

# Codes of Forest Practices

## - Enhancing social dialogue and forestry work



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**Abstract**

It is important to include forest work issues in codes of best practices, since sustainability requires qualified workers to carry out proper forest management, avoiding destructive harvesting practices, ensuring adequate reforestation after harvesting and carrying out effective rehabilitation of degraded forests. Forestry work has certain characteristics that need to be considered when formulating best practices. Working conditions must be attractive to build up and retain a competent workforce. Training is essential for the implementation of a code.

The development of a code can strengthen the social dialogue in the forest sector. A participatory process involving the social partners also makes the implementation of the code easier. The code is more accepted by people if they feel they have a part in it.

To secure the future of forestry, human resources as well as forest resources must be managed in a sustainable manner. Without decent work forestry will not be sustainable.

## 1. Introduction

Codes of forest practice are sets of regulations or guidelines developed by government or other organizations to help foresters and forest enterprises select good practices for forest management and utilization<sup>1</sup>. Codes should aim to make forestry practices; environmental sound, economically viable and socially beneficial and thus also contributing to sustainable development.

It is important to include labour issues in codes of best practices, since sustainability hinge on a qualified workforce to carry out proper forest management, avoiding destructive harvesting practices, ensuring adequate reforestation after harvesting and carrying out effective rehabilitation of degraded forests.

Without improvements on the social side, the difficult working conditions and high accident rates prevailing in the forestry sector and the lack of training coupled with a high turn-over among operatives will mean that the qualified workforce needed for environmentally benign operations is not available. Moreover, good and stable jobs are an important way of enabling local populations to share in the economic benefits of sustainable forest management, thereby enhancing their motivation to protect and maintain forests. To secure the future of forestry, human resources as well as forest resources must be managed in a sustainable manner. Without decent work forestry will not be sustainable. Working conditions must be attractive to build up and retain a competent workforce. These are the main reasons why ILO is active in the development of codes.

This paper is written from an ILO perspective and therefore focuses on enhancing social dialogue and forestry work in connection with codes of forest practices.

## 2. Development of codes

In 1998 ILO has published the Code of practice on safety and health in forestry work. The code aims to protect workers from hazards in forestry work and to prevent or reduce the incidence of illness or injury. It emphasizes that safety policies must be pursued at all levels – nationally, in the enterprises and at the worksite. Since its adoption the ILO Code has been translated to various languages and has proven to be applicable under a wide variety of conditions.

The ILO also supports member countries and industry to develop national codes and has so far assisted Brazil, Chile, China, Fiji, Mongolia, the Philippines, Uruguay and Zimbabwe to develop national codes. The ILO has also contributed to the regional codes for Asia and Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition from FAO Model Code of Forest Harvesting Practice, 1996

The ILO's ability to involve its tripartite constituents has proven a strong advantage in the formulation and implementation of codes. The ILO is seen as a source of authoritative advice as well as an honest broker between interested groups.

FAO and ILO have collaborated in projects that promote the development of codes of practice. The two organisations have proved to be suitable partners in that their collective competence encompasses all three dimensions of sustainable forest management, i.e. economic, environmental and social aspects.

### **Participatory process**

There is an increasing view in favor of participatory approaches in setting goals and objectives of forest management. This is also equally applicable when developing codes of forest practice. The participation of the main interested parties in the code development process is desirable as it contributes to the creditability of the outcome. The main interested parties should therefore be identified early on to allow for a transparent process with frequent and close interaction between the different stakeholders. If the public becomes alienated from the process, it is a risk that the code will be received with mistrust or indifference.

Generally it is an advantage if the code is drafted by those who in the end will use it. It could be argued that process of developing a code is of greater importance than is the result. In those countries where it has been introduced it has had a boosting effect on the general awareness and perception of sustainable forest management. In addition, the importance and sense of ownership cannot be overstated. The involvement of external expertise should therefore be limited. In some cases, however, such consultancies might help to ensure objectivity and resolve sticking issues.

Developing a code should involve actors such as:

- industry
- workers
- contractors
- government (forest service, labour inspection, ministry of labour)
- environmental groups and representatives of indigenous people
- technical experts

To involve the stakeholders it is important to show them what they can benefit from a code. The main arguments for the principal stakeholders are found in table 1.

**Table 1 Benefits from a code for the main stakeholders**

<b>The government</b>	<b>The forest owners, industries and employers</b>	<b>The workers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complement to/substitute for legislation</li> <li>- Reduced need for inspections/enforcement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Closer to industry realities than regulations</li> <li>- Operational more efficient; e. g. accident costs reduced and operational costs reduced (machine cost).</li> <li>- Practicable rules to meet national and international requirements</li> <li>- Enterprises and field staff can refer to one single document</li> <li>- Positive image, public demonstration of good will (access to markets)</li> <li>- Blueprint for training and contracting of operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better working conditions</li> <li>- Higher safety standards</li> <li>- Training opportunities</li> <li>- Sustainable employment and income</li> </ul>

**Forestry work**

Most forestry is still characterized by a difficult working environment, heavy physical effort and high accident risk.

There are certain characteristics of forestry work that should be considered when developing a code and it is important to consider these and assess which are relevant and then formulate the best practices, see table 2.

**Table 2 Forestry work characteristics versus suggested best practices**

<b>Forestry work characteristics</b>	<b>Suggested best practices</b>
<p>Large labour turnover due to dissatisfaction with working and living conditions and the loss of jobs due to mechanization.</p> <p>Highly mechanized operations and manual work side-by-side leads to diversified aspects to take into consideration, including great differences in remuneration.</p>	<p>Concerning occupational safety and health, working conditions and labour relations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a health and safety policy and management system that systematically identify hazards and preventive measures and ensure that these are implemented in the operation;</li> </ul>

Forestry work characteristics	Suggested best practices
Contract work replacing direct employment. Contractors are often not covered by labour legislation and have generally less protection than employed workers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide all necessary tools, machines and substances at the worksite and ensure that they are in a safe and serviceable condition;</li> <li>• Consider health and safety requirements in all stages of forest work—from planning to execution</li> <li>• Provide camps and conditions for accommodation and nutrition that comply at least with the ILO <i>Code of practice on safety and health in forestry work</i>.</li> <li>• Provide workers with access to medical care and social services</li> <li>• Negotiate fair wages with the worker's representatives</li> <li>• Promote stable employment</li> <li>• Ensure that relations between labour and management are based on regular consultation and fairness on both sides.</li> <li>• Ensure that provisions in the code cover all workers including contractors</li> </ul> <p>Concerning training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide adequate training for all staff</li> <li>• Ensure that all machine operators and cutters have undergone skill testing and hold a certificate of competence</li> </ul>
Under pressure to cut costs in a very competitive market, contractors often overextend themselves and their employees with a high pace of work and excessive working hours, illegal practices such as moonlighting and hiring undeclared immigrants.	
Considerable risks of accidents and occupational diseases persist. Forestry in one of the most dangerous occupations worldwide. There is often a lack of social protection.	
Working in isolated areas. Living in camps etc.	
Women workers. Low share of women workers and they are often exposed to heavy work and suffering wage discrimination.	

### 3. Lesson learnt

The development of a code can strengthen the social dialogue in the forest sector. A participatory process also makes the implementation of the code easier, since the stakeholders have already been involved. The development of the code involve the different stakeholders.

Occupational safety and health aspects should be integrated in the codes. Unacceptable working conditions results in a vicious circle of high labour turnover, low skills levels, low productivity and low profitability. It is difficult to implement a code unless acceptable occupational safety and health and working conditions contribute to stabilize the work force and make skill development possible.

The implementation of a code of forest practice is a big challenge for many countries. Training is a very large component of code implementation. A well-trained staff at all levels in forest institutions and companies is vital to comply with code requirements. If workers are not trained in correct practices the code will have no effect and its enforcement will be pointless. Special training programmes must be designed for each category of worker including contractors. Training programmes should be based on thorough training needs assessments. Where skills are found to be insufficient, short practical training courses should preferably take place on site but not simply Aon-the-job@ in the sense of learning by trial and error. Training needs to be cost-efficient, structured, imparted by qualified instructors and culminate in a control of progress through skills testing and certification.

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