

Briefing

Forests

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Policy pointers

Effective teams for forest governance work need to mix agencies and disciplines, find an inspirational convener and explicitly connect empowered decision makers with marginalised people.

Commitment to learning — permission to fail or succeed, adapt and move on marks out teams with lasting and spreading impact.

Just US\$34,000 per year over several years to a well-connected team can have impacts on key in-country forest governance frameworks.

Teams need time to make and seize opportunities — to wield evidence, let provocation simmer, conduct back-door diplomacy and watch for openings.

Battle-scarred forest governance tactics

Wise global prescriptions for managing forests abound. But we cannot combat illegal logging or deforestation-driven emissions with international analysis or diktat alone. IIED's Forest Governance Learning Group, working on the ground for over a decade, has helped drive progress in 10 countries — from recognition of community resource rights to reforestation-boosting small enterprises. Its approach works because it understands forest governance as the sum of decisions made by people — people who sell or consume commodities from forest lands, who make or abuse the rules, or who just try to make ends meet. Over years of engaging those people to do more for sustainability and local livelihoods, the group can now show how it has made progress, and can offer a set of 'battle-proven' tactics that anyone can use.

Lessons from the Forest Governance Learning Group (FGLG) are especially timely. The European Union is reviewing its anti-illegal timber programme Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), and bottom-up forest management is emerging as a central thread in international processes for tackling climate change and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+).

FGLG is made up of 10 country teams — in Cameroon, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Vietnam. Each team is a coalition of forest governance experts representing a range of stakeholders and organisations, both state and non-state. Backed by IIED and international partners, the teams connect people marginalised from forest governance with those controlling it and push for better decisions (see 'What does a learning group do?', overleaf).

A 2009 IIED briefing reviewed the achievements of this learning network since its beginnings in 2002.¹ This briefing covers the last five years, describing recent lessons and impacts drawn

from an independent evaluation² and a new report from the group.³ The findings point to a vital role for citizen engagement in forest governance, complementing FLEGT and making Europe's legal timber approach more meaningful. FGLG country teams have demonstrated practical pathways to securing forest rights for local communities, which much evidence suggests is one of the most cost-effective ways of combating climate change.⁴ And for government bodies and NGOs seeking forest governance solutions, an account of what has worked for our learning group may offer useful experience and strategic guidance.

International impacts

The recent evaluation found that FGLG has achieved considerable success at a modest cost. The report looked at five years of work funded by the European Commission under the project name 'Social Justice in Forestry'. Budgeting around €25,000 (US\$34,000) per year per team, the project promoted forest rights and small enterprise, legitimate forest products, pro-poor climate change mitigation and adaptation through

forestry, and stronger international understanding of governance approaches that can achieve social justice in forestry.

The country teams' activities — learning events and platforms, knowledge exchanges, published tools and reports — made a distinct impression on international processes such as FLEGT and REDD+, helping to put governance and social justice at the forefront of discourse. The evaluation found that this shift in thinking spawned numerous initiatives and a broader international community of practice on forest governance. The group directly advised this community, producing, for example, an implementation guide to accompany the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's new Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests.

The evaluation also found that with greater investment, the project could have done even more. FGLG teams have the know-how to translate policy shifts into practical implementation and enforcement that benefits forest-reliant communities. Effects of the teams' influences on policy include:

Cameroon: creating a hub of influence. The Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Central Africa hosted Cameroon's FGLG team, known in the country as GREG-Forêts. After productive talks with the Cameroon prime minister's office, the team signed memorandums of agreement with the forestry and environment ministries, boosting the influence of key experts from civil society. Proposals from GREG-Forêts influenced revision of Cameroon's Forestry Law, strengthening community rights to non-timber forest products and a 2010 joint ministerial decree that included more equitable benefit-sharing arrangements for forest revenues.

Ghana: rekindling FLEGT and sparking bottom-up pressure for change. A team convened by the NGO Civic Response sparked dialogue between various civil society forums, Ghana's Forestry Commission and the private sector, and catalysed complementary initiatives. Among the impacts: rekindled participation of civil society in the Voluntary Partnership Agreement process under FLEGT, incorporating constructive criticism of the government's introduction and terms of a legality assurance system. The team influenced a 2012 legal and policy review of the forest sector that called for greater community participation in governance and management. And when illegal rosewood harvesting emerged as a key issue in local forest forums supported by FGLG, Forest Watch Ghana launched a successful campaign to ban Ghanaian rosewood exports to Southeast Asia.

India: making community forest rights a reality. Convened by the Enviro-Legal Defence Firm and the Landesa Rural Development Institute, the FGLG team in India helped create research centres of excellence that government agencies refer to. The team had major influence during a 2012 revision of the Forest Rights Act, which established forest resource use rights for forest-dependent and tribal people — a practical breakthrough for social justice. FGLG capacity-building support led to successful community claims for forest rights and resource titles, and the amended Forest Rights Act mandates post-claim support for communities, ensuring that such legal settlements will increasingly result in real improvements to livelihoods. The team introduced this approach into REDD+ consultations at state and national levels. Notably, the new Green India Mission to increase afforestation and reduce greenhouse gas emissions is becoming more focused on community rights and capabilities, thanks to learning group connections in key government ministries.

Indonesia: championing change from within. Progressive national and state officials are a strong presence on the Indonesia team, enabling FGLG to promote change from within while nurturing trust between government and civil society. An alumni system keeps connections in the group strong and multiplies this influence as senior members rise to powerful positions in government and NGOs. Engagement across several ministries and institutions has won stronger recognition that sustainable forest management is essential for REDD+ success, and the team has worked on transparency and stakeholder participation measures to link the national REDD+ programme with local implementation. FGLG support also helped open opportunities for accessing credit in Java and introduce new sandalwood regulations in East

What does a learning group do? The FGLG 'model'

Learning groups organise around two ideas: that good decisions are based on engagement, learning and pragmatic choices; and that understanding about good decisions can be spread by involving practitioners. They provide teams of individuals, in key local or national governance contexts, an informal and moderated space within which dialogue, learning and decisions can occur. These individuals are typically governance-connected and drawn from divergent interests, institutions and sectors. There is a deliberate attempt to create teams for, or links to the issues of, those marginalised and affected by policy decisions, and to take action to influence policy formulation and implementation.

Once this structure is set, the teams carry out targeted research, hold learning and training events, build networks, support the uptake of governance tools, and develop and exploit opportunities for governance reform. The team members' connections with each other through the group enable effective peer review of progress and transfer of inspiration, innovation, learning and insights between teams and into international policy.

Nusa Tenggara, the poorest province in Indonesia. Both areas of support are now considered influential models for sustaining livelihoods at district and provincial levels.

Malawi: legitimising charcoal and clan-based management. Malawi's team, convened by the Centre for Development Management, is increasingly a reference point on forest governance issues, its recommendations taken up by the Department of Forestry, donors and NGOs. Collaborating with FGLG teams from Tanzania and Mozambique in a challenging political environment, the group drew attention to sustainable charcoal production and trade as a lynchpin for improved forest governance and livelihoods. Clan-based forest management systems were also promoted, based on a successful pilot that boosted reforestation and family incomes in Ntcheu district. These successes helped catalyse a national REDD+ strategy process, with the FGLG team in an influential support role to the Forestry Department.

Mozambique: media, paralegals and accountability. A major strength of the FGLG team in Mozambique, convened by various members of the Amigos da Floresta alliance of NGOs and research organisations, is its media-based campaigning. Heightened public awareness of the illegal timber trade led to government action against corruption and to the first discussions between Mozambique officials and Chinese logging companies and timber traders. Specialising in communication and learning, the team organised and revived national forest dialogues, helped make a documentary on gaps in land law, ran training sessions on environmental education, and produced a children's book. The group also supported the creation of a National Paralegal Network to empower communities on natural resource rights and published the first national report on monitoring of good environmental governance.

South Africa: small forest enterprise in a wider strategy for rural justice. Convened by the timber growers' association Forestry South Africa, this team has thrived on a system of core and call-in members drawn from government, civil society and the private sector. Starting in 2009, the group engineered a shift in the institutional and regulatory environment to better support small and medium forest enterprises (SMFEs). Following several approvals of capital funding for such forest enterprise initiatives, the government is considering a longer-term strategic support programme.

Tanzania: constructive engagement with government after a critical media campaign. As the 'governance arm' of the Tanzania Natural Resources Forum, the FGLG team in Tanzania

Tactics for impact

It is not often that a single project at IIED lives to see its 12th birthday. Programmes endure over decades but individual projects tend to come and go, constrained by donors' limited ability to commit funding over the long term. FGLG's longevity has allowed us time to identify **five effective tactics** and to integrate them in all our forest governance work³:

- **Securing safe space** ensures independence and builds mutual trust
- **Provoking dialogue** connects and explores stakeholder positions
- **Building constituencies and networking** strengthens understanding and collective muscle
- **Wielding evidence** generates, captures and presents accurate information
- **Interacting politically** engages strategically with political players and tracks the effects.

Through experience, FGLG has also been able to focus on making **six types of impact**:

- **Knowledge** of on-the-ground realities and key governance barriers and opportunities
- **Tactical acuity** about practical ways to change governance in different contexts
- **Capabilities** to influence or change governance
- **Engagement** mechanisms and processes
- **Discourses** in decision-making arenas and processes
- **Decisions** on policies and key practices.

has increased government trust in working with non-state stakeholders. NGOs now have easier access to official information on budgets and forestry, membership in REDD+ technical working groups, and joint meetings with government to prepare for international climate change talks. In the Mama Mitsu campaign to curb illegal logging, learning group members produced broadcast documentaries and other media work that drew creatively on research findings. The team also helped facilitate bilateral government agreements with neighbours Mozambique and Kenya to address the cross-border timber trade role in deforestation.

Uganda: citizens holding government to account. By wielding evidence well, the Uganda team helped a wider campaign that halted allocation of major tracts of the Mabira Forest Reserve to sugar production. The country's president made an agreement with the team to study policy alternatives, and the group, convened by the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment, has since seen the government improve its legal compliance and compensation arrangements in forest land allocation cases. Following detailed study of timber concessions by the FGLG team, officials announced a ban on timber harvesting and launched a review of timber concessions and the concession process. The team's proposals on grievance mechanisms and

Prolific producers

FGLG has produced more than 100 policy research outputs and tools to date, along with 150-plus press articles, radio pieces and blogs. In 2012, we launched *Justice in the Forests*, a series of six widely broadcast short films showing how small teams can have a big impact on forest governance. Other key products include *Stories of Change*, which, through different media, describe the effects of FGLG work in Southeast Asia, and a major international guide and toolkit, *Improving Governance of Forest Tenure: a Practical Guide*. All of these are available online at: www.iied.org/pubs

stakeholder participation were used in Uganda's REDD+ strategy and proposals for multilateral financing. Further work through public dialogues and stakeholder consultations led to the first citizens' report on the state of forest governance in Uganda, which stimulated much press attention in early 2014 and will be published later in the year. It is hoped that this report will provide a benchmark for future campaigns and that its indicators will be revisited periodically.

Vietnam: bridging the community-government gap.

As Vietnam moves away from state domination of the forest sector, there is increasing momentum for local control. But despite formal legal recognition of community land and forest tenure, bureaucratic hurdles proliferate. In response, the FGLG team, convened by RECOFTC — The Center for People and Forests, has raised policymakers' awareness of forest governance, community forest management and the urgent need to improve the forest land allocation process based on pilot experiences. Learning group members have committed to participatory approaches, and the team works through many channels, including the national REDD+ process and discussions on smallholder timber legality issues for Vietnam's Voluntary Partnership Agreement under FLEGT.

China and Africa: new relationships and strategies for forest governance. With 80 per cent of African timber exports headed for China, FGLG launched the China-Africa Forest Governance Learning Platform in 2013 to help African experts track the situation and form relationships with their Chinese counterparts. The aim is to facilitate exchange and learning about the key links in supply chains where stakeholder action is needed to improve the prospects for sustainability and local livelihoods. IIED has secured support for a project with organisations in Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Uganda, China and international partners. These partnerships will help sustain the platform's momentum, learn the lessons of FGLG, and give forest governance new strategic impetus over the coming years.

Sustaining the gains

The independent evaluation highlighted areas of challenge for the learning group, and one of these was retaining team members' engagement over time in order to sustain and spread impacts. Part of the teams' effectiveness was their informality and

autonomy, based on individual rather than institutional membership, yet this also meant that members juggled outside commitments and frequently moved on as their careers developed. One way to preserve institutional memory is through social networks involving FGLG alumni, as modelled by the Indonesia team.

Another sustainability issue is funding. The FGLG project has built strong social capital, and existing country teams are expected to continue operating in one form or another beyond 2014, but they will need to find new sources of support. To help the teams carry on their learning, impacts and support systems, the evaluation recommended establishing an online repository with easy access to all project materials. To add to this archive, we need to capture and consolidate evidence of what has proven effective under different forest governance settings. Documentation from the learning group will likely be in demand on the ground as well as in international conversations about REDD+ and FLEGT.

Recommendations

The bottom line from 12 years of FGLG experience is that learning groups work. We now know that patient, open-ended discussions with multiple stakeholders over sufficient time can shift forest governance systems and start to build an enabling environment for sustainable local livelihoods. Here's how decision makers, donors and practitioners can leverage this experience:

International organisations and governance bodies. Recognise the potential of bottom-up approaches such as learning groups and incorporate them into frameworks like FLEGT and REDD. Forest governance change is not just a matter of legal crackdowns or altering incentives from on high — stakeholder-driven solutions are essential.

Government officials and in-country NGOs.

Connect with FGLG teams and others who are using proven learning group tactics (see 'Tactics for impact') or set up a new team based on these lessons.

Donors. Support the ongoing work of FGLG teams and other groups adopting this effective approach.

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Notes

¹ Mayers, J *et al.* (2009) Just forest governance: how small learning groups can have big impact. IIED, London. <http://pubs.iied.org/17070IIED> / ² Branney, P (2014) Evaluation of the work of the Forest Governance Learning Group 2009-2013. <http://pubs.iied.org/G03752> / ³ Mayers, J (2014) Social justice in forests: gains made and tactics that work. A report from the Forest Governance Learning Group. IIED, London. <http://pubs.iied.org/13574IIED> / ⁴ Stevens, C *et al.* (2014) Securing Rights, Combating Climate Change: How Strengthening Community Forest Rights Mitigates Climate Change, World Resources Institute and Rights and Resources Initiative, Washington DC. www.wri.org/securingrights