

MAY 2010

## OVERVIEW

### IIED Natural Resources Group

**Project name:**

Forest Governance Learning Group

**Project leader:**

James Mayers

**Time frame:**

2003-2013 and beyond

**Cost:**

£3.5 million

**Objectives:**

Improved forest governance in 10 countries in Africa and Asia – securing local rights, developing forest product legitimacy and combating climate change.

## PROJECT SUMMARY

In 10 forest-protection hotspots across Africa and South Asia, a novel alliance has been studying how to shift power over forests towards those who enable and pursue sustainable forest-linked livelihoods. Teams in each of these countries work to connect people marginalised from forest governance to those controlling it, and push for better decisions. Allied through the IIED-steered Forest Governance Learning Group (FGLG), they have developed practical tactics for securing safe space, sparking dialogue, building constituencies, wielding evidence and interacting politically. An independent review of the project has reported significant and widespread impacts.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

The combination of new forest 'land grabs' for food and fuel production and old problems – of rights in the wrong hands and capabilities not matched to need – has spurred many to voice the necessity of focusing forestry in a new way. And with REDD (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) and other forest climate strategies presenting opportunities and a few dangers, these voices are getting much louder. Effective, integrated, on-the-ground approaches to forest management are key, but elusive – partly because of a failure to check forest governance that marginalises the

# Shifting power in forests

Alliances that share information crucial to bottom-up change are making a real difference in forest governance

## In-country successes

When an alliance of people from a diversity of sectors spreads the word on key ideas, their influence on thinking and policy can be profound. The Forest Governance Learning Group (FGLG) has been actively engaged in this task since 2003.

This innovative (some even say subversive) network allies international partners to in-country teams and is active in Cameroon, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Vietnam. Facilitated by IIED, the FGLG's influence has been significant and widespread.

The FGLG was reviewed independently in 2009; some of the results are listed below.

- Forest-linked livelihoods around Uganda's Mabira reserve are more secure after the reversal of a presidential decision to convert forest to sugar plantations.
- Investments in overexploitative logging deals have been questioned and prevented by high-level action in Mozambique.
- Changes to governance frameworks in Vietnam are making locally beneficial community forestry more practical.

Each FGLG country team forms such a group – a cross-section of 'governance-connected' people from a mix of agencies who carry out focused studies, build networks, develop practical guidance and tools for reform, and seize opportunities to improve governance.

## Grappling with forest governance

Learning groups organise around the idea that good decisions can be made only when they are based on engagement, learning and pragmatic choices. What is emerging from FGLG are lessons on what makes the process work for forest governance, as below.

- Effective groups represent diverse interests, deliberately link to the issues of people marginalised from policymaking, and take action to influence policy.
- Despite pressure for quick, tangible results, we need to support key people in connecting over time to tackle core issues of rights and sustainable forest management.
- Modest resources have the greatest impact when there is a clear shared goal; this allows actions to be flexible, opportunistic and iterative. Inspirational and dedicated convenors drive groups forward, and participants can stretch limited funds by using their networks to lever additional sources of support.

## High-impact tactics

Groups across FGLG's partner countries have homed in on a shared set of effective tactics for governance work, listed in Table 1; Table 2 summarises the impacts of these tactics (see both, overleaf).

local stewards who could potentially solve the challenges. Governance of forests — or who gets to decide what about forests, and how — is at the heart of prospects for both social justice and sustainable forest management. The Forest Governance Learning Group aims to improve forest governance. It researches issues with the marginalised, convenes key and diverse opinion-formers and decision-makers, builds bridges between separated stakeholders, and takes opportunities for having policy influence.

### KEY LESSONS LEARNED & INNOVATIONS

- Given time and modest support, learning groups of ‘governance-connected’ individuals can bring about important reforms in forest governance.
- Effective learning groups are built on stakeholder engagement, safe space, links to the issues of people marginalised by policy decisions, and action to influence policy.
- Limited resources go furthest when groups have clear goals and adaptive action, inspirational conveners, leverage of additional support, and wider collaborative networks.

### PARTNERS’ VIEW

*There is no bigger source of power than control over natural resources. When working on forestry, there is no question that people know what you are doing – you must be ready to engage with power. Tactical work requires a lot of trust from stakeholders and from the government institutions that we are working with. FGLG provides vital cover for tactical work. We have gradually learned to use small resources to achieve great impact.*

Kyeretwie Opoku  
FGLG Ghana

### IIED NATURAL RESOURCES GROUP

The aim of the Natural Resources Group is to build partnerships, capacity and wise decision-making for fair and sustainable use of natural resources. Our priority in pursuing this purpose is on local control and management of natural resources and other ecosystems.

**Table 1. Tactics for governance work**

TACTIC	EXAMPLES FROM FGLG WORK
<b>Securing safe space</b> — mutual trust and independence	confidentiality rules for teams in Cameroon, Indonesia and Uganda – vital for creativity and participation of key players
<b>Provoking dialogue</b> — connecting stakeholders	convening stakeholders to establish positions in Ghana and Indonesia
<b>Building constituencies</b> and networking	intensive informal communication with decision makers in all countries
<b>Wielding evidence</b> — generating and presenting information	using legal tools to force information out in Uganda court cases producing research briefs, press pieces, cartoons, theatre, internet, TV and radio in Mozambique and Uganda
<b>Interacting politically</b> — engaging with political players	undertaking low-profile shuttle diplomacy among political players to move forward a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) in Ghana exposing malpractice when the evidence was solid and the context sufficiently safe — in Mozambique logging deals

**Table 2. Impacts on governance**

IMPACT	EXAMPLES FROM FGLG WORK
<b>Improved understanding of issues</b>	effective evidence-based advocacy on small-forest enterprises in Cameroon
<b>Improved tactics</b>	clarified and legitimised lobbying tactics in India and Uganda
<b>Stronger influence</b>	politicians in India able to push for governance reform as ‘their’ issue
<b>Wider engagement</b>	new platforms to engage multiple stakeholders in monitoring Ghana’s VPA process
<b>Reshaped discourse</b>	questions of social justice injected into national forestry discourse in Ghana and Mozambique
<b>Changed decisions</b>	better deals for local people on community logging in Indonesia

FGLG has engaged with more than 40 international organisations and produced over 90 policy research outputs and over 100 press, TV and radio advocacy outputs.

There is ample opportunity to do more. Flashpoints of forest conflict abound — from Mabira reserve in Uganda to the Kampar Peninsula in Indonesia. Three-quarters of the world’s forests are government-controlled and often poorly managed; these are ticking time bombs at local level. FGLG’s next phase of work, through 2013, will move further towards defusing some of them.

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