



Evaluation of the Nordic Forest Research (Samnordisk Skogsforskning – SNS)

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The **Oxford Research Venn-diagram** represents how we integrate our three key competency areas - research, strategy and communication - when seeking to provide knowledge for a better society.

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Executive summary

About Nordic Forest Research (Samnordisk skogsforskning - SNS)

Nordic Forest Research, hereinafter referred to, as SNS, was established in 1972 as a Pan-Nordic co-operating body. The aim of SNS is to promote sustainable forestry through strengthening forest research as well as to advise the Nordic Council of Ministers on questions concerning forests and forest research.

The evaluation

SNS commissioned Oxford Research to evaluate SNS's organisation. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess performance so far in terms of the criteria defined in the Better Regulation Guidelines (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and Nordic added value) and to make recommendations for future improvement. In this way, the evaluation served both accountability and learning purposes. Data were collected through desk research and in-depth interviews with staff, key persons close to the organisation, representatives of the Nordic Council of Ministers and external actors who either cooperate or are affiliated with SNS. Overall, the evaluation was able to collect extensive and meaningful data that allow for confidence in the results.

Key findings and conclusions

The next paragraphs present the evaluation's key findings and conclusions across each of the five criteria. These show that SNS is a forward-looking and developing organisation that regularly takes stock of its performance and improves over time. SNS provides invaluable knowledge to promote sustainable forestry, firm support and guidance to the target groups' work, effective interactions in a multilevel structure and a high level of responsiveness despite the limited resources. SNS's target groups are national, Nordic and EU policymakers, the Nordic Council of Ministers, researchers in relevant areas and their partners. While there is room for improvement, this amounts to organisational tweaks to an organisation that is overall relevant, working well and adding value to the Nordic context.

Relevance

Policymakers need to have access to relevant knowledge and credible information to be able to develop the forestry sector in a sustainable way. This entails that the correct type of activities needs to be presented from appropriate actors, and that cooperating bodies, such as SNS, work to meet the needs of the target groups. SNS, therefore, needs to implement activities that contribute to increased knowledge of sustainable forests and forestry within the appropriate policymaker arenas. To achieve this, SNS needs to identify the needs on a broad systematic level, which is to push for the relevant issues on a pan-Nordic and international level to bring about changes on a policy level. SNS also needs to focus its action on the concrete needs of its primary target group, by giving support and guidance to their concrete development work. SNS meets these needs to a high degree, and the evaluation makes the assessment that SNS is relevant.

Effectiveness

The internal effectiveness of SNS is an important factor since it affects the ability to achieve results. SNS' external effectiveness also affects the ability to achieve results. SNS' structure and resources are

therefore a determining factor for what the organisation will be able to contribute to. As such, SNS is an agile organisation, which reacts to strategic challenges through expanding resources. SNS has created a well-functioning structure for internal and external communication and decision-making which are important success factors. The evaluator's assessment is that SNS internal and external effectiveness is high and has a high ability to achieve their desirable results. At the same time, we note that limited resources and future organisational uncertainty are factors that hinder the extent of possible achievements.

Efficiency

Oxford Research's assessment is that SNS succeeds regarding reaching the desirable effects. At the same time, we note that the organisation's role as a coordinator on the forest and forestry research scene in bits could be improved. Overall, the evaluator's judgement is that SNS's contribution to the Nordic forest research development is high. SNS efficiency relates to the implementation of the work and activities as well as what SNS has achieved. In other words, how well the communication, policy observations and support to the networks are carried out, SNS' cost effectiveness as well as if they achieve the results in form of assisting and promoting sustainable forest and forestry research. Efficiency can also relate to whether the organisation is able to achieve the desirable effects such as meeting the demands of sustainable forest management in a growing bioeconomy, maintenance and increased utilisation of ecosystem services and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Within the areas, the evaluation assesses SNS' efficiency in providing research findings and up-to-date information to the Nordic Council of Ministers and the countries governments as high. However, the efficiency would be increased with additional organisational resources.

Coherence

Coherence have an internal dimension, related to how well SNS' many parts fit together, and an external dimension, related to its alignment with other Nordic policies and initiatives. The evaluation assesses that SNS' priorities and activities fit well with each other and the objectives of the organisation stated in the strategy plan. Further the evaluation assesses that SNS' activities are in line with and contribute to the Nordic Council of Ministers' strategic priorities until 2024.

Nordic Added Value

SNS added value is defined as the value created by SNS above and beyond what could still be expected to be achieved if the organisation did not exist. The respondents perceive added value in terms of SNS being a complementary function to other organisations who either work on a narrower set of themes, have other target groups, pay for their services or only work at national levels. Further, SNS is able to take onboard national concerns and, through the organisation, package and communicate the needs to the Nordic policy level. Oxford Research's assessment is that SNS' efforts contribute to results that could not be created as effectively by the national actors themselves. It indicates that the existence of the organisation is justified.

Recommendations

It follows from the above that the SNS organisation should be continued in order to consolidate the achievements made so far and to address established needs. The recommendations below offer some ideas that could be used to improve the organisation in the future, both during the current and coming funding periods.

Design of the SNS organisation and its strategic work

The Strategic plan for SNS should serve as baseline and example for the development and implementation of activities under next funding period. We recommend that the forthcoming period make explicit reference to the Sustainable Development Goals, to align with the overarching goals of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Further, we recommend that SNS to a larger extent use the current goals expressed in the Strategic plan as measuring tools for the steering and governance of their organisational performance. Likewise, we suggest that the forthcoming plan to a larger extent present a cohesive framework for their goal steering.

Long-term view

It should be emphasised that the results of the evaluation are generally positive. While there is room for improvement in certain areas, these amount to organisational tweaks to an organisation that on the whole is relevant, working well and adding value. It follows from this that the SNS organisation as such should look for a permanent location from now, and with that, in the next funding period, a well-established organisation will be able to consolidate the achievements made so far and to address the needs of target audiences as well as the Nordics more generally.

Communication

Recently, additional resources have been added to the SNS organisation to meet an increased need for communication efforts. Communication efforts are also important in the future to develop knowledge about forestry issues in more policy areas within the Nordic Council of Ministers. We suggest that SNS communicates more actively about the possibilities of the SNS core areas in cooperation with the work of actors in other policy areas to contribute to Nordic Added Value. We also recommend that SNS develop their communication plan to reach a larger audience within the forestry and forest area and areas which could cooperate in forest and forestry related issues.

Implementation

Besides communication it is vital for SNS to increase the implementation of SNS activities in a Nordic perspective. We recommend increased coordination and the development of several horizontal joint actions, such as the textile industry and forest, with the other Nordic Council of Ministers' policy areas. To enable such an ambition, it is important to further optimise the common procedures and resources for joint action together with other policy areas within the Nordic arena.

1. Introduction and reading guide

SNS was established in 1972 as a Pan-Nordic co-operating body. The aim of SNS is to promote sustainable forestry through strengthening forest research as well as to advise the Nordic Council of Ministers on questions concerning forests and forest research.

The purpose of the report is to present the results of the evaluation of SNS, most importantly to provide answers to the evaluation questions, conclusions and recommendations for the future.

Aside from this introduction, the report has four main chapters:

Chapter 2 presents the approach of the evaluation starting with a recap of our understanding of the services and summary of the approach and a detailed approach to the evaluation questions as well as the methodology and the tools used. Chapter 3 presents SNS's organisational set-up. Chapter 4 presents the outcome of the evaluation and Chapter 5 presents the recommendations.

2. Approach to the evaluation

This chapter is structured in three parts.

Sections 2.1 and 2.2 provide a recap of our understanding of and approach to the assignment. Section 2.3 provides detail on how we have answered the evaluation questions that formed the basis for the research.

2.1 Understanding of the assignment

The current assignment serves a dual purpose that is part summative, with a focus on SNS's governance and performance. It is also formative, with a focus on learning to improve the design and delivery of SNS as a pan-Nordic co-operation organisation and thereby increase the ability to achieve defined objectives assigned to them by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The evaluation adheres to the purpose and scope as detailed in the Terms of Requests (ToRs). These include taking stock of and reporting on the SNS in terms of the organisation's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, and Nordic added value. The evaluation covers a full range of funded activities (such as the networks), as well as all member countries and stakeholders, most importantly SNS as such, the board of SNS, the Committee of Senior Officials for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ÄK-FJLS), the secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers and other interested parties.

The evaluation also adheres to the **Better Regulation Guidelines**,¹ which lay out a set of common principles for all European Commission evaluations. The guidelines are used to ensure that evaluations

¹ Commission Staff Working Document, Better Regulation Guidelines, SWD(2017)350, Brussels, 7.7.2017. Complemented by the Better Regulation Toolbox, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/better-regulation-toolbox.pdf>.

are consistent and that the evaluations are carried out in an aligned manner. Oxford Research adheres to the guidelines in national and Nordic evaluations that the company conducts.

2.2 Addressing the evaluation questions

The evaluation is using an analytical framework to structure the evaluation as well as to analyse and describe SNS's activities. The activities were measured using five key indicators: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, and added value. The evaluation questions touched upon the following areas:

- SNS' strategic work,
- results,
- allocation of funding,
- structure of SNS' work,
- evaluation of their work and,
- Nordic added value.

The evaluation questions design was shaped to fit the respondent groups. The respondent groups were members of the Committee of Senior Officials, SNS' partners, members of the board, the secretariat and the Nordic council of Ministers secretariat. The interviews were carried out in Danish, English, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish.

2.2.1 Relevance

At root, relevance refers to the need for an initiative. In other words, if there was no SNS, would someone need to invent it. Examining relevance is critical because if SNS is not relevant (not doing the right thing) then evaluating how well (effectively) or efficiently this is being implemented has no real value. To be a relevant organisation it is central that SNS functions in a way where the basis of their work consists of goals and priorities. This work itself needs to be closely linked to the needs of the organisation's beneficiaries. An overarching view of the need for support within Nordic forest research on a pan-Nordic level was obtained through the external interviews. The internal interviews and desk studies complemented the view of which activities SNS carries out as well as which needs the activities addressed.

2.2.2 Effectiveness

Effectiveness consists of an intervention's ability to contribute to the achievement of its objectives and goals. In other words, does SNS 'work' or not. Is SNS able to achieve relevant results, which in turn are prerequisites to attain the long-term effects which the overarching goals aim to achieve? SNS' results on an operational level, the overarching goals which the organisation is expected to contribute were explored through desk studies and external interviews.

2.2.3 Efficiency

Efficiency focuses on an organisation's capacity to implement the work cost-effectively in relation to the results achieved. The evaluation takes in the aspects of efficiency which affect SNS's design and operations. Through desk studies, internal and external interviews the efficiency of SNS design and operation were examined as well as how efficiently the activities are performed.

2.2.4 Coherence

Coherence concerns whether there is a rational connection between SNS commitments, activities and goals, and the overarching strategies, policy and activities which pursue these. SNS aims to promote sustainable forestry by encouraging forest science, as well as advising the Nordic Council of Ministers on forest and forest research related issues. Similar goals are expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals.² The level of coherence between SNS's goals and activities, and other organisations and strategy document is examined through internal and external in-depth interviews as well as through desk studies.

2.2.5 Nordic added value

Nordic added value focuses on the value of SNS in comparison to what other actors could be expected to achieve on their own if SNS did not exist. The question is based on SNS' role within the Nordic context. The corresponding results and effects analysis are based on external interviews.

2.3 The evaluation approach

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess performance so far in terms of the criteria defined in the Better Regulation Guidelines and mentioned above (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and Nordic added value) and to make recommendations for future improvement. In this way, the evaluation served both accountability and learning purposes. Data were collected through desk research and in-depth interviews with staff, key persons close to the organisation, representatives for the Nordic Council of Ministers and external actors who either cooperate or are affiliated with SNS. Overall the evaluation was able to collect extensive and meaningful data that allow for confidence in the results.

2.3.1 Document and literature study

Oxford Research conducted structured desk research on material connected to SNS and the activities carried out. The purpose of this was to analyse SNS' commitments during the evaluation period. The following material were included:

SNS:s own documentation	SNS statutes
	SNS Strategic plan
	SNS work plans
	SNS communication strategy
	SNS's annual reports
Nordic council of minister's documentation	Nordic Council of Ministers Co-operation Program for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry

² United Nations *The 17 goals* available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> Accessed 17/11

Previously conducted evaluations	Evaluation of the concept of CARs
	Evaluation of SNS 2008-2011
Social media channels, external communication, and website	SNS webpage
	SNS newsletter
	SNS Facebook
	SNS Twitter
	SNS LinkedIn

2.3.2 Interviews

Oxford Research carried out 26 semi-structured in-depth telephone interviews with individuals who are linked to SNS. The interviews were booked ahead of time and took between 30-45 minutes to conduct. More specifically, interviews with key actors who work with or have active roles within the SNS organisation were carried out. In addition, interviews were conducted with representatives from the Committee of Senior Officials (ÄK-FJLS) and interviews with SNS's collaborative partners.

3. SNS' organisational set-up

This section summarises the evaluations findings and understanding of the organisational set-up. Data was collected through desk research and interviews. The chapter describes SNS' commitments, goals, priorities, activities as well as how the organisation is structured. Section 4 then analyses the findings and conclusions in connection to and based on our understanding of the organisational structure.

3.1 Commitments

SNS is committed to initiating and coordinating cooperative forest-related research activities and contributing to values for the Nordic countries and the political cooperation both in the Nordic countries and neighbouring countries, by supporting and creating arenas for networking and knowledge-sharing regarding forests and forestry. SNS' assignment is to strengthen the role of the Nordic Countries within EU and other relevant international research efforts. SNS continuously evaluates the need for new research initiatives to address current issues of societal relevance, as well as imminent challenges and create future opportunities.³

3.2 Organisational goals

SNS' aim is to assist and promote sustainable forest and forestry research. SNS contributes to common goals for the development of Nordic sustainability and for forestry through aiding and promoting joint Nordic forest research efforts. SNS offers counselling to the Nordic countries generally and to the Nordic Council of Ministers for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry in matters concerning forestry research and other forest-related areas specifically. The central long-term goal is to actively contribute to the development of ecological, economical, and socially responsible forestry together with utilising wood goods as well as other utilities from the Nordic forests. The following thematic areas are focal points of SNS:

1. To meet the demands of sustainable forestry in a growing bioeconomy.
2. Maintenance and increased utilisation of ecosystem services.
3. Climate change adaptation and mitigation.

3.3 Activities carried out by the SNS organisation.

Below the organisation's different activities are presented.

3.3.1 Network funding

SNS offers funding to networks over a 1- or 2-year period. The aim of the funding is to strengthen forest research in the Nordic region, bridge gaps between research and practice, promote collaboration across sectors within a sustainable bioeconomy and to link national research projects which otherwise would be carried out on a national level, but where considerable positive outcomes can be reached

³ Nordic Forest Research, *Verksamhetsplan 2020 för Samnordisk Skogsforskning (SNS)*

through a wider regional scope.⁴ To be eligible for funding, the networks need to consist of at least three research institutions in the Nordic region. The networks must be represented by each gender to a minimum of 40% of the participants. It is also a requirement that the networks have co-funding of at least half of the total budget⁵. The 1-year period networks receive maximum 200 000 SEK in funding from SNS. The 2-year period networks, known as the SNS-NKJ networks can receive maximum 250 000 SEK in funding.

3.3.2 Research projects

The funding for research projects aims to support research projects in different thematic areas. For the 2019-2021 period the thematic area is “exploring ways to manage forests without destroying nature and to extract resources sustainably from them without compromising other values such as biodiversity and ecosystem services.”⁶ To be eligible for the funding three of the participants in the project need to be researchers at institutions in the Nordic region. Funding from SNS covers a three-year period and can at most cover a third of the total budget for the project.⁷ The research projects receive up to 350 000 SEK annually over a period of three years.

3.3.3 Virtual Centres of Advanced Research

SNS supports Virtual Centres of Advanced Research, hereinafter CARs, over a period of 4-5 years. CARs are seen as an important tool for forest research and long-term networking in the Nordic region as well as adjacent countries⁸. CARs are eligible to receive funding from SNS at a maximum of 10% of the total costs and each CAR can apply for between 300 000 - 600 000 SEK per year.

3.3.4 Strategical events and projects

Strategic projects and events are run by the SNS Secretariat. The projects and events are based on sound research results. The purpose of the projects and events are to bring light on current topics that are relevant to the Nordic Council of Ministers, other decision-making bodies, and society at large.⁹

3.3.5 External communication activities

SNS sees a responsibility in conveying research findings and policy recommendations to specific target audiences, including Nordic researchers, decision-makers, industrialists, and relevant authorities. To encourage communication between researchers and policy makers, SNS offers multiple meeting places and information channels. In networking activities and through the website, the newsletter and social media, the meeting places and knowledge sharing take shape.

⁴ Nordic Forest Research, *Networks*, available at <https://nordicforestresearch.org/networks/> retrieved 3/11-2020

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Nordic Forest Research, *Research projects*, available at <https://nordicforestresearch.org/research-projects-2/> retrieved 3/11-2020

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Nordic Forest Research, *CARs*, available at <https://nordicforestresearch.org/car/> retrieved 3/11 2020

⁹ Nordic Forest Research, *Strategic projects*, available at <https://nordicforestresearch.org/strategical-projects/> retrieved 3/11 2020

3.4 Organisation and Resources

Below we present the organisation and their resources.

3.4.1 The secretariat

The secretariat alternates between member countries. Since 2014 the secretariat is placed in Alnarp, Sweden. The secretariat has four employees, working the equivalent of 1.65 full-time staff. The premises are shared with Nordic Joint Committee for Agricultural and Food Research (NKJ). The SNS secretariat has constant communication with the board, the Committee of Senior Officials and Nordic Council of Ministers secretariat. There are multiple meetings held with different types of purposes. Such as meetings with the Committee of Senior Officials and communication regarding the yearly report. Ad hoc and other informal interactions also take place regularly.

3.4.2 The board

SNS' board consists of two members from each Nordic country, along with one observer to the board from the autonomous region of Åland. Board meetings are held twice a year and Norway holds the current chair of SNS. The current board consists of six men and four women. The youth member and Åland's observer are also men. Among the board there is a contact group which can be compared with a working committee that, together with the secretariat, prepares matters to be raised at the board meetings.

3.4.3 The Committee of Senior Officials

The Committee of Senior Officials for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry is in close contact with the SNS' organisation. The committee consists of country representatives who work in relevant fields. The committee provides advice regarding issues related to forest and forest research and suggest new priority areas for Nordic cooperation.¹⁰ The Committee of Senior Officials also approves SNS' working plan for the coming year. The current gender distribution of the committee is eleven women and ten men.

3.4.4 SNS and The Nordic Council of Ministers

SNS' main commitment is to link research and policy and to provide sound, policy relevant information to the Nordic countries and the Nordic Council of Ministers based on the findings from forest research, as well as from targeted statements. SNS and the Nordic Council of Ministers have an annual meeting where the secretariat and members of the board present their annual report. After the annual meeting is conducted, the annual report is presented at the next meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials.

3.5 SNS's partners

SNS has multiple collaborative partners, such as the European Forest Institute, SusFor, the Nordic Genetic Resource Centre, the Forest Bioeconomy Network, International Union of Forest Research Organisations and the Nordic Joint Committee for Agricultural and Food Research. SNS' aim with

¹⁰ Nordic Forest Research, *Strategy plan 2018-2021*

strengthening collaborations is to develop results and synergies that cannot be obtained by national efforts.

3.6 Supported academic journals

SNS funds two internationally established scientific journals. The journals are called *Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research* and *Wood Material Science and Engineering*. *Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research* is a prominent global research journal publishing on the entire field of forest research in boreal and temperate areas worldwide. *Wood Material Science and Engineering* is a multidisciplinary and global journal that publish research in the area of wood material and wood engineering. The journals provide publishing outlets for Nordic Researchers.

4. Key findings and conclusions

This section presents the key findings and conclusions based on the analysis of SNS' organisation and Oxford Research's assessment of its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and added value. Further, the evaluation is taking into consideration SNS as an organisation in relation to the following factors and areas: SNS's strategy plan, competences within SNS, equality regarding both gender and age, impact of SNS's communication and cost-effectiveness. The Nordic benefits which are created by SNS permeate the analysis as a whole.

4.1 Relevance

Policymakers need to have access to relevant knowledge and credible information to be able to develop the forest sector in a sustainable way. This entails that the correct type of activities needs to be presented from appropriate actors, and that cooperating bodies, such as SNS, work to meet the need of the target groups. SNS, therefore, needs to implement activities that contribute to increased knowledge of sustainable forest and forestry within the appropriate policymaker arenas.

To achieve this, SNS should identify needs on a broad systematic level, which is to push for the relevant issues on a Nordic and international level to bring about changes on a policy level. SNS must focus their actions on the concrete needs of the primary target group, by giving support and guidance to their concrete development work. SNS meets these needs to a high degree as explained below in terms of promoting forest and forestry issues, guidance to target groups and supporting young researchers. Oxford Research therefore assess that SNS is relevant.

4.1.1 Promoting forestry-related issues

Oxford Research assesses that SNS to a high degree meets to the needs for an actor that promotes and assists forest and forestry related research. The need for promotion and assistance in forest and forestry related research exists on national, Nordic, and global levels. Network actors as well as members of the Senior Officials Committee consider that the mission and commitments of SNS makes them as a key actor which connects forest and forestry researchers from Nordic countries. SNS addresses issues on a large spectrum from gender perspectives of forestry to forest fires, and continually, through monitoring, bring forth current issues. SNS combines funding, policy support, and collaborations with relevant actors. SNS academic journals are considered by the respondents to be a platform where SNS can promote forest and forestry related question on the Academic arena. These activities together with communicating research findings and policy recommendations to target audiences contribute to the fact that SNS can promote forest and forestry related research and issues on a high level, both nationally and on a Nordic level.

4.1.2 Support and guidance to the target groups work

According to our assessment, SNS performs well regarding supporting their primary target group in their development work. SNS creates a platform for dialogue and knowledge sharing through their collaborations with the beforementioned organisations and through funding networks. SNS is regarded by the interviewees as an organisation which contributes to synergies between actors, connections to the Nordic Council of Ministers, anchoring policy questions, and communication outlets.

4.1.3 Promoting young researchers

SNS helps and supports young researchers to take a step outside the national Academic scene towards the Nordic scene and later the global scene. The model of enabling young researchers to meet other young researchers from other Nordic countries give possibilities to build forthcoming strong academic research groups within Nordic forest research.

4.2 Effectiveness

The internal and external effectiveness of SNS is an important factor since it affects the ability to achieve results. Internal effectiveness relates to factors within the organisation, whereas external effectiveness relates to factors which are directed towards their target groups. The desk research and interviews show that SNS' structure and resources are determining factors regarding what the organisation will be able to contribute to. As such, SNS is an agile organisation, which reacts to strategic challenges through expanding. In spite of the limited resources the interviewees consider that SNS has created a well-functioning structure for the internal- and external communication and decision making which are important effectiveness factors.

As explained in the paragraphs below SNS' internal-and external effectiveness is good in terms of multilevel interactions, responsiveness and supporting documentation. Oxford Research assessment is therefore that SNS' ability to achieve desirable results is high. At the same time, there are factors as limited resources and dependency of individuals that hinder maximal effectiveness.

4.2.1 Multilevel Interactions

Oxford Research assesses that the interactions between SNS and the board, SNS and the Nordic Council of Minister's secretariat, the board and the senior official committee are effective. The formal statutes are in place and the meeting structures are well established. Even if formal procedures are in place it is not to a barrier for the spoken interaction to be effective. There is an unspoken informality between the parties, with short communication lines that improve the effectiveness even more. This creates an environment where information and communication can flow between the parties without long time lags, which results in clear and precise decision paths.

4.2.2 SNS responsiveness is high

As a reaction to an increasing demand for its activities, SNS was confronted with a lack of human resources, meaning not all daily tasks could be handled. With a desire to increase capacity and with extra funding from the Nordic council of Ministers, SNS was recently able to hire an administrator. The recruitment process was however hampered by the fact that it was only possible to offer a short-term position.

We consider the ability of SNS to respond to resource management challenges as high and handled in a good manner. But to further develop activities, there is a need to be able to have a long-term view of possible structural developments. Due to the interviews our evaluation also shows that there is a risk that SNS, because of the SNS secretariat's small size, could become dependent on individuals rather than its organisational structure. Becoming dependent on individuals affects the resilience of the organisational structure.

4.2.3 Structures directed to recipients is a key instrument

SNS structures its outgoing material to ease processes which can become time-consuming. This includes (for example) the application forms that are used by those who apply for funding for networks and research projects. By offering application material which is clearly structured, the risk of actors shying away from applying due to unconcise application processes decrease.

4.3 Efficiency

SNS efficiency relates to the implementation of the work and activities as well as what SNS achieves. This can for example relate to if their communication, policy observations, and support to networks are carried out, SNS' cost effectiveness, as well as if they achieve the results in form of assisting and promoting sustainable forest and forestry research. Efficiency can also relate to whether SNS can achieve the desired effects such as meeting the demands of sustainable forest management in a growing bioeconomy, maintenance, and increased utilisation of ecosystem services and climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Oxford Research's overall assessment is that SNS' efficiency in providing research findings and up-to-date information to the Nordic Council of Ministers and the countries governments is high. However, the efficiency would be increased with additional organisational resources. SNS succeeds in reaching the desirable effects by enabling knowledge spreading, increasing visibility, prioritising diversity, and enabling united actions. At the same time, we note that SNS' role as a coordinator on the forest and forestry research scene could be even further developed and that SNS' cost effectiveness could increase. Oxford Research assesses that SNS contribution to the Nordic forest research development is high.

4.3.1 SNS enables knowledge spreading and increases visibility for the target groups.

SNS gives the opportunity to their partners and networks to attend events in different settings. SNS can present and acknowledge forest- and forestry-related projects in different settings, which in turn enables knowledge spreading, sharing and increased visibility of SNS's work. Many interviewees point out that the communication with SNS's secretariat is done with ease, and that they are very responsive. The interviews indicated that by offering visibility through SNS' supported academic journals, SNS' is able to reach a larger audience through publishing forest and forestry related research. Bilateral communication results in fewer bottle necks, since there is a steady flow of information and recommendations from SNS to the partners and networks, and vice versa. This also improves SNS ability to share knowledge with its relevant target group.

4.3.2 SNS increases united actions and cooperation

SNS network funding aims to promote Nordic synergies within forest research, establish stronger cooperation among forest research communities in the Nordic countries, and encourage cross-sectorial networking between researchers and stakeholders in related areas in the Nordic countries. What is reflected through the interviews is that SNS brings about united and cooperating actions, gives researchers valuable connections both to other researchers and the Nordic Council of Ministers, as well as contributes to interdisciplinary actions and synergies. Through the interviews, we also note that this coordinating role can become more present, as the network-actors see a need for it. Communication regarding their aim, as well as the support to networks through funding, contributes to

the achievability of reaching the desired results in form of assisting and promoting sustainable forest and forestry research.

4.3.3 Working towards heterogenous groups

SNS actively works to promote diversity in the forest sector, which generally is conservative and traditionally male-dominated. To promote diversity SNS has formed regulations that the network-applicants need to meet to be eligible, for example the networks need to represent each gender by a minimum of 40% of the participants. The gender ratio of 40/60% is also expected to be achieved by the board, the secretariat, and other activities supported by SNS. Promoting the participation of researchers from different nationalities in the networks also affects the achievability of promoting a diverse forest sector. By promoting diversity SNS' contribute to the Nordic identity as an equal society within forestry.

4.3.4 Possible resource structures that could hinder effectiveness

Cost-effectiveness relates to how much each input results in. Currently, the SNS secretariat is rotated between the member countries every four years. This means that every four years the secretariat needs to be winded-up and be reorganised in the coming chairmanship country. The cost associated with winding-up and rebuilding structures within organisations is high according to the interviewees. According to the respondents, a permanent location for the secretariat could decrease the cost associated with winding up the secretariat. If the secretariat has a permanent location cost-effectiveness could increase. Cost-effectiveness could also increase through permanent location of the secretariat if it is placed near, and can collaborate organisation-wise with, a university or other related organisation. This would increase cost-effectiveness because it has certain economies of scale factors. Another factor that relates to the rotation of the secretariat is the hiring and retention of staff. When the secretariat rotates there is naturally turnover since the staff of the previous secretariat does not travel with to the newly assigned country.

Turnover rates entail costs since new staff need to have a start-up period. Another factor that hinders effectiveness and relates to turnover, is relation-making. The new employees need to create relations with other parts of the organisation, which takes time. Established relations can lead to better communication within the organisation and are attained by having a permanent location of the secretariat. We asses a rotation of the secretariat entails cost inefficiency.

4.4 Coherence

Coherence have both an internal dimension, related to how well the content of SNS's many parts fit together, and an external dimension, related to its alignment with other Nordic policies and initiatives. We address each of these two dimensions in separate sub-questions.

Overall Oxford Research considers both coherences to be high. SNS' coherences are high in terms of reflecting their target group's priorities through their activities. Further we asses that the areas fit well with each other, the objectives of the organisation, the strategic priorities of the Nordic Council of Minister's, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals.

4.4.1 Internal coherence

Internal coherence concerns how well the content of SNS activities, organisation, policies, and strategies which strive to achieve the same goal are connected. SNS exists within an overarching context where it has a specific mission which it should work towards. Oxford Research assessed the priorities and specific activities of SNS to see how well they fit with each other and the objectives of the organisation. Meaning that all activities must refer to the objectives and priorities outlined in SNS's statutes, strategy plan and the resulting annual reports.

The overarching goals stated in the SNS strategy plan is to promote sustainable forestry through strengthening forest research. This work is done through a long line of active research networks, specific research projects and the Centres of Advanced Research (CAR).

Many interviewees point to the flexibility and comprehensiveness of the SNS strategy plan as key strengths, being able to fit a wide palette of concrete activities. These activities reflect target group priorities within the overarching priorities of the organisation. To mention an example, in the strategy, it is underpinned that SNS should work on raising the awareness of gender equality and all activities supported by SNS, including the board and the secretariat, is expected to reach the goal of a 40/60 distribution between men and women. In the annual report indicators are presented and monitored on annual basis, with an assessment on where improvements are needed. Another example is the network activities which are considered to be one of the most important yearly support activities that enables the activities to thrive towards the overarching priorities.

4.4.2 External coherence

The Nordic countries have the vision from 2019 of becoming the world's most sustainable and integrated region by the year 2030. To achieve the vision, the Nordic Council of Ministers main strategic priorities until 2024 will be:

- A green Nordic region - Together we will promote a green transformation of our society and work for carbon neutrality and a sustainable circular and bio-based economy.
- A competitive Nordic region - Together we will promote green growth in the Nordic region based on knowledge, innovation, mobility, and digital integration.
- A socially sustainable Nordic region - Together we will promote an inclusive, equal, and cohesive region with common values and strengthened cultural exchange and welfare.

To investigate the external coherence, we focused on SNS's possible contributions to the three strategic priorities. For the period 2018–2021 the emphasis stated in the SNS strategy plan is divided between three areas:

- Meeting the demands of sustainable forest management in a growing bioeconomy.
- Maintenance and increased utilisation of ecosystem services.
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Oxford Research assesses that the specific activities of SNS are relevant for achieving the objectives within the three areas. The areas fit in well with each other, the objectives of the organisation as well as the strategic priorities of the Nordic Council of Minister's.

Oxford Research believes that the activities contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. SNS's activities regarding forest and forestry affects the ability to achieve Sustainable Development Goals. The activities contribute directly to ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns (goal 12), taking action to combat climate change and its impacts (goal 13), and protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, halting land degradation and halting biodiversity loss (goal 15). However, we believe that SNS currently does not have a plan for concretely studying in what ways their activities can further contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

4.5 Nordic added value

SNS's added value entails if the value created by the organisation still can be expected to be achieved if SNS did not exist. It is important for an organisation based on commitment from several different actors that the organisation's efforts contribute to results that could not be created as effectively by the actors themselves. If there is no perceived added value, it indicates that the organisation is redundant.

The interviews clearly indicate that the informants experience a strong added value from SNS. The organisation's added value is found on several levels and differs in part depending on the informant's position in relation to the SNS organisation.

Representatives from the networks see an added value from the funding provided by SNS and the experience of being included in a group of researchers who all work in the same or related research fields. Through participating in networks handling current issues within forestry and forest, the participants perceive synergies, possible future collaborations, and professional development.

Representatives from the Board and the Committee of Senior Officials believe that the added value of SNS primarily is related to the overall knowledge of Nordic forest research that SNS contributes. However, the representatives do not only see the research itself as important. Of greater importance is SNS's working processes. The members of the Board and the Committee of Senior Officials assess that a great added value exist in the working process, to gather national knowledge and through SNS gain a common Nordic understanding of forest-related issues.

Another added value highlighted by the Board and the Committee of Senior Officials is SNS's complementary function to other organisations who either work thematically broader like Formas and Nordforsk or narrower as Nordgen and other organisations with complementary or other target groups, that pay for their services, or only work at national levels.

Based on the added values perceived by the network representatives, members of the board and the committee of Senior Officials, we asses that SNS contributes to a high degree to a Nordic added value.

5. Recommendations

This section offers recommendations that could be used to improve the design and delivery of SNS as a pan-Nordic co-operation organisation and thereby increase the ability to achieve defined objectives. Both during the remainder of the current and coming funding periods. The recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions presented throughout this report and are structured in themes that relate to different aspects of SNS's governance and performance.

5.1 Design of the SNS organisation and its strategic work

The strategy plan for SNS should serve as baseline and example for the development and implementation of activities under next funding period. We recommend that the forth coming period include the Sustainable Development Goals, to align with the overarching goals of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Further we recommend that SNS to a larger extent use the current goals expressed in the Strategy plan as measuring tools for the steering and governance of their organisational performance. Likewise, we suggest that the forthcoming plan to a larger extent present a cohesive framework for their goal steering.

5.2 Long term view

It should be emphasised that the results of the evaluation are generally positive. While there is room for improvement in certain areas, these amount to tweaks to an organisation that on the whole is relevant, working well and adding value. It follows from this that the SNS organisation as such should look for a permanent localisation, and with that, in the next funding period, be a well-established organisation that is able to consolidate and develop the achievements made so far and to address the needs of the target audiences as well as the Nordics more generally.

5.3 Communication

Recently, the Nordic Council of Ministers approved extra funding to SNS to improve their possibility to meet an increased need for communication activities. The communication activities are important for the future possibility to develop knowledge around forestry issues within other Nordic policy areas. We suggest that SNS communicates even more actively the possibilities of SNS's core areas in cooperation with other policy areas to contribute to Nordic Added Value. We also recommend SNS to develop the communication plan further, like emphasising the youth perspective, to reach an even larger audience.

5.4 Implementation

Besides communication it is vital for SNS to increase the implementation of SNS's activities in a Nordic perspective. We recommend an increased coordination and thrive for several horizontal joint actions with the other Nordic Council of Ministers' policy areas. To enable such an ambition, it is important to further optimise the common procedures and resources for joint action together with other policy areas within the Nordic arena.

Annex 1

Organization	Position	Name
SNS board	Boardmember Danmark	Morten Ingerslev
SNS board	Boardmember Finland	Liisa Saarenma
SNS board	Boardmember Sweden	Karin Perhans
SNS board	Previous Boardmember Sweden	Jan Svensson
SNS Secretariat	Secretary	Mimmi Blomquist
SNS Secretariat	Communicator	Kaia Ekegren
SNS Secretariat	Head of secretariat	Jonas Rönnerberg
SNS Secretariat	Economist/Accountant	Zhanna Möller
SNS Secretariat	Administrator	Sara Hoff
Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat	Senior advisor	Torfi Johannesson
Nordic Joint Committee for Agricultural and Food Research	Chairman	Nina Solheim
ForBioeconomy	Coordinator	Camilla Widmark
Susfor	Project manager	Karl Jäghagen
NordGen	Head of forest section	Kjersti Bakkebo Fjellstad
IUFRO	Head of Secretariat	Fredrik Ingemarson
ÄK-FJLS (Skogsbruk)	Member of Committee of Senior Officials	Björn Helgi Barkarson
ÄK-FJLS (Skogsbruk)	Member of Committee of Senior Officials	Inger Antonsen
ÄK-FJLS (Skogsbruk)	Member of Committee of Senior Officials	Ivar Ekanger
ÄK-FJLS (Skogsbruk)	Member of Committee of Senior Officials	Lars E. Olsson
ÄK-FJLS (Skogsbruk)	Member of Committee of Senior Officials	Leena Arpiainen
ÄK-FJLS (Skogsbruk)	Member of Committee of Senior Officials	Lise Lykke Steffensen
ÄK-FJLS (Skogsbruk)	Member of Committee of Senior Officials	Markus Schulman
ÄK-FJLS (Skogsbruk)	Member of Committee of Senior Officials	Mikael Sandvik
ÄK-FJLS (Skogsbruk)	Member of Committee of Senior Officials	Mogens Kjörup
ÄK-FJLS (Skogsbruk)	Member of Committee of Senior Officials	Pernille Karlog
ÄK-FJLS (Skogsbruk)	Member of Committee of Senior Officials	Tróndur Gilli Leivsson

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