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Empowering communities through forest partnerships

Forests support the livelihoods of millions of local people, are home to invaluable biodiversity, and are critical to mitigating and adapting to climate change. But across the world, they are increasingly threatened by a lack of appropriate forest policies and accessible funds for sustainable forest management and conservation. Partnerships among the historically 'voiceless' — local communities, indigenous people, smallholders and other often marginalised groups — are proving to be a powerful tool for stimulating appropriate policy and financing solutions for those people using and managing forests every day.

Policy pointers

- **Long-term investment** including in capacity development is critical for developing bottom-up partnerships.
- **Real partnerships are** driven by a shared, clear and coherent goal, which incentivises participation and commitment.
- **Mapping local forest** stakeholders and their networks can identify influential players and highlight power dynamics
- **Investment preparedness** within local partnerships is critical for attracting effective and appropriate financial resources.

Partnerships: why they matter

Many forest-dependent communities, indigenous people and smallholders are not included in policy processes and cannot influence development strategies — largely because they are not organised into networks, associations or other cooperative groups.

Partnerships can play a central role in addressing this inclusion challenge. Initiatives such as Growing Forest Partnerships (GFP) focus on using partnerships to ensure key stakeholders, including community groups, indigenous people and small-scale producers, participate in policy dialogue and capacity-building efforts (see Backstory).

The key lies in facilitating the organisation that is necessary to gain a voice in and influence policy decisions. For example, in Liberia, GFP has helped establish 15 County Forest Forums and a National Forest Forum. These fora involve an array of stakeholders — including those previously lacking a voice in the decision-making arena — and have opened the door to participatory partnership development, capacity building and policy dialogue.

Building partnerships among historically marginalised groups can help join the many unheard voices into an amplified chorus that is impossible for decision makers to ignore (see A Guatemalan alliance). And, by joining forces within partnerships, disparate local groups can

Backstory

Established in 2009, the Growing Forest Partnerships (GFP) initiative aims to catalyse and reinforce effective partnerships. It does this, among other things, by working together with those people who are directly involved with, and have a daily impact on, forests.

This collaborative grassroots approach encourages practical and sustainable solutions to the challenges facing forests and rural people.

GFP operates in five countries — Ghana, Guatemala, Liberia, Mozambique and Nepal. The initiative's strategies and processes look different in each country, but each includes a combination of capacity-building exercises, information campaigns and activities to facilitate partnerships.



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access capacity-building assistance, identify common needs and work together to translate their ideas into viable policy support such as adequate funding or investment preparedness. In this way, national, regional and local forest policy

can begin to reflect and respond to those most reliant on forests.

In short, partnerships have the potential to change the balance of power for a huge number of people. At present, the people with the most to

gain are those most left out, making it especially crucial that initiatives such as GFP continue to focus on enhancing grassroots partnership development.

Accessing forest finance¹

Forestry is facing unprecedented opportunities. Forests are increasingly recognised as a key ingredient in resolving global issues such as poverty, climate change, biodiversity loss and natural resource supply. And this growing interest in forests is opening up a wide range of promising new funding sources, instruments and mechanisms — the most visible ones being those related to climate change mitigation (for example, REDD+) and adaptation.

These opportunities, if effectively realised, could both enhance the livelihoods of forest-dependent people and improve the state of the world's forests

by providing steady funds and ultimately allowing forest-dependant people to sustainably manage the forests around them and rise out of poverty.

Achieving this will, to a large extent, rely on our ability to increase access to, understanding of and knowledge about these new forest finance mechanisms among marginalised groups, particularly in regions where innovative financing tools have yet to be introduced or developed.

Limited forest financing is often less about how much money is available than about other factors such as weak framework conditions — including policies, institutions and macro-economic conditions — or poor financial and business preparedness. Addressing these requires evidence-based solutions that draw on both solid socioeconomic and environmental data as well as knowledge about the existing institutional frameworks, livelihood strategies and local realities (see Funding forestry in West Africa).

In all cases, partnerships will be important in ensuring that communities, indigenous peoples, small-scale forestry and other marginalised groups benefit from the new forest funds and that they are used to improve local environmental, economic and social conditions.

By working in partnerships, local people are more likely to ensure that legal frameworks for forest financing evolve and respond to their particular diverse local conditions and situations (see Incentives for smallholders).

It is important to enable local communities and

A Guatemalan alliance

The 'Alianza Nacional de Organizaciones Forestales Comunitarias de Guatemala' — created in 2009— provides a forum for small-scale forest users, communities and indigenous groups in Guatemala to find a common voice and influence national and international forest policy. Made up of more than 400 community groups, with about 77,000 members, the alliance represents an unprecedented level of coordination among indigenous people and community forest organisations in Guatemala.

The Alianza has provided a strong platform for engaging people in national decision-making processes, particularly in identifying forest financing instruments — including REDD (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) — that can best benefit and build the capacity of smallholders and forest communities to carry out sustainable forest management and engage proactively in policy development.¹

More than 388,000 Guatemalans who depend on forests for their livelihoods have benefited from the Alianza's work. Most recently, the alliance was instrumental in passing significant legislation to financially support smallholders (see Incentives for smallholders).



actors to drive their own social and economic development because they are best placed to consider local realities, needs, aspirations and dynamics. By working together in partnerships, these community actors can more easily organise training and other capacity-building activities — for example, to support the preparation of well-structured and fiscally sound business plans for investors and donors. In Guatemala, GFP has helped small-scale timber producers from the Verapaces region produce a viable business plan by linking them — through the independent Federation of Cooperatives of the Verapaces (FEDECOVERA) — with furniture manufacturers in San Juan Sacatepéquez and the broader timber manufacturing industry.²

How to build a resilient partnership

A resilient partnership is one that adds value for each participant. What this looks like in practice will, of course, vary depending on local contexts but, in general, a resilient partnership³:

- has a specific vision or goal in sight, something that partners can focus on accomplishing together;
- is innovative, either linking people who do not usually collaborate or having as its objective something that has not previously been tried;
- is inclusive, expressly committed to including those groups that are often marginalised from national or international decision-making processes;
- is action-oriented, working to implement, rather than discuss, change, whether that



The Alianza Nacional de Organizaciones Forestales Comunitarias de Guatemala represents more than 400 community groups, including development association Tikonel.

- be changing policy, mobilising investment or offering training and advice;
- reflects on its own evolution and learning as it develops.

Achieving a partnership that has all these characteristics can be difficult but there are several tools available to help. The first step is to map forest sector stakeholders within the country, region or locality — to better understand who and where the players are, and identify the 'network of influence'.

Funding forestry in West Africa

In partnership with FAO and the National Forest Programme Facility, GFP is enhancing financial strategies to help smallholders and community forestry in West Africa improve their livelihoods and lift themselves out of poverty.

The initiative, still in its early stages, plans to research, document, analyse and share successful forest financing experiences from across West Africa. While there have been recent attempts to improve forest financing in the region, information about these is fragmented and most members of the Economic Community of West African States lack comprehensive national forest financing mechanisms.

This initiative is a good example of how participatory learning and sharing can help increase knowledge about and capacity for accessing and using practical and sustainable financing mechanisms specifically applicable to community, smallholder and indigenous groups.



Incentives for smallholders

In October 2010, the Government of Guatemala — with support from the Netherlands and thanks largely to lobbying by the Alianza Nacional de Organizaciones Forestales Comunitarias de Guatemala (see A Guatemalan alliance) — created an incentive program for smallholders called 'Programa de Incentivos para Pequeños Poseedores' (PINPEP). The program sets aside 0.05–0.1 per cent of the national budget (the equivalent of several million US dollars each year) for forest management incentives and aims to include smallholders and people living in community forest lands as participants in forest management.

People can access PINPEP funds regardless of whether they actually own the land in question. This is a major step forward in addressing the difficulty of providing support to indigenous and local people who frequently have traditional rights to use forest areas but do not necessarily have legal ownership.

Once given out, the funds are managed entirely by the recipients — be they communal or individual — who also present annual reports and activity plans.

After this mapping, the partnership building can begin in earnest by⁴:

- building on and working with existing networks and platforms wherever possible;
- identifying a credible and accountable local champion — a person, organisation or group that knows the country well, has a strong network of contacts there and regularly communicates and transfers information;
- developing strong and deliberate processes with enough resources to ensure that marginalised groups are fairly represented in the partnership's leaders and members.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember in building partnerships is the need to allow

enough time — reaching and building trust with marginalised groups can take longer than you think.

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The views expressed in this publication are the authors' own, and do not necessarily reflect GFP policy, although they have been formed through the authors' work and experience with GFP partners across the developing world.

Growing Forest Partnerships (GFP) is an initiative that helps develop and support networks of people and organisations at local, national and international levels towards the equitable and sustainable management of forestry resources. The GFP initiative is funded by the World Bank, and currently involves the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and a series of local partners in Ghana, Guatemala, Liberia, Mozambique and Nepal.

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Notes

- ¹ Boscolo, M., van Dijk, K., Savenije, H. 2010. Financing sustainable small-scale forestry: Issues and lessons from developing national forest financing strategies in Latin America. *Forests* 1(4), 230–249. ■ ² GFP. 2010. *Supporting the implementation of the Guatemalan National Forest Finance Strategy*. GFP Newsletter, November 2010. See: <http://www.growingforestpartnerships.org/news/gfp-newsletter-november-2010> ■ ³ GFP. 2010. *Forest partnerships at the grassroots level*. See: <http://www.growingforestpartnerships.org/resources-and-downloads> ■ ⁴ IIED. 2010. *GFP Summary of Lessons Learned 2009–2010*. IIED, London.

