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Making local voices heard: the Three Rights Holders Group

Harnessing forests' potential to help meet both environment and development goals demands sustainable forest management that is controlled by local people. Achieving this in practice means policymakers must both fully acknowledge the role, and rights, of local people in managing forests and fully engage these people in forest decision-making processes. It also requires accessible forest funds that more accurately reflect local people's needs. In response to these needs, a new network — the Three Rights Holders Group, the G3 — has been formed. The network brings together three key alliances of local forest-dependent people, representing family foresters, community forestry organisations and indigenous peoples. Through the G3, these alliances are pushing the locally controlled forestry agenda forward and are making the voices of forest-dependent people heard in both local and global policy arenas.

Policy pointers

- **Sustainable forest** management can reduce poverty, conserve the environment, supply natural resources and mitigate climate change.
- **Local people must be** supported to receive, benefit from and sustainably manage forest investments.
- **The G3 represents three** key stakeholder groups and promotes locally controlled forestry from the bottom up.
- **The G3's success in** harmonising different forest-dependent people's voices and making them heard as one in international arenas is a considerable achievement.

Forests matter

Forests are important to people. They are home to about 300 million people around the world and underpin the livelihoods of more than five times that number (1.6 billion people). More than a third of forests are used to produce wood and non-wood products and, in 2004, trade in forest products was estimated at US\$327 billion.¹ There is global recognition that sustainable forest management contributes significantly to sustainable development, poverty eradication and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.²

But if forests are critical to development, they also play a significant role in keeping our environment healthy. Covering about a third of the world's land area, forests house an estimated 80 per cent of our terrestrial biodiversity.¹ They also store a large amount of carbon that, if released through deforestation, could have major implications for global climate. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that forestry and land-use change already contribute 17 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Indeed, the increasing search for effective tools and mechanisms to mitigate and adapt to climate change has, more than ever, put forests under the spotlight. New financial mechanisms such as REDD (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) represent the growing effort to create a financial value for the carbon stored in forests and offer developing countries incentives to reduce emissions from forested lands and invest in low-carbon paths to sustainable development.

But to succeed, these strategies require the emergence of international agreements to regulate carbon emissions and establish formal markets or special funding mechanisms, both of which remain uncertain. Success will also depend on the willingness and capacity of local forest-dwelling or forest-dependent communities to adhere to REDD agreements and for that, incentives are required.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the key to unlocking forests' potential across the board — to reduce poverty, conserve the environment, supply natural resources and mitigate climate change — lies not only in stopping deforestation, but in sustainable



We must support local people to access and benefit from forest investments

forest management. And this means focusing on local people. As one member of the Capulalpam de Méndez community in Oaxaca, Mexico, has put it:

“forests cannot be protected by remote control”.³

Strong tenure rights and governance systems are key. Two major studies have shown a clear move towards devolution and the recognition of local people’s rights to manage forests and use forest resources. By 2002, for

example, 22 per cent of forests in selected developing countries had been designated for use by, or property rights had been assigned to, local communities, indigenous peoples, individuals and firms.⁴ By 2008, this figure had risen to 26 per cent.⁵

We must prepare and support these local people to access, benefit from, and sustainably manage forest investments.⁶ Doing that in practice means focusing on: raising awareness, strengthening capacity, making financial schemes responsive and accessible to local people, and ensuring the full engagement of forest-dependent communities in forest decision-making processes, while fully respecting their rights.

A new network

It is in this fertile and fast-changing scenario that a new network — the Three Rights Holders Group, the G3 — was formed in 2009. The network brings together three key alliances of local forest-dependent people, or forest ‘rights holders’ (see Boxes) — the International Family of Forest Alliance (IFFA), the Global Alliance of Community Forestry (GACF) and the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of Tropical Forests (IAITPTF). Together, they help raise, and advocate for, the key issues and perspectives around local people and sustainable forest management.

The G3 plays a key role in making the voices of forest-dependent people heard at both local and global levels. One of the network’s main focus areas is to promote ‘locally controlled forestry’, which it defines as “the local right for forest owner families and communities to make decisions on commercial forest management and land use, with secure tenure rights, freedom of association and access to markets and technology”. In particular, this includes:

- local rights for forest-owner families and communities to make decisions on forest management and land use;
- secure tenure rights and freedom of association;
- access to markets and technology and rights to commercial use of forest resources;
- responsible, long-term forestry for improved livelihoods and sustainable forest management, including protection of biodiversity; and
- respect for communities, families and peoples and their customary use of traditional and local knowledge.

One voice

The G3’s goal of promoting locally controlled forestry with one voice is not easy. Partly, this is because of inherent differences in the nature and governance structures of each alliance. And partly, it is because the issues that the network aims to address — including climate change policy, land tenure, access to funds, building capacity and protecting local peoples’ rights — are complex.

Take, for example, the issue of land tenure and use rights. Harmonising positions across the three alliances in the G3 is a challenge because the groups they represent are treated differently by international agreements and conventions. Many of these

The International Family Forestry Alliance (IFFA)

The IFFA provides the voice of family forestry in the G3. The global alliance, formally launched in 2002, was founded as an informal network of national forest owners’ organisations.

It has been instrumental in raising local and global awareness of family forest owners’ contribution to pure water, clean air, productive soil, wildlife, landscape and recreation opportunities.

The IFFA works to, among other things:

- provide information and recommendations to international forest policy processes;
- be recognised as an important stakeholder and be consulted by policymakers;
- promote the existence, development and advantage of family forestry and advocate supportive policies;
- provide a forum for family forest owners to exchange experience, ideas and information; and
- communicate foresters land rights and their strong connection to local communities.



The Global Alliance of Community Forestry (GACF)

The GACF brings the perspective of community forestry organisations to the G3. Established in 2004, it provides a global platform for these organisations to build networks, share experiences in sustainably managing forest resources and raise local and international awareness on how community forestry can help protect the environment and enhance livelihoods.

Over the past eight years, the GACF has helped community organisations craft a strong position on access, use and management of natural resources. It has presented and defended the cause of forest-dependent communities at international, regional and local fora, and made sure their voices impact policy.

The GACF works to:

- empower autonomous federations at all scales to ensure local people's rights to access and control natural resources;
- enable local communities to drive sustainability, good governance, self reliance and democratisation of natural resources management;
- promote the full engagement of stakeholders in formulating policy; and
- reduce poverty through sustainable community-based forest management.

agreements talk about indigenous peoples,⁷ indigenous communities,⁸ indigenous populations, tribal peoples,⁹ minorities, forest dwellers¹⁰ and local communities.¹¹ But they mean different things in each case. The lack of consensus and the varying legal status given to different groups of forest-dependent people makes it tricky for the G3 to fix a single approach to establishing land tenure and use rights.

To overcome their differences and speak with a single voice at global and local policy fora and events, the alliances within the G3 have spent the 18 months since the network's birth strengthening the links between them and developing a common mission, shared objectives and messages, and a joint action plan.

This largely focuses on influencing global policy through local experience, which requires creating an active flow of information and ideas between the two levels: feeding international fora with local examples and experiences of what works on the ground while also informing local stakeholders of global policies and positioning.¹²

This vision tallies with the core principles of the Growing Forest Partnerships (GFP) that sponsors, among other things, many of the G3's outreach activities.

International influence

It is too early to assess what kind of impacts the G3 is having at the local level. But the network has certainly been very effective at pushing the locally controlled forestry agenda forward in key global forestry and climate change events. For example, at the UN biodiversity summit in Nagoya, Japan in October 2010, the G3 highlighted the importance of locally controlled forestry and biodiversity conservation. "Locally controlled forestry is promoting sustainable forest management, and people conducting locally controlled

forestry are the key players in the conservation of biodiversity," said chair of the German Forest Owners' Federation, Philipp von Gutenberg, speaking on behalf of the G3. In the same month, at the twentieth session of the Committee on Forestry in Rome, Italy, the G3 reiterated their willingness to act together to bridge the gaps between local and international levels and to further cooperate with the GFP.

The G3's success in harmonising different voices and making them heard as one in international arenas is a considerable achievement that surely represents one of the major added values of the G3.

The group has also made significant contributions to advocating the potential of locally controlled forestry in climate change solutions — to provide carbon sequestration and storage and support the substitution of non-renewable fossil fuel and raw material. For example, in Cancun, Mexico, during the Forest Day at the UN climate negotiations, the G3 had an information booth and participated in various panels where its speakers stressed the need to include the role of forest-dependent people in mitigating climate change.

This point was also made in Nagoya, where the G3 stated that "sustainable forest management is the most efficient and cheap solution to the global climate challenge as sustainably managed forest and harvested wood products, hardly at any cost, can provide the 'six S' — subsistence, sink, storage, substitution, species and services — in one go. No other policy instrument, resource, technology or material is able to do so".

Looking ahead

Despite it's significant progress, the G3 still needs to prove it can support locally controlled forestry in the long term; helping to establish sustainable funding



The International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests (IAITPTF)

The IAITPTF represents indigenous peoples within the G3. A global network of organisations, the IAITPTF already lobbies UN bodies and other institutions for the protection of indigenous peoples' rights. It also uses policy intervention, capacity building, networking and communications to improve recognition of, and respect for, the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples.

In particular, the alliance works to:

- promote full recognition of the rights and territories of indigenous and tribal peoples;
- promote these people's development and participation in decision and policymaking;
- establish effective regional and international networks of indigenous peoples; and
- provide a forum for indigenous and tribal peoples to share information and experiences.

mechanisms and providing a strong 'anchor' to the local level by showcasing successful case studies and linking locally controlled forestry with concrete REDD implementation projects.

To achieve this, the G3 plans to:

- document and disseminate success stories of locally controlled forestry and link them to other drivers of development projects — including gender, poverty reduction, biodiversity loss, green economy — at the global level; and
- further explore funding options and fine-tune the idea of an international, independently monitored non-sovereign fund.¹³ This includes better defining the institutional architecture, accountability models, and management practices needed to make funding more accessible, more widely distributed and better monitored and verified.

GFP — both directly and through The Forest Dialogue — will continue supporting the G3 to strengthen its international role, recognition and influence. In particular, by generating ideas and research that can help integrate the network's thoughts and actions into global and local policy. And by steering the development of key tools, analyses and initiatives to better use and link existing data, in close consultation with potential investors, to guide and support greater and improved investment in locally controlled forestry.

■ GRAZIA PIRAS

Grazia Piras is a researcher for the Forest Team, Natural Resources Group at IIED.

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.

Notes

- ¹ UN. International Year of Forests, 2011. www.un.org/en/events/iyof2011 ■ ² COP 16 agreement on REDD+: official UNFCCC text ■ ³ Bray, D. *et al.* 2010. *Sustainable Forest Management at a Strategy to Combat Climate Change: Lessons from Mexican communities*. Rights and Resources Initiative, Washington DC. ■ ⁴ White, A., Martin, A. 2002. *Who Owns the World's Forests? Forest tenure and public forests in transition*. Forest Trends, Washington DC. ■ ⁵ Sunderlin, W.D., Hatcher, J., Liddle, M. 2008. *From Exclusion to Ownership? Challenges and opportunities in advancing forest tenure reform*. Rights and Resources Initiative, Washington DC. ■ ⁶ Angelsen, A. *et al.* 2009. *Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD): An options assessment report*. Meridian Institute. ■ ⁷ International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169, Article 1 refers to "indigenous peoples". ■ ⁸ UN Conference on Environment and Development refers to "indigenous people and their communities." ■ ⁹ ILO Convention 169, Part I, Article 1, Paragraph 1(a) refers to "tribal peoples". ■ ¹⁰ Articles 2(d) and 5(a) of the 'Non-Legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests' uses the term "forest dwellers", without definition. ■ ¹¹ The International Finance Corporation Performance Standards defines 'local community' as "Community within the project's area of influence". ■ ¹² Buss, C. 2011. *Sustainable forestry: connecting local to global and vice versa*. Briefing. Growing Forest Partnerships. ■ ¹³ Macqueen, D. 2011. *Investing in locally controlled forestry*. Briefing. Growing Forest Partnerships.

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 Agriculture Organization (FAO) and a series of local partners in Ghana, Guatemala, Liberia, Mozambique and Nepal.

CONTACT: Grazia Piras
International Institute for Environment and Development
grazia.piras@iied.org
Tel: +44 20 7388 2117
www.iied.org

