



JANUARY 2011

Sustainable forestry: connecting local to global and vice versa

Climate investors are increasingly turning to forests as a means of mitigating and adapting to climate change. But their efforts will only be effective if they respond to local people's needs and support these people to improve their livelihoods through sustainable forest management. An estimated 30 per cent of the world's forests are managed by local people, either formally or informally. And it is these people — smallholders, communities and indigenous people — that make forest investments work on the ground. The recent boost to forest funding must enhance their ability to influence policymaking. This requires better communication between global decision makers and local forest managers — both by getting local voices heard in global decision making arenas and by sharing lessons learnt at a global level with local forest managers. Initiatives — such as Growing Forest Partnerships — that support networks of locally controlled forestry groups are making progress on both fronts.

Policy pointers

- **Global decisions about forest funds** must be relevant to local people's needs and focus on sustainable forest management.
- **Enhancing the ability of local people to influence global decision making** is critical to achieving that.
- **This requires an improved two-way flow of information:** to get local voices heard in global decision-making arenas, and global decisions disseminated to local people.
- **Networks of locally controlled forestry groups** can improve information flows in both directions.

Don't lose sight of locals

The renewed focus on forests as a route to mitigating and adapting to climate change is breathing new life into funds for forestry activities in developing countries. The latest donor commitments to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) total an estimated US\$4–8 billion, while forest-related overseas development aid now stands at approximately US\$2 billion each year. This huge windfall of money for the forestry sector could be a great opportunity for improved financing of sustainable forest management.

But there are concerns among smallholders, local communities, indigenous peoples and civil society groups that the new funds will not reach them as a key target group. Yet they manage or own an estimated third of the world's forests, either formally or informally.

We must not lose sight of the fact that it is these 'local people' that make forest interventions work on the ground. Indeed, the role of local people in shaping effective forestry interventions has been

one of the key lessons to emerge from the past 20 years of investment into sustainable forest management.

Community involvement in forest management has been evolving since the late 1970s as a way of enhancing the links between people and trees. It now includes integrating the 'governance' pillars for improving livelihoods and environment — rights, tenure and benefit sharing.

The recent boost to forest funding should enhance local people's ability to influence decision making. To do that, we need to strengthen the flow of communication and decision making between global practitioners and local forest managers. This means getting local voices heard in global decision-making arenas. But equally important is ensuring that information and lessons learnt at a global level find their way down to those who matter most — local people on the ground — and are shared between local forest managers. This information flow should help ensure that the rights, responsibilities and obligations of local people and governments are integrated into local practices and national policies and laws.



Local people are best placed to advise what interventions are needed on the ground

Making decisions relevant

Many decisions about how forest funds should be used are made at global or national levels. But do these reflect local needs and experiences on the ground? The short answer is 'not really'. Most funding is distributed to national governments, where it is often handled by finance rather than forest or environment departments. Despite their best efforts, many groups and organisations struggle to make their investments either relevant or responsive to local people's needs.

Forests underpin the livelihoods of many poor people. They provide income from timber and non-timber forest products, meet subsistence needs for construction materials, energy, food and medicine, and provide many other 'ecosystem services' such as soil fertility and regulation of water supply. These forest services are more often than not managed by local people with local knowledge of how best to use forests sustainably. Yet many investments do not consider forests' livelihood values, largely because their economic worth is often underestimated (see Putting a price on locally managed forests).

A lot of the 'climate-inspired' forest funds — and associated 'soft' investments to support, for example, capacity building — tend to be directed at conservation in the belief that halting all forest activities offers the best and quickest route to cutting forest emissions. But just because forests are used does not mean they cannot be sustainable or help meet climate challenges. Global funding decisions should include livelihood activities and focus on local sustainable forest management.

Such locally controlled forestry is carried out by forest-dependent families or smallholders, community groups and indigenous people. Together these groups

are called 'rights holders' — they have substantial (and growing) decision-making power and control over forestland but not necessarily secure tenure or ownership rights. In Tanzania more than four million hectares of forest are under varying degrees of local control.

Rights-holder groups have already shown that they can sustainably manage forests for wood, non-timber forest products and other social or environmental services (see Locally controlled forestry works).

These local people are best placed to advise what interventions are needed on the ground. It is therefore vital to decrease the gap between forest-dependent people and the global actors investing in the forestry sector. Improved dialogue and partnerships can help achieve this and enhance the ability of global decisions to reflect the needs of local people (see Figure).

Getting local voices heard

People locally managing forests are already demanding a key role in designing and implementing investment streams, especially with regard to climate change. For example, the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) — a formal network of more than eight million people, represented through 11,200 groups — links community forest users from across the country to strengthen their role in policymaking. The network has been instrumental in improving dialogue between policymakers and forest users and is now well represented in national and global discussions.

But few groups are so lucky. Many cannot access global decision-making processes because discussions tend to be dominated by governments and donors. Other local groups fail to get a voice because they have limited resources and organisational capacity to attend forest funding discussions or because they are not linked into the wider networks that do participate.

Despite these barriers, there is some progress to report. Some organisations, such as The Three Rights Holders Group (G3), supported by Growing Forest Partnerships (GFP), are using their wide networks to provide opportunities for smaller groups to get their voice heard and strengthen their decision-making power (see Supporting local forest managers).

Getting global discussions to a local level

Many donors and multilateral development banks that provide forest funds are increasingly aware of the need to reach out to a wider group and include local voices in their decision making, and local goals — from improving livelihoods and reducing poverty to equitable benefit sharing and good governance — in their funding.

Putting a price on locally managed forests¹

Locally managed forest goods and services play an important economic role in many developing countries. In Kenya, for example, they contribute significantly to the livelihoods of more than ten per cent of the population and are thought to be worth almost US\$100 million each year. Indeed, in many African nations, non-timber forest values far exceed the recorded national income generated by formal forest industries. In Namibia, for example, they are worth an estimated US\$180 million — nearly 450 times more than the income from commercial logging.

Individually, the value of non-timber forest products and services is also high — in South Africa, the use of forest-based traditional medicines is worth between US\$77–155 million; in Zimbabwe, the soil erosion costs avoided by the presence of natural vegetation are estimated at up to US\$ 80 million each year; in Kenya, indigenous forests provide water catchment services worth more than US\$25 million a year; and the global value of carbon sequestration by Eritrea's forests and woodlands has been calculated at more than US\$27 million.



For example, the World Bank's multi-billion dollar Climate Investment Fund (CIF) has democratically elected 'observers' from civil society and the private sector who attend the committees and sub-committees overseeing its operations and activities, including the Forest Investment Programme. The CIF hosts an annual 'Partnership Forum' — a broad meeting of donors, UN agencies, implementing agencies and others — to help ensure that all stakeholders are included in its discussions. The forum provides much needed opportunities for obtaining independent scientific, technical and other advice, sparking dialogue and consultation on how to integrate climate change and development, and sharing cutting edge knowledge about climate change challenges.

But there remains the significant challenge of how to get the broad spectrum of experience and knowledge coming out of this type of global meeting down to the people who matter most — those locals managing more than a third of the world's forests. It is administratively easier to have a single point of contact (the national government) and rely on the government's own process for engaging sub-national stakeholders.

This approach is not always effective though. It can be expensive and is rarely a priority for national governments, whose lower-level staff also have limited capacity to break out of their typical 'forest guardian' role.

What is really needed is a series of platforms to engage civil society at multiple levels. This kind of supportive framework would not only ensure a flow of information but would also provide effective 'checks and balances' on how the funds are used. For example, strengthening the role of CIF observers in national processes and platforms would help integrate global information into country-level processes.

If, for example, these observers could link into platforms such as the Guatemala Alliance of indigenous and community forest organisations it would help enormously in sharing global information with stakeholders at national, regional and international levels. This alliance represents more than 77,000 people in 400 community groups and, supported by GFP, is already helping the voices of marginalised groups in the country to be heard more clearly at national and international levels.

Hurdles to progress

When it comes to both getting local voices heard in global arenas and getting global dialogue down to local people, building and strengthening organisational networks of locally controlled forestry is the first step to creating sustainable improvements. It is no easy task and has been vastly underestimated in many funding mechanisms.

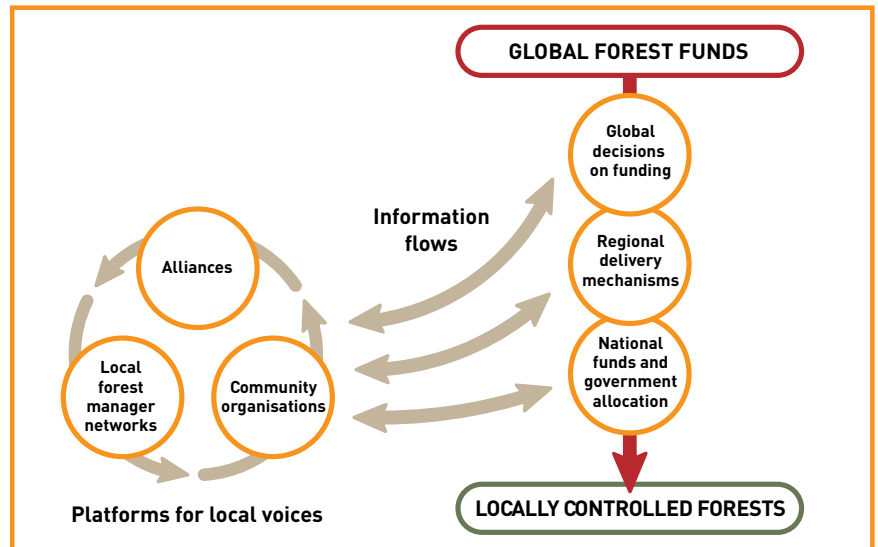


Figure. Information flows to connect global decision makers to forest-dependent people

Locally controlled forestry works²

In 2005, the Tanzanian Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism considered the benefits of locally controlled forestry by assessing the impact on local communities of restoring ngitilis — traditional enclosures to reserve pasturelands and dry season grazing areas — in Shinyanga Region. They found that ngitilis, which are managed by individuals, groups and whole communities, have helped re-establish small acacia woodland patches on up to 472,000 hectares of degraded land across the region.

This has led to significant economic benefits for the groups managing the ngitilis, worth up to US\$11.7 per person each month. As well as the cash they receive from selling ngitili products such as grazing rights and firewood, local communities have made significant gains in reduced effort to collect fuel wood, thatch grass, poles, fodder and water.

More than two-thirds of households have improved their economic wellbeing as a result of the ngitilis.

The key hurdles are organisation and communication. Many local organisations — including national forest forums and community forest user groups — have sprung up across the globe but these have struggled to make an impact on improved governance, institutional representation and participatory policymaking, partly because of poor organisation. Weak organisational structures go hand in hand with weak communication, which too often focuses on broad issues rather than the specific needs of local forest managers.

Finding the resources to build the capacity and organisation of these networks is a key challenge, particularly given the need to link across the many nations covered by individual forest funds. But the benefits of doing so could be enormous. There is a vast pool of knowledge and experience among local forest managers that can be shared between countries to help shape effective activities. By facilitating links between countries, forest stakeholders can learn, network and individually improve and collectively strengthen their ideas for future forest investment. It



Supporting local forest managers³

Since 2009, the GFP initiative has supported the Three Rights Holders Group, (the self titled G3), an alliance of organisations to support local forest managers. The group consists of the Global Alliance of Community Forestry, the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of Tropical Forests, and the International Family Forestry Alliance. These organisations promote sustainable forest management through locally controlled forestry and have come together at events such as the World Forestry Congress in 2009 and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change meetings in 2009 and 2010, where their presence has been key to raising the profile of local forest stakeholders in global debates and defending their position as key custodians of the forest in the climate change debate.

would also provide opportunities for influencing local and national decision making by helping to integrate forests into development and find ways of attracting investment into locally controlled forestry.

The rights-holders alliance is making some progress in this direction. Through links to local organisations, it is gathering information and experiences, and using them to demonstrate the value of locally controlled forestry to decision makers. The network also provides a channel through which information can flow both upwards and downwards.

Next steps

GFP supports local, national and international networks through multi-stakeholder dialogues and sharing of experiences and knowledge. Through effective partnerships and by working with civil society groups, the initiative has begun to see better communication of policy information and lessons learnt about key priorities from local to global and global to local.

For example, GFP has worked in partnership with The Forests Dialogue to bring the three rights-holder groups together to share their visions and identify a common agenda, highlighting mutual obstacles as well as shared opportunities for locally controlled forestry at a national and international level. The goal is to better position these groups in forestry decision making and ensure that funds intended to address poverty and climate change are put to best use. The initiative has brought together leaders and representatives from both local forest-dependent groups and international stakeholders to improve the quality and quantity of investments into forests, particularly those available through climate change funds.

It is platforms such as this that provide the open and free space for local forest managers to interact with global decision makers. For example, the above dialogue stream has also helped connect local forest managers to forestry investors.

But we still need to link into networks beyond GFP and take their experiences of successful locally controlled forestry to more global decision makers. For that to happen, we need to direct funds to further enhance support for:

- building local communities' capacity to get involved through training in policy formulation, lobbying and negotiating with donors;
- improving advocacy at local, national and regional levels;
- building democratic community institutions that cover cross-sectoral issues to ensure forests are integrated into management for the broader landscape;
- networking and exchange visits between communities, including those that are marginalised, unorganised and non-networked;
- educating forest rights holders on the potential benefits of joining organisations.

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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 Mogaka, H. *et al.* 2001. *Economic aspects of community involvement in sustainable forest management in Eastern and Southern Africa*. IUCN — The World Conservation Union, Eastern Africa Regional Office, Nairobi.
- ² Blomley, T., Iddi, S. 2009. *Participatory forest management in Tanzania 1993–2009: lessons learned and experiences to date*. Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, United Republic of Tanzania.
- ³ For more information on the G3 right-holders group see www.growingforestpartnerships.org/locally-controlled-forestry

