this protocol fosters community involvement, promotes data-driven decision-making, and ensures transparency in forest management practices, ultimately contributing to sustainable ecosystem management.

**Commented [MU34]:** Overall I have an impression that we need clearer overview of the roles and responsibilities to include here or as a separate sub-chapter, maybe an overview table, what do you think?

**Commented [Ma35R34]:** Agreed.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **National Forestry Agency:**

- The National Forestry Agency issues a tender for the implementation of a forest management plan for a specific municipality.
- The winning contractor company receives printed maps of the forest areas in the designated municipality and is connected with the Local Advisory Committees (LACs).
- The National Forestry Agency reviews the forest management plan submitted by the contractor company.
- A public discussion is held regarding the proposed forest management plan.
- The forest management plan is officially adopted.

#### **Contractor Company:**

- Once the National Forestry Agency delivers the maps, the contractor company organizes training sessions with the Local Advisory Committees (LACs) on how to incorporate forest ecosystem services into the maps.
- The contractor company distributes the maps to the LACs, allowing them a specific timeframe to complete the task.
- Upon receiving the completed maps, the contractor company begins the process of digitizing the data.
- Field validation of the digitized data to ensure its accuracy.
- Incorporation of verified data into the forest management plan.

#### **LACs:**

- Training on understanding forest ecosystem services and integrating them into mapping processes.
- Engaging with local communities to verify the accuracy and correct placement of information on the maps.
- Transferring the finalized results to the private contractor.
- Maintaining ongoing communication with the National Forestry Agency and the contractor.

- Attending and contributing to public discussions to enhance community engagement and mobilization.

### Techniques for Working on the Map:

Before meeting with the Local Advisory Councils (LACs), a **baseline** map of the municipality undergoing forest management planning should be prepared. Depending on the municipality's size and the number of LAC representatives involved, this map should be divided into manageable sections. Each section should be equipped with essential tools to facilitate accurate and effective mapping. These tools include:

1. **Title:** Clearly indicates the purpose and subject of the map.
2. **Legend (Key):** Explains the symbols, colors, and markings used on the map, making it easy to interpret.
3. **Scale:** Provides the ratio between distances on the map and real-world distances, ensuring accurate measurements.
4. **Orientation:** A compass rose that shows directions (N, S, E, W), aiding in map orientation.
5. **Labels:** Clear names for key locations, features, and landmarks to enhance understanding.
6. **Grid:** A coordinate system (such as latitude and longitude) for precise location identification.
7. **Color Coding:** Uses various colors to distinguish between different features like terrain types, water bodies, and urban areas.
8. **Inset Maps:** Smaller, detailed maps for specific areas of interest or added context.
9. **List of Ecosystem Services with Numbering:** A catalog of ecosystem services that corresponds to unique numbers on the map.
10. **Special Workspace (Optional):** An area designated for map users to make notes or modifications, as needed.

The LAC members will learn ecosystem service mapping techniques that they will later teach to local residents. For example, when marking ecosystem services on the map, LAC members will refer to the numbered list of ecosystem services:

- **Point:** If marking a specific feature (e.g., a water source), they will place a point and assign the relevant number.
- **Polygon:** For area-based features (e.g., pastures), they will draw a boundary around the region and label it with the corresponding number.
- **Line:** For linear features (e.g., trails), they will draw a line along the route and add the appropriate number.

If a particular ecosystem service is not included in the pre-defined list, there is a designated space on the map for additional notes. Here, LAC members can describe the service, assign it a new number, and provide a brief explanation.

The maps should be distributed to all participating LAC members and be available for each village, showing the areas surrounding these communities. Ideally, the maps will be printed in **A3 format** for ease of use and portability during fieldwork and community consultations.

### **Role of the private company in carrying out the ES Mapping process**

Based on the above listed protocols and technical components of the ES mapping, the following step-wise process can be carried out by NFA's outsourced company which is developing an FMP.

1. Information Pre-Processing:
  - MEPA conducts a desk study to pre-process relevant information and compiles this data into maps. The desk study includes interagency (NFA, NAPR, NEA, etc.) baseline data analysis of ecosystem services on the national level.
2. Map Distribution and Training:
  - MEPA transfers the maps to the company, which then provides printed copies to Local Advisory Council (LAC) members and village trustees.
  - The company conducts training sessions for LAC members, equipping them with the skills needed to understand and utilize the maps effectively.
3. Local-Level Meetings and Feedback Collection:
  - LAC members and community trustees organize meetings within their local communities to discuss the maps and gather feedback.
  - This feedback is then relayed to the company for further analysis and validation.
4. Information Validation and Feedback:
  - The company validates the information gathered during fieldwork and provides the validated data back to the LAC.
  - LAC members share the validated information (as reflected in FMP) with community stakeholders to ensure transparency and local engagement.

### **Summary of the framework mechanism of the ES Mapping Protocol:**

The "**ES Mapping Protocol**" outlines a comprehensive approach to integrating ecosystem services into forest management. It begins with the collection of essential municipal information through the analysis of various studies and documents to identify key data for securing ecosystem services. Basic mapping data, such as roads, rivers, settlements, and watersheds, will also be gathered, followed by the preparation of detailed maps for the Local Advisory Councils (LACs).

The protocol emphasizes extensive engagement with LACs to ensure robust communication and the refinement of insights. Training sessions on participatory mapping of forest ecosystem services will be provided by the selected company, enabling LACs to learn the mapping framework and subsequently gather information from local populations.

## 2. Facilitated focus group workshops and discussion

Goal: Present the ES Mapping results to the LACs, gather additional local knowledge and document potential forest use conflicts and economic opportunities

Duration: 30 Days

Dependency: ES Mapping (Phase 2, Activity 1 – [Participatory mapping of Ecosystem Services](#))

Based on the results and analysis of the Ecosystem Services (ES) Mapping, it is essential to present and discuss the findings with relevant stakeholders. This discussion should focus on the implications of the ES Mapping for Forest Management Plans (FMP), including potential conflicts over resource use. Engaging stakeholders in this process will allow for a comprehensive understanding of the trade-offs between different land uses and ecosystem services. Collecting their perspectives and feedback is crucial for ensuring that the FMP reflects the needs and priorities of local communities, environmental conservation, and sustainable development.

### Protocol for facilitated focus group workshop and discussion

Commented [MU36]: Carried out by whom?

Lead: NFA

#	Task	Description
I	Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using GIS, Google Earth, or other programme being used, clearly visualize the ES Mapping data using maps, charts, and infographics to make the findings accessible and understandable to a diverse audience<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Ensure that the analysis highlights key ecosystem services, their current state, and areas where conflicts may arise.</li></ul></li><li>• Mobilize LAC.</li><li>• Book the venue.</li><li>• <b>Equipment</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Laptop</li><li>○ Projector for Presentations</li><li>○ Sticker Notes</li><li>○ Sticker Board</li><li>○ Pens</li><li>○ Papers / Notebooks</li></ul></li></ul>
II.	Facilitated workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outline the major findings, focusing on how they relate to existing or potential forest management practices and local land use.</li><li>• Address any anticipated or identified conflicts over resource use, and propose initial ideas for mitigating such conflicts.</li><li>• Facilitate an open discussion by inviting stakeholders to share their insights and concerns.</li><li>• Highlight how the insights from the ES Mapping can inform the revision or development of Forest Management Plans. Focus on</li></ul>

		balancing the protection of ecosystem services with sustainable economic activities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage stakeholders to provide input on potential solutions for managing or resolving usage conflicts, fostering a collaborative approach to decision-making.</li> </ul>
III	ES Map Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate the updated results into the maps.</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LACs informed about the results of the ES Mapping; ES Maps updated.</li> </ul>

### 3. [FMP field work results workshop](#)

**Goal:** Present and discuss the results of the field work and its implications for SFM and the potential usage conflicts and presentation of next steps for FMP development.

**Duration:** 30 Days

**Dependency:** Facilitated focus group workshops and discussion conducted (Outcome of Phase 2, [Activity 2 - Facilitated focus group workshops and discussion](#))

**Lead:** NFA/Company

The fieldwork findings provide essential insights into forest conditions, biodiversity, resource availability, and land use patterns, all of which directly influence how forests should be managed moving forward.

This discussion will serve as an opportunity to not only present the outcomes of the fieldwork but also to reflect on how these results can inform the principles of SFM—ensuring the sustainable utilization of forest resources while maintaining the health of ecosystems. Potential conflicts between different land uses, such as conservation, logging, tourism, and community resource use, will be highlighted, and stakeholders will be invited to provide feedback and recommendations.

In addition, the session will outline the next steps in the development of Forest Management Plans (FMP). This will include a roadmap for integrating fieldwork data into FMP processes, timelines for consultation and revision, and strategies to ensure that all stakeholders are actively engaged in co-developing the plans.

#### Protocol for FMP field work results workshop

#	Task	Description
I	Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compile and organize the fieldwork data in a clear, visual format (maps, charts, graphs) to make it easy to understand for all participants.</li> <li>• Emphasize the key findings related to forest health, biodiversity, ecosystem services, and human activities in the region.</li> <li>• Ensure that any technical data is explained in a way that is understandable for non-expert stakeholders.</li> <li>• Mobilize LAC.</li> <li>• Book the venue.</li> </ul>

**Commented [MU37]:** Carried out by whom? NFA or the company or together?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Equipment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Laptop</li> <li>○ Projector for Presentations</li> <li>○ Sticker Notes</li> <li>○ Sticker Board</li> <li>○ Pens</li> <li>○ Papers / Notebooks</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
II	FMP field work results workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify areas of potential conflict—whether between different land uses or between stakeholders—and provide data-driven insights into how these conflicts might impact long-term forest sustainability.</li> <li>• Offer initial ideas or frameworks for conflict resolution based on best practices in participatory forest governance.</li> <li>• Open the floor for stakeholders to share their thoughts, concerns, and recommendations.</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome</b>		Field work results presented to LACs, feedback collected.

#### 5.1.4 Phase 3: Participation in FMP development and approval

Duration: 3 months

##### 1. Intragovernmental agreement on forest boundaries is achieved at national as well as local level

Goal: Achieve a consensus on forest boundaries to support effective management and explore certification opportunities.

Duration: 10 Days

##### **Dependency:**

Collaboration and engagement among governmental agencies and stakeholders.

In this phase, the objective is to establish a clear and unified agreement among various governmental agencies, at both national and local levels, regarding the precise boundaries of forest areas. Achieving this consensus is essential for effective forest management, as it defines jurisdiction, responsibility, and the legal status of forest lands. This agreement requires extensive collaboration, data sharing, and mapping exercises to ensure that all stakeholders have a shared understanding of the boundaries and their implications.

While current forest management plans may not explicitly include certification as a requirement, it is important to recognize the broader perspective that the Forest Management Plan (FMP) offers. The FMP is not solely a document addressing challenges in forest management; it also serves as a strategic blueprint for unlocking economic opportunities within forested areas. By raising the topic of forest certification, there is an opportunity to envision how future FMPs could integrate this essential aspect.

Introducing certification into the FMP framework would not only align forest management practices with sustainable development goals but would also provide a strong incentive for conservation efforts.

Certification can promote responsible harvesting practices, enhance the marketability of forest products, and ultimately support the sustainable use of forest resources. Furthermore, including certification in future management plans would encourage more effective forest zoning, ensuring that diverse land uses are compatible with conservation objectives. This proactive approach to integrating certification can foster a balanced relationship between economic growth and environmental stewardship, benefiting both communities that rely on these resources and the ecosystems that sustain them.

### **Forest Categorization**

Incorporating structured forest categorization into Forest Management Plans (FMPs) is essential for achieving sustainable land use by designating areas for specific purposes such as recreation, conservation, and timber production. Addressing intersectoral issues and aligning the interests of various sectors, categorization helps minimize conflicts over land use and fosters coexistence among different activities. National-level parameters provide a consistent framework across regions, promoting uniformity in forest management while allowing for local adaptability. This flexibility ensures that forest management practices reflect each area's unique ecological, social, and economic contexts, enhancing relevance and effectiveness.

Establishing parameters for recreational forests involves a structured approach that addresses both national guidelines and local-specific considerations. This process can be divided into two key components:

#### **1. Setting National-Level Parameters for Recreational Forests:**

- Develop general guidelines that apply across the country, especially for aspects not directly defined by legislation. This includes parameters such as designated recreational zones based on proximity to settlements, accessibility, and potential usage types. These national parameters provide a unified framework to ensure consistency in recreational forest zoning.

#### **2. Resolving Local Intersectoral Issues for Specific Forest Areas:**

- During the forest inventory process, address intersectoral issues specific to each forest area. This step involves collaboration across sectors, such as tourism, conservation, and local development, to identify and resolve any conflicts or needs that arise. By tailoring solutions to local conditions, this approach ensures that zoning decisions align with the unique ecological and social requirements of each area.

#### **2. Facilitated consultation focus group discussions with stakeholder groups on final draft of FMP**

**Goal:** Present and discuss the final FMP draft and its implications for SFM and the potential usage conflicts. Collect stakeholder views and inputs. Identify local initiatives for joint SFM between NFA and local stakeholders and agree on possible support mechanisms. Check if agreements in FMP are reflected and if no, why. Reach agreement on final draft of FMP with respective stakeholder groups and document final decisions and disagreements

**Duration:** 30 Days



**Dependency:** Field work results presented to LACs, feedback collected (Outcome of Phase 2-[Activity 3](#) and Phase 3-[Activity 1](#))

**Lead:** NFA

The goal of this session is to present and discuss the final draft of the Forest Management Plan (FMP) and its implications for local stakeholders in the municipality, identify potential usage conflicts, and finalize the plan through consensus-building with stakeholders. The final draft should reach an agreement with the stakeholders, and all decisions and unresolved issues should be documented for transparency and accountability.

**Protocol for facilitated consultation focus group discussions with stakeholder groups on final draft of FMP**

Commented [MU38]: The same question, by whom?

#	Task	Description
I	Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Summarize Key Components:</b> Prepare a comprehensive summary of the final FMP draft, highlighting the main objectives, management practices, and anticipated outcomes in terms of sustainable forest management.</li> <li>• <b>Visualization of Data:</b> Use maps, charts, and infographics to make the technical aspects of the FMP easily understandable, particularly around areas of <b>land use, resource allocation, and ecosystem services</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Provide Copies: 10 days prior</b>, ensure that all stakeholders, including LACs, have access to the FMP draft in advance, along with a <b>summary of the changes made since the previous consultations</b>.</li> <li>• Mobilize LAC and book the venue</li> <li>• <b>Equipment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Laptop</li> <li>○ Projector for Presentations</li> <li>○ Sticker Notes</li> <li>○ Sticker Board</li> <li>○ Pens</li> <li>○ Papers / Notebooks</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
II	The meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Open Discussion:</b> Encourage an open, structured discussion where stakeholders can express their views on the final draft. Provide time for each group (community members, private sector representatives, NGOs, etc.) to present their concerns or approvals.</li> <li>• <b>Facilitate Dialogue:</b> Facilitate a balanced dialogue, ensuring all stakeholders feel heard and that feedback is documented. Use participatory techniques such as roundtables or breakout sessions to manage input from larger groups.</li> <li>• <b>Focus on Usage Conflicts:</b> Pay special attention to usage conflicts—identify areas where stakeholder priorities may clash (e.g., between</li> </ul>

	commercial use and conservation) and work towards finding common ground or compromises.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Document all feedback.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Outcome</b>	Documented feedback on final FMP draft

### 3. FMP disclosure (5 days) and opportunity for commenting and processing of comments (40 days)

**Goal:** Disclosure of the FMP to the designated municipality stakeholders for additional commenting

Commented [MU39]: By MEPA, right?

**Duration:** 40 Days

**Dependency:** Documented feedback on final FMP draft (Outcome of the Phase 3 – [Activity 2](#))

**Lead:** MEPA

Based on the feedback gathered during previous events, the Forest Management Plan (FMP) document should be revised to incorporate stakeholder recommendations and insights. Following these revisions, it is essential to disclose the updated FMP to the designated municipal stakeholders for an additional round of commenting and input. This will ensure that the final version reflects the diverse interests of all stakeholders and addresses any outstanding concerns.

To facilitate this process, it is crucial to mobilize the Local Advisory Councils (LACs) and provide them with an electronic summary of the revised FMP. The summary should clearly outline the key land-use functions, forest categories, and their implications for the local population (e.g., grazing versus conservation, timber harvesting versus ecosystem protection). This will ensure that the local communities fully understand the direct impact of the FMP on their livelihoods, enabling them to provide informed feedback.

#### Protocol for FMP disclosure for commenting and comments processing

#	Task	Description
1	<b>Revision of the FMP Document</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Incorporate Stakeholder Feedback:</b> Carefully review all feedback from previous events and consultations, ensuring that key points, concerns, and recommendations are integrated into the revised FMP. This should include technical adjustments, stakeholder requests, and any compromises made to resolve conflicts.</li> <li>• <b>Clarify Key Changes:</b> Document the changes made and be transparent about which stakeholder inputs have been incorporated and why. For inputs that were not included, provide a clear rationale.</li> <li>• <b>Key Elements to Include:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Land Use Functions:</b> Provide a clear breakdown of the designated land use functions within the forest (e.g., timber production, conservation, recreation) and how they are distributed across different areas.</li> <li>○ <b>Forest Categories:</b> Clearly categorize forest areas (e.g., protection forests, production forests, recreational areas) and describe the management objectives for each category.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Implications for Local Communities:</b> Explain the practical implications for local populations. This may include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Grazing vs. Conservation:</b> Clarify where grazing is permitted or restricted and the rationale behind these decisions.</li> <li>2. <b>Timber Harvesting vs. Ecosystem Protection:</b> Explain the balance between economic activities like timber harvesting and the protection of vital ecosystems.</li> <li>3. <b>Tourism and Recreation:</b> Highlight areas designated for tourism and recreational development and the potential opportunities for local economic growth.</li> </ol> </li> <li>○ <b>Visuals and Accessibility:</b> Include maps, diagrams, and charts to make the document visually engaging and easier to understand for non-technical stakeholders. Ensure that the language is accessible and free from jargon.</li> </ul>
II	<b>Mobilization of Local Advisory Councils (LACs)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach out to LAC members well in advance, informing them of the upcoming disclosure process and the importance of their role in reviewing the revised FMP.</li> <li>• Distribute the electronic summary of the revised FMP to all LAC members. Ensure that it is sent through accessible channels, such as email, messaging apps, or local government platforms.</li> <li>• Encourage LACs to distribute the summary to wider local communities and stakeholder groups, ensuring a broad base of participation in the feedback process. Utilize municipal Facebook groups and local news stations to spread the word.</li> <li>• Provide 40 days for feedback.</li> </ul>
III	<b>Document Final Changes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate final revisions into the FMP based on stakeholder comments. Document all changes transparently and explain any decisions to either accept or reject feedback.</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome</b>		Final FMP draft developed

#### 4. Public Hearing on final FMP

Goal: Officially present the final FMP draft to general public in the municipality

Duration: 20 Days

Dependency: Final FMP draft developed (Outcome of Phase 3 – [Activity 3](#))

Following the previously mentioned activities, it is crucial to organize a public hearing to present the final Forest Management Plan (FMP) to all relevant stakeholders. This event serves as a platform for transparent communication and accountability, allowing stakeholders to review the final FMP and ensuring broad public awareness and participation.

To ensure the success of this public hearing, the Local Advisory Councils (LACs) must be actively mobilized, and calls and emails should be sent to all key stakeholders, including those from stakeholder groups, civil society organizations, and relevant NGOs. Media outlets should also be engaged to promote the event and raise public awareness about the FMP and its importance for sustainable forest management.

During the public hearing, it is essential to provide clear and accessible information on grievance mechanisms so that stakeholders understand how they can formally raise concerns, submit feedback, or seek redress regarding any issues related to the FMP.

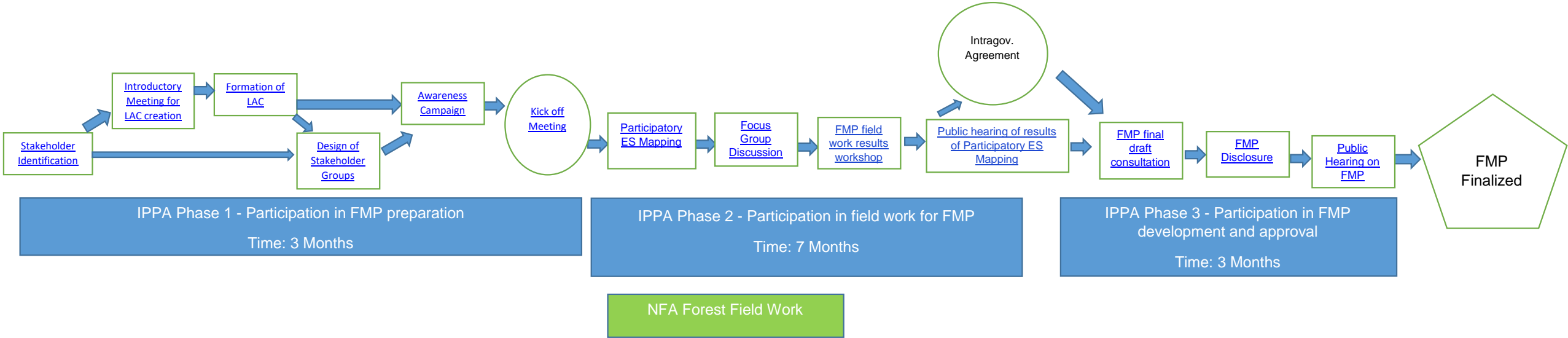
#### Protocol for FMP public hearing

#	Task	Description
I	<b>Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Choose an Accessible Venue:</b> Select a venue that is easily accessible for all stakeholders, including community members, government representatives, NGOs, and private sector actors. If the hearing will be virtual, ensure that all participants have access to the necessary technology.</li> <li>• <b>Set a Convenient Time:</b> Schedule the hearing at a time that is convenient for most stakeholders, considering local work schedules and availability to ensure maximum participation. It is recommended to conduct such a hearing during a weekend (Saturday or Sunday).</li> <li>• <b>Prepare Presentation Materials:</b> Develop clear and concise presentation materials, including an overview of the FMP, key objectives, forest land-use categories, and any final revisions. Use visual aids such as maps, diagrams, and infographics to help attendees understand complex information.</li> <li>• <b>Engage LACs Early:</b> Contact LAC members early in the planning process to ensure they are fully informed and engaged. Encourage them to take an active role in mobilizing their communities and informing relevant stakeholders about the upcoming public hearing.</li> <li>• <b>Distribute Materials:</b> Provide LACs with electronic and/or physical copies of the final FMP summary, including the key changes, land use categories, and its implications for local populations (grazing, conservation, tourism, etc.). Ensure that these materials are shared with the broader community before the hearing.</li> <li>• <b>Incentivize Participation:</b> Encourage LACs to promote the public hearing through word-of-mouth, local meetings, and digital communication channels. Emphasize the importance of community participation in shaping sustainable forest management practices.</li> <li>• <b>Outreach</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <b>Send Invitations:</b> Create a comprehensive stakeholder list, including local communities, government agencies, civil society organizations, academic institutions,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

		<p>private companies, and international partners. Send official invitations via email, phone calls, and social media channels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <b>Engage NGOs:</b> Reach out to relevant NGOs, especially those working in environmental conservation, forest management, and community development, and ask for their support in promoting the public hearing.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Media Engagement:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Press Releases:</b> Draft and distribute press releases to local and regional media outlets, providing key details about the public hearing and why it matters. Highlight the FMP's impact on sustainable forest management and local livelihoods.</li> <li>• <b>Social Media Campaigns:</b> Leverage social media platforms to spread the word. Create event pages, use relevant hashtags, and encourage stakeholders to share posts about the hearing to reach a broader audience.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
II	<b>Conducting the Public Hearing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Opening Remarks:</b> Begin the hearing with opening remarks by key officials (e.g., representatives from the NFA, local government, or LACs) to establish the importance of the event and its role in finalizing the FMP.</li> <li>• <b>Present the Final FMP:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Provide a detailed presentation of the final FMP, emphasizing key land-use functions, forest categories, and how these decisions were made based on previous consultations and feedback.</li> <li>o Explain how the FMP balances conservation, resource use, community needs, and sustainable development goals.</li> <li>o Highlight any potential usage conflicts (e.g., grazing vs. conservation) and how these have been addressed or mitigated in the final plan.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Provide Grievance Mechanisms Information:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Explain the grievance mechanisms that are in place to address stakeholder concerns or complaints related to the FMP. This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Formal Complaint Procedures:</b> Explain the process for submitting formal complaints or feedback, including deadlines, contact points, and responsible authorities.</li> <li>▪ <b>Ongoing Monitoring and Redress:</b> Discuss mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the FMP and resolving conflicts that may arise during its execution.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ensure that stakeholders understand how to access these mechanisms and the type of support available to them in case they wish to lodge a grievance.</li> <li>• <b>Facilitating Stakeholder Input and Dialogue:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Encourage Open Discussion:</b> After the presentation, open the floor for questions, comments, and discussions. Allow time for stakeholders to share their views, ask clarifying questions, or raise concerns.</li> <li>• <b>Focus on Remaining Concerns:</b> If any issues or concerns are raised during the hearing, ensure that they are addressed or documented for further review.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Post-hearing activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Summarize Outcomes:</b> After the public hearing, prepare a summary of the key outcomes (on sticker boards, PPT or blackboard), including any final decisions, agreements, and unresolved issues. Distribute or present the summary to all attendees and make it publicly available.</li> <li>• <b>Final FMP Adjustments (if needed):</b> If new concerns or critical feedback arise during the public hearing, ensure that these are reviewed and addressed before the FMP is finalized.</li> <li>• <b>Ongoing Communication:</b> Inform the stakeholders about the next steps in the FMP process, including its official adoption and implementation timeline. Maintain open channels of communication for any future inquiries or grievances.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Outcome:		FMP public hearing conducted and FMP finalized

5.2 IPPA FMP Methodology Flowchart



## 6. Required Resources and Necessary Capacity Building

To enhance public participation effectively, three key components are necessary: a) diverse engagement formats, b) adequate human and financial resources, and c) capacity building for stakeholders. Here's a detailed breakdown:

1. **Human Resources:** Local National Forestry Agency (NFA) offices and municipal administrations need to be actively involved. They must allocate time to prepare processes, organize formats, and encourage stakeholder participation. While both NFA and Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) staff possess facilitation skills, it is crucial that facilitators not only guide discussions but also ensure community feedback is integrated into decision-making.

**Specifically, NFA staff may include:**

- **NFA personnel/facilitator** will be essential to lead and facilitate the various stages of the IPPA. Key roles include:
  - **Forest managers and planners** to lead the FMP preparation and fieldwork.
  - **Public participation specialists** to coordinate stakeholder engagement.
  - **GIS experts** to manage spatial data and ecosystem service mapping.
  - **Liaison officers** to coordinate between NFA, Local Advisory Councils (LACs), and other stakeholders.
  - **Personnel** to work with local communities and ensure active engagement throughout the IPPA process.
- 2. **Financial Resources:** Adequate funding is essential for organizing participatory processes, covering administrative costs, logistics, and enabling wider stakeholder involvement.
- 3. **Capacity Development:** Stakeholders, including community members and local officials, must be equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to engage meaningfully in the processes, which may require targeted training programs.

### Logistics:

The required **technical resources** for implementing the formats are minimal. Each municipality or local NFA branch has own venues (city hall, concert hall, meeting rooms, community centers etc.) to host public hearing, kick-off meetings or focus group discussions. Stakeholder focus group discussions can alternatively also be held in forest areas itself or in local villages, depending on topic or group. Depending on format, costs for catering or conference technology might occur.

Other necessary resources include:

- **Printed Materials:** Brochures, handouts, and maps for public meetings and consultations, including summaries of the FMP, land-use plans, and key ecosystem service data.



- **Transport for Fieldwork:** Vehicles and fuel for field teams conducting participatory mapping, field data collection, and public meetings in remote areas.
- **Translation and Interpretation Services (needs based):** Ensuring all materials are accessible in local languages, and interpretation is available during public hearings if needed.

## 7. Legislation

### International Obligations

When discussing Georgia's obligations related to forest management, it is essential to highlight its commitments under various international conventions. A notable agreement is the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**, which Georgia ratified in 1994 through parliamentary approval. In 2004, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention developed the **Extended Program of Work for the Conservation of Forest Biodiversity**. This program mandates that parties, including Georgia, develop and implement local forest management systems aimed at protecting and conserving forest biodiversity.

In addition to the CBD, Georgia has committed to several other international agreements focused on environmental protection, including the **Bern Convention**, the **Ramsar Convention**, the **European Forest Convention**, and the **UN Forestry Forum**. While these agreements underscore the importance of sustainable forest management, it is important to note that they do not explicitly mandate the development of local forest management systems.

### National Legislation

On the national level, several key legislative documents outline Georgia's approach to forest management:

- **Resolution of the Government of Georgia "On the Rules for Determining Forests of Local Importance" (2007)**
- **National Forest Concept of Georgia (2013)**
- **Forest Code of Georgia (2020)**

Each of these documents emphasizes the importance of granting municipal forest status to local forests within the administrative boundaries of municipalities or to specific portions thereof. This recognition is crucial for ensuring that local forests are effectively managed and conserved, allowing communities to participate in sustainable forest management practices that align with both national goals and international obligations.

Together, these international and national frameworks provide a comprehensive foundation for the sustainable management and conservation of Georgia's forest resources, promoting local engagement and fostering the protection of biodiversity within forest ecosystems.

## 8. Recommendations

### IPPA Decree

It is recommended that the National Forestry Agency (NFA) take proactive measures to develop a decree aimed at institutionalizing the **Improved Public Participation Approach (IPPA)** methodology. This initiative is critical for enhancing the participatory framework in the development of Forest Management Plans (FMPs).

By formalizing the IPPA methodology through a decree, the NFA will establish clear guidelines and standards for stakeholder engagement, ensuring that local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other relevant parties are actively involved in the forest management process.

#### Key Benefits of Institutionalizing the IPPA Methodology

- Institutionalizing the IPPA will facilitate systematic and meaningful engagement of stakeholders at all levels. This includes ensuring that local communities have a voice in decision-making processes and that their traditional knowledge and experiences are integrated into FMP development.
- It will provide a framework for identifying, engaging, and collaborating with diverse stakeholder groups, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for forest resources among local populations.
- A formal decree will promote transparency in the decision-making process by outlining the steps for public consultations, data collection, and feedback mechanisms.
- Clear accountability mechanisms can be established to ensure that stakeholder feedback is taken into consideration and addressed in the FMPs, thereby improving overall governance.
- The formalization of the IPPA methodology will align NFA's practices with international standards and obligations regarding public participation in environmental governance.
- It will ensure that Georgia's forest management practices meet the requirements of various international agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the European Forest Convention, and thus, bring Georgia closer to the EU.

### Certification

The issue of **forest certification** is currently not a component of the existing Forest Management Plans (FMPs) developed by the National Forestry Agency (NFA). However, this is a critical topic that should be considered for future inclusion. Certification, such as through the **Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)** or other recognized schemes, goes beyond addressing the technical aspects of forest management and highlights opportunities for both sustainable use and economic development.

While the primary focus of FMPs is typically on resolving current challenges and addressing specific forest management issues, these plans also serve as **strategic blueprints** for identifying and optimizing **economic opportunities** associated with forest resources. By introducing forest certification into the FMP

framework, NFA can help align local and national forestry practices with international standards, ensuring that forest resources are managed sustainably while opening up new markets for certified forest products.

In this context, certification can become a critical point of discussion. Although it is not part of the current FMP framework, it holds potential for future inclusion. Incorporating certification into FMPs could play a vital role in enhancing conservation efforts and promoting more effective forest zoning. By establishing standards for sustainable management, certification could provide long-term environmental and economic benefits, ensuring that forest resources are used responsibly while supporting biodiversity and ecosystem services.

#### **Human resources**

Designate additional responsibilities of holding needs based communication with LACs to NFA's Forest Inventory Department.

#### **The Importance of Gender Mainstreaming in Forest Management**

For forest management practices to be inclusive, equitable, and sustainable, gender mainstreaming is important. In order to make sure that decision-making processes take into account the varied viewpoints of women, men, and marginalized groups, gender analysis has been utilized to evaluate the unique roles, needs, and contributions of these groups. Communities that depend on forests, especially women, frequently shoulder special duties like gathering non-timber forest products and managing ecosystem services, so their involvement is essential to long-term results.

The inclusion of intersectionality improves this process by identifying the overlapping factors—such as socioeconomic position, ethnicity, and age—that impact people's experiences and possibilities in forest governance. Taking an intersectional approach ensures that no group is left out and that initiatives are targeted to address disparities, elevate minority perspectives, and promote fair access to benefits. Gender mainstreaming increases public engagement, improves governance results, and promotes more resilient and inclusive forest management systems.

When gender mainstreaming and intersectionality are integrated into all stages of forest management, from planning to implementation and monitoring, policies become more responsive, equitable, and successful. This inclusive approach not only increases the legitimacy and openness of decision-making, but it also improves long-term sustainability by harnessing all stakeholders' expertise, skills, and contributions. Forest management strategies that empower women and marginalized groups may promote social justice, enhance livelihoods, and develop resilient communities capable of managing and protecting natural resources.

#### **Additional Recommendations:**

- **Conduct Community Training Workshops:** Organize ongoing training sessions for Local Advisory Councils (LACs) and community members on participatory mapping techniques and ecosystem services to strengthen their capacity to contribute effectively to the FMP process.
- **Establish Continuous Feedback Mechanisms:** Create platforms for regular feedback and discussion between LACs, local communities, and the National Forestry Agency (NFA) to ensure ongoing dialogue and integration of local knowledge into FMP updates.

- **Develop Collaborative Partnerships:** Foster partnerships with local NGOs, academic institutions, and stakeholders to share resources, knowledge, and expertise, enhancing the overall effectiveness of ecosystem service assessments.
- **Implement a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework:** Establish a robust system for monitoring and evaluating the impact of ecosystem service integration in FMPs, allowing for adaptive management and continuous improvement based on community feedback and ecological outcomes.
- **Promote Awareness and Advocacy:** Launch awareness campaigns to educate local communities about the importance of ecosystem services and their role in sustainable forest management, encouraging active participation in future FMP initiatives.

## 9. Conclusion

The implementation of the **Improved Public Participation Approach (IPPA)** in Georgia represents a pivotal step forward in aligning forest management practices with the aspirations of local communities and the principles of ecosystem sustainability. By promoting collaborative decision-making through participatory tools such as **Local Advisory Councils** and structured public consultations, the IPPA effectively addresses existing gaps in stakeholder engagement and fosters inclusive governance.

This innovative approach is designed not only to prevent conflicts but also to enhance informed decision-making by ensuring that a wide range of perspectives is integrated into the forest management planning process. By valuing diverse voices, the IPPA strengthens the legitimacy of decision-making and encourages transparency, accountability, and trust among stakeholders.

Ultimately, the IPPA has the potential to significantly enhance forest governance in Georgia, contributing to sustainable development, promoting gender equality, and safeguarding biodiversity. By supporting the long-term health of both communities and ecosystems, the IPPA embodies a holistic approach to forest management that recognizes the interdependence of social, economic, and environmental factors. Through this framework, Georgia can create a resilient and sustainable future for its forests and the communities that depend on them.