

**Growing forest partnerships
in
Guatemala**

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Introduction

Climate change, extreme poverty, natural resource degradation and a variety of other environmental challenges confront countries around the globe. The international community, national and local governments and other stakeholders have sought solutions for these pressing issues through passage and implementation of a wide range of innovative policies and funding instruments. Several of these policy and funding mechanisms could provide opportunities for rural communities around the globe to improve their livelihoods, which could in turn lead to more sustainably managed environments and decreased levels of poverty. A major obstacle for many rural forest-dependent communities however is that local stakeholders, including forest smallholders and indigenous people, are frequently not organized into partnerships for cooperative and unified action and advocacy, and many lack the necessary skills to effectively engage in policy and funding processes. This means that the people with the most to gain are frequently not at the table, leaving their issues and particular needs unvoiced and unrepresented.¹

Growing Forest Partnerships

In 2009, in response to this lack of organization and need for capacity development, the Growing Forest Partnerships (GFP) initiative was established. It set out with the goal of supporting the development of partnerships amongst forest smallholders, indigenous people and forest-dependent communities, and to enable them to acquire and develop the necessary capacities required to access financing for forestry related activities. GFP also set out to improve national and international investment in and support for locally driven sustainable forest management related processes. Towards this end, support has been provided for knowledge sharing between local, national, regional and international actors in the forestry, policy and finance arenas.

GFP has been established in five countries, tailoring assistance to each country's unique context. These countries include Ghana, Guatemala, Liberia, Mozambique and Nepal. While each country process has included capacity and knowledge development activities focused on facilitating partnership development and enhancing abilities to access finance, each country process has progressed and grown in a unique way as a result of the various contexts, priorities and interests of those involved. This has proven to be an important factor in participants in the countries embracing and owning the activities and goals of GFP.

The GFP initiative is facilitated by a group of partner institutions that work together to provide technical and advisory support to each GFP country, including the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (under the management operations of the National Forest Programme (NFP) Facility), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the World Bank. GFP funding is provided by the World Bank. In addition to providing the technical expertise of its staff, FAO

¹ Grouwels and Schweitzer Meins, 2011.

has been able to add to GFP efforts by building on the NFP Facility's knowledge and human resources, such as the expertise of NFP Facility country 'Coaches', located within the regions and providing regular advice and guidance to in-country GFP project facilitators. A multi-stakeholder group of relevant experts forms the GFP 'Reference Group', and serves in a quasi-steering capacity, providing input into major programme decisions and strategies (e.g. annual workplans and budgets, programme visioning, etc).

The importance of partnerships

A fundamental question for those involved in early conversations about the development of the GFP was what people in forest-dependent communities needed in order to become empowered to improve their social, economic and ecological conditions. Based on research findings and on practical experience, three main drivers were identified for achieving greater empowerment including large numbers of organized people, financial resources and articulated and well communicated ideas.

- Organized groups can wield tremendous social, cultural and political influence. By coming together within partnerships, previously disconnected local groups and individuals can access capacity-development assistance, identify common needs and work together to translate their ideas into viable policy recommendations and requests for financial and technical assistance.
- Financial resources can be used to exert economic and political influence. For example, in many local communities, business leaders have a large role in local politics and community activities as a result of the economic influence they maintain within the community (source of employment, funding source for community activities, etc). At a broader level, the wealthy may choose to donate heavily to political campaigns, and thus gain the ear of political leaders. In other words, those with financial resources can buy influence.
- Ideas themselves can be powerful. As solutions are sought by politicians, donors and natural resource managers for a variety of development challenges, innovative and workable ideas and solutions that are well articulated and communicated are invaluable.

In all five GFP countries, many forest-dependent communities struggled with a lack of organized partnerships or networks of people and money. While ideas lay nascent in many communities, individuals within the localities did not have an understanding of how those ideas could inform policy and finance dialogues. By encouraging partnership development, GFP's intent was to support local people in increasing their influence through the development of organized partnerships, which could in turn allow them to development and subsequently share their ideas in a focused and targeted way and, potentially lead to greater financial access and security.

GFP Guatemala

A GFP country since 2009, Guatemala's efforts have focused on building forest community partnerships, strengthening the capacity of forest communities and improving finance instruments to benefit smallholder and forest communities, all through the development of strong partnerships.

At the start of the GFP programme in Guatemala, four thematic areas were identified as core areas to which GFP activities should respond in order to generate positive economic, social and environmental impacts in the country. These areas have served to guide the evolution of GFP in Guatemala and include governance, financing instruments, institutional strengthening and capacity development.²

Governance

The first major action of the GFP programme in Guatemala was to provide support for the development of a partnership called the 'Alianza Nacional de Organizaciones Forestales Comunitarias de Guatemala' (the National Alliance of Community Forest Organizations) ('Alianza'). The Alianza was established as a platform for Guatemalan small holders, indigenous groups and forest communities to develop and speak with a common voice in order to influence national and international forest policy. Additionally, with support from the GFP, the Alianza initiated a training plan for developing local capacity in several areas of Guatemala.³

Today, the Alianza is made up of more than 400 community groups, with about 77,000 members, and has become a strong platform for engaging people in national decision-making processes, particularly and, as its first priority, lobbying for forest financing policies and instruments that can benefit local people. This partnership represents an unprecedented level of diversity and coordination among indigenous people and community forest organizations in Guatemala, and demonstrates the enormous potential that lies in strong partnerships, as the following section illustrates.⁴

Finance instruments

On 17 November 2010, at the Congress of the Republic of Guatemala, El Programa de Incentivos Forestales a Pequeños Poseedores (PINPEP) (Forest Smallholders Incentives Program) was signed into law (Law No. 3937, Decree No. 51). The law was passed, in large part, as a result of lobbying by and inputs from the Alianza, showing its increasing strategic importance in policy decision making.⁵

² Boscolo, van Dijk, Savenije, 2010.

³ Ibid

⁴ Grouwels and Schweitzer Meins, 2011.

⁵ Instituto Nacional de Bosques Guatemala, 2011.

The new law, which sets aside 0.05 to 1.0% (the equivalent of several million US dollars each year) of the national budget for forest management and reforestation incentives, has the potential to dramatically impact forest communities all over Guatemala because 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 financial support to indigenous and local people who frequently have traditional rights to use forest areas but do not necessarily have legal ownership. It is expected that more than 400,000 people with smallholdings, who have no legal registration of ownership, may directly benefit from PINPEP. Additionally, community forestry organizations will play an active role in the technical decision-making body of PINPEP, which will ensure their perspectives contribute to the shaping of PINPEP's implementation into the future.⁶

Institutional strengthening

In November 2007, a process to develop and implement a national forest financing strategy (NFFS) was initiated, receiving final approval from the Board of Directors of the Guatemalan Forestry Authority (INAB) in 2009.⁷ This process set out to improve the flow of information and ideas between the forestry sector and the finance sector. The NFFS was also established to explore various options for improving access to finance amongst forest stakeholders.

A key role has been played by the Alianza, as the network has engaged in various fora focused on innovative new programs and funding sources to ensure inclusion of forest community interests and perspectives. One such forum is the Forest, Biodiversity and Climate Change Group which is focused on developing a national strategy and program for Reduction of Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+). The Alianza participation in this group is critical as there is broad concern about how to adequately include local communities, and ensure they are not harmed by climate change actions.

Capacity development

Within INAB, a small team was appointed to establish a Unidad de Inteligencia Financiera Forestal (UIFF) (Forest Finance Intelligence Unit) to follow up on the implementation of finance instruments identified as likely to be beneficial for smallholders and forest dependent communities. The unit provides forest finance information and capacity-development opportunities for foresters and finance professionals, and supports the development of forest sector business proposals.⁸ To complement the efforts of the UIFF, GFP has provided support to the Alianza, as well as to Alianza member organizations, to focus specifically on building local forest-based entrepreneurs' capacity to develop and market viable business plans. This has been

⁶ Instituto Nacional de Bosques Guatemala, 2011.

⁷ Rodas, 2010.

⁸ Boscolo, van Dijk and Savenije, 2010.

carried out through the convening of several training workshops and exchanges focused on improving market competitiveness, developing projects, developing guidelines and management and strategic business visioning.

It is important to enable local communities and 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 organize training and other capacity-building activities, for example, to support the preparation of well-structured and fiscally sound business plans for investors and donors.

The Alianza: One member's story

The Alianza membership includes smaller networks (often called 'second level organizations'). One such network member is a group called Utz Che. Utz Che is an association focused on strengthening sustainable forest management and biodiversity and natural resources conservation. Its membership includes legally recognized organizations from around the country, focused on the development of small and medium sized forest-based businesses. The network strives to achieve its mission through training and capacity development on business and forest management, participation, policy and other relevant topics.⁹

Utz Che has been able, in part, to carry out its business development goals with funding and technical support provided by an initiative called Forest Connect, co-facilitated by FAO and IIED. Forest Connect focuses on strengthening market linkages and capacity development amongst forest-based small and medium enterprises. In 2009, Utz Che applied to FAO for funding under GFP under their "Forest Connect" umbrella, pointing out their work in partnership and capacity development, their connection to the Alianza and their potential to provide enhanced capacity development services to forest-dependent communities for all the members of the Alianza which needed business support. This request was approved, and with the funding provided by the GFP initiative, the association has been able to further improve commercial connections and relationships to aid market access, and build capacity in business acumen and in skills such as leadership and conflict resolution. Utz Che members believe that if they continue to learn and build their technical and business skill set, they will be able to move away from needing financial support in the future as they will be able to build financially sustainable and independent enterprises.¹⁰

⁹ Lobos, 2009

¹⁰ ibid

Lessons learned¹¹

The experience of GFP and FAO has led to the identification of several points to consider when supporting the development of forest community partnerships and the improvement of finance instruments to benefit smallholder and forest communities.

- Every country will have a different context and partners. It is critical that context, as well as the country's specific needs and gaps are taken into account when considering providing assistance similar to that of the GFP. Rather than prescribing too strictly the way in which a partnership development and financing improvement programme should be carried out in the country, interventions should try to respond to the country's specific needs.

For example, while Guatemala's GFP programme saw the development of the Alianza, Liberia's GFP programme has contributed to the development of several County Forest Fora and an overarching National Forest Forum, and Ghana has focused primarily on the generation of information by conducting studies on sector mapping, climate change funds preparedness and a variety of other topics relevant to forest-based communities. Allowing each country to self-determine the best way forward based on their specific conditions and partners leads to greater sense of ownership of the initiative by those within each country, and a higher likelihood that the programme will have lasting and sustainable impacts on forest-based communities.

- The implementation of GFP in various contexts has been, in part, successful because whenever possible it has built upon existing studies and diagnostic processes and strengthened existing networks. This has been another important element in creating a greater sense of ownership of GFP amongst stakeholders, as well as of anchoring the initiative to each country's reality. Additionally however, it means that many of the successes of GFP are also successes of other programmes and initiatives. For example, in Guatemala, while the success of the Alianza can certainly be attributed, in large part, to the support provided through GFP, other programmes like the NFP Facility have also played an instrumental role in strengthening the Alianza and its activities.
- It takes time to create a diverse multi-stakeholder platform, and for genuine ownership of an approach like the GFP's to take root. Achieving and building trust is not a simple process and there may be cases where it simply is not possible. It is therefore important to step back periodically to examine the partnership development process and critically analyze the 'glue' that keeps it together. This will serve as an opportunity to celebrate successes, as well as to identify and assess remaining obstacles.

¹¹ IIED, 2010

For instance, the Alianza has already, as has been highlighted above, met with tremendous success. Nevertheless, the Alianza today only represents around fifty percent of the country's forest-dependent people. A network of indigenous authorities (Red de Autoridades Indigena) has been reluctant to join the Alianza, and many households and small communities are so isolated and impoverished that they simply cannot be reached, even by local organizations. While the Alianza does continue striving to increase participation by forest dependent people and groups that are not currently part of the group, it also keeps moving forward, making strides to improve livelihoods and forest conditions in communities throughout Guatemala.

Conclusion

The GFP approach seeks to encourage processes and activities which lead to more empowered forest smallholders, indigenous people and forest communities in each of the countries in which it has programmes. Working with stakeholders within the GFP countries, particularly on partnership development, has been viewed as a critical part of strengthening the capacity and voice of forest-dependent people. Guatemala's method of developing a broad national network is just one approach applied under the GFP. Other countries have tried different mechanisms, including creating in-country multistakeholder participatory platforms like county and district forest fora, conducting studies to enhance and improve the knowledge base, carrying out multi-stakeholder community-based forest management projects and so on.

As GFP has evolved, the importance of connecting to and partnering with stakeholders at the international level who are striving to increase investment in and support for locally driven forest management processes has also been increasingly recognized and supported by GFP. This is because of a growing understanding that partnership building can be both a vehicle for forest-dependent people to connect within each country, as well as a mechanism for the needs and conditions of forest-dependent people around the world to be communicated to a global audience.

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