

MARCH 2011

## OVERVIEW

### IIED Natural Resources Group

**Project name:**

Growing Forest Partnerships

**Project leader:**

Grazia Piras

**Time frame:**

2009–2011

**Cost:**

US\$10 million

**Objective:**

To foster bottom-up processes that empower and link forest-dependent people worldwide, ensuring their voices influence local and global policy.

## PROJECT SUMMARY

In Africa, Asia and Latin America, the Growing Forest Partnerships initiative (GFP, [www.growingforestpartnerships.org](http://www.growingforestpartnerships.org)) is creating a global movement through networks of international and local groups. Participants in eight countries have advocated for locally controlled forestry, lobbied for change in national forest policies, and prepared forest-dependent people to influence and benefit from investment funds supporting forest management for climate change mitigation and other goals. GFP is a three-year multi-partner initiative financed by the World Bank. Its mandate arises from an IIED study that reviewed global forest programmes and consulted more than 600 experts – highlighting an urgent need to support bottom-up processes worldwide and engage local stakeholders in forest policy.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

The Growing Forest Partnerships initiative has appeared at a challenging time for the world's forests and forest-dwellers. Forests may gain great monetary value under programmes for REDD – reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation – yet the ownership of these resources and the rights of those whose livelihoods depend on them are broadly unresolved. It is increasingly clear that support for forests can help reduce poverty, conserve

# Building bottom-up platforms for change

Bottom-up processes and informed stakeholders are crucial in shaping the new global agenda for forests.

In 2007, the World Bank decided to shake up its approach to forests. New forces such as climate change mitigation schemes were reshaping the sector, and an internal review had found progress was slow on the Bank's own forestry strategy. The organisation proposed wide-ranging new partnerships and commissioned IIED to gather feedback from the forestry community. Our survey reviewed major global forest initiatives and consulted more than 600 experts, who called on the World Bank to fill a challenging gap: forests did need a global-scale network, but its work had to be driven from the local level, and communities who rely on forest resources had to be key partners. The Bank accepted the call for a participatory approach, and with IIED, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, launched Growing Forest Partnerships (GFP).

### Hands-off help

The initiative started in 2009 in Ghana, Guatemala and Mozambique – countries with valuable forests where marginalised groups were already demanding greater involvement in decision-making. To set priorities, local country teams ran nationwide 'people's diagnostic' workshops where forest-dwellers and other relevant stakeholders discussed pressing problems and opportunities. Liberia and Nepal joined this 'growing' initiative in 2010, building on previous participatory processes that had already identified gaps and goals in

those countries' forest sectors. At the end of 2010, GFP further expanded through lesson-learning exchanges in Burkina Faso, Lao PDR and Peru.

To nurture bottom-up change, the international institutions behind GFP took a hands-off approach. Local partners were given space to discuss issues of their choosing, organise themselves, articulate their needs for sustainable forest management, and take action. Though the idea of multi-stakeholder platforms was far from novel, it was a striking innovation for a global project to give local groups of partners a free rein in creating the platforms themselves.

All the in-country groups identified broadly similar goals of influencing policy towards more equitable use of forest resources. But the project's open-endedness encouraged them to take diverse paths based on local needs and opportunities.

- In **Ghana**, land tenure was a key concern. The team there commissioned two studies on land rights and forest governance to find possible avenues for change.
- In **Guatemala**, GFP birthed a new alliance representing thousands of forest rights-holders. Drawing strength from existing organisations that joined the partnership, they successfully campaigned for new legislation, known as PINPEP, that makes non-landowners eligible for state incentives.

environments, and promote sustainable use of natural resources and climate change resilience — not when distant institutions pour money into avoiding deforestation, but when local communities are prepared to receive, benefit from and sustainably manage investments. This initiative aspires to catalyse a new global dynamic by creating and linking groups of local and global forest stakeholders. These new coalitions can ensure that global discussions include the real challenges facing forest-dependent people and can test innovative ways of tackling those challenges.

## KEY LESSONS LEARNT & INNOVATIONS

- Though global in scope, Growing Forest Partnerships offers remarkable autonomy to local groups, who have developed their own priorities, coalitions and campaigns.
- It is easy to underestimate the time needed to create and strengthen new partnerships. But given time to explore the needs of all parties, powerful alliances can form that often achieve important policy results with limited resources.
- Change occurs more quickly and cheaply if promoted by existing groups or networks with high credibility, solid structure and clear aspirations. Involving these organisations is crucial to attract marginalised groups.

## PARTNERS' VIEW

*Different organisations have found a place through Growing Forest Partnerships — [people with] different ideas have come together to discuss and influence policymaking processes.... Through Growing Forest Partnerships we could clear space to discuss beyond a project.*

Bharati Pathak  
Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal

## 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.



Photo: Mike Goldwater

Forest policy must engage the local communities that depend on forest resources.

- In **Liberia**, the group studied chainsaw regulations, testing different options on the ground.
- **Mozambique** is undergoing a national decentralisation process. The partnership there used two case study sites to test the effects of shifting central authority over forests to the local level.
- In **Nepal**, priorities were clear from the start, thanks to two decades of broadly inclusive work on forest issues. The group quickly targeted critical policy processes, including a forthcoming update to Nepal's 1993 Forest Act. In a face-to-face meeting, they convinced top officials to put on hold a version of the bill that didn't meet their needs.

## Time crunch

The programme's flexibility did come at a cost, however: no one realised how long it would take for the partnerships to cohere and start operating. Some project milestones were three to ten months behind schedule. Reaching out to marginalised groups and building trust are slow processes, and even more patience is needed to alter systems that in some cases have remained unshaken for centuries. Furthermore, many groups opened Pandora's boxes of issues — such as corruption or gender disparities — that forest policy can't solve, but serious initiatives can't elude.

This complexity, though disruptive to the three-year project cycle, was also GFP's strength. Using stories told directly by forest-dependent people, the initiative sketched a realistic map of what is needed and what works in each country. To make use of this nebulous but truthful snapshot, donors and practitioners must be willing to take an integrated approach

aimed at long-term results that may require much more time than expected.

Once the GFP platforms were in place, their connections and influence scaled up rapidly from local to global. A particular success was the creation of the 'G3' coalition of three forest rights-holders organisations — the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of Tropical Forests, the Global Alliance of Community Forestry, and the International Family Forestry Alliance — who now lobby internationally for investment in locally controlled forestry.

The three groups met at a GFP-organised event, spent a year forging a shared mission, and have since made their voices heard in major UN conferences on climate change and forestry. The involvement of established, reputable organisations in our ambitious and open-ended programme created a springboard effect. The outcomes in Guatemala and Nepal offer the same lesson.

The work of creating effective local and international partnerships is just beginning, but foundations have been laid. Five national platform groups have the capacity to run projects, and people on the ground are realising they can powerfully affect new policies and initiatives. Human capital, though largely unmeasurable, is an important legacy of GFP. This capital can be invested in other initiatives as the forest sector continues to grapple with global change.

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