Forest governance and social justice: practical tactics from a learning group approach in Africa

J. MAYERS, A. BILA, S. KHAUKHA, K. OPOKU and W. SIMWELA

2 Director, Forestry and Land Use programme, International Institute for Environment and Development, Edinburgh, UK
3 Assistant Professor, Faculdade de Agronomia e Engenharia Florestal, University of Eduardo Mondlane, Maputo, Mozambique
4 Coordinator Planning, National Forestry Authority, Kampala, Uganda
5 Coordinator, Civic Response, Accra, Ghana
6 Assistant Director of Forestry, Department of Forestry, Lilongwe, Malawi

Email: james.mayers@iied.org

SUMMARY

People’s livelihoods and the forests upon which they depend are frequently threatened because people are marginalized from governance. The Forest Governance Learning Group is an independent alliance developing practical tactics for making progress in such situations in Africa. It recognises that the current international drive to combat illegal forestry could do more harm than good if social justice is not brought centre-stage. In Malawi and Mozambique sub-groups have recognised the real danger that communities will disengage from forest stewardship unless practical mechanisms for their ownership and responsibility are found. In Uganda, a sub-group has used the space created by decentralisation and high-profile cases of timber trade corruption to develop improved systems. In Ghana, the work points to the potential powder keg created at community level by those involved in flouting the law and over-harvesting timber. A renegotiation amongst stakeholders through forest forums is being called for in bringing the major abusers to book.

Keywords: forests, forest governance, social justice, learning group, FGLG

INTRODUCTION

In rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa forest resources are amongst the most vital components of livelihoods and development opportunity (Arnold and Townson 1998, Cavendish 2003). Finding the ways and means to secure access to, and control of, forest resources is thus a core preoccupation for many at local and national level – and a central issue for the prospects of rural poverty reduction (Anderson 2002, Ribot 2004). Access to forests is, to varying degrees, influenced by and dependent on forest governance (Kowero et al. 2003). The degree to which governance favours poverty reduction, local livelihoods and sustainable forest management depends on many factors, but experience shows that key amongst these factors is the involvement of the people that governance seeks to influence (Mayers and Bass 2004). Indeed, access to forests is intimately tied up with access to governance.

Notions of governance have come to the fore in international attention to forests recently. Box 1 explores some of these notions. Yet putting such notions into practice at local level generally remains a distant prospect. While the range of institutions that play important roles in poor people’s lives is vast, poor people are often excluded from participation in governance – being treated with disdain by institutions and having little defence from institutional injustice, criminality, abuse and corruption (Kaimowitz 2003a).

BOX 1 Governance and forests: working definitions of awkward notions

Governance is a notion as old as human civilisation, and is traditionally held to be very close to that of “government” – more or less “what governments do”. Over the last decade governance as a term has gained wide currency in a range of contexts – within societies and individual organisations. One simple definition of governance is „the art of steering societies and organizations.“ A further definition of governance in

its societal dimension is: “the traditions, institutions and processes that determine how power is exercised, how citizens are given a voice, and how decisions are made on issues of public concern” (Institute on Governance 2005). Many aspects of governance affect forests – only some of them could be said to be “forest governance”.

**Good governance** is clearly about getting governance right, but since the „right way“ is largely shaped by the cultural norms and values of each particular society or organization, universal templates for good governance have limited credibility. The UN has suggested that some universal norms and values do apply and has published a list of characteristics of good governance (UNDP 1999): participation, transparency; responsiveness; consensus orientation; equity; effectiveness and efficiency; accountability; and strategic vision. A notion of good governance has the advantage for some in offering a non-partisan discourse on politics. Others note that the good governance agenda has rapidly swelled to include just about every aspect of public life and is therefore problematic (Grindle 2002). Others suspect that it is a western notion being promoted at the expense of different and locally legitimate forms of governance.

**Forest governance** as a term has evolved similarly to governance in general. It has come to the fore particularly as a result of debates on decentralisation, corruption and illegal logging. It has different meanings for different people – but is generally used as a means to tackle the qualities of decision-making processes rather than the formal political structures of government. Several international initiatives have emerged with explicit aims to implement elements of improved forest governance – notably those associated with the evolving range of bilateral and multilateral arrangements on Forest Law Enforcement and Governance.

**Good forest governance** is a phrase in relatively recent circulation and with few attempts at consensual definition. An **Asian Alliance for Good Forest Governance** facilitated by the Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific notes that “good forest governance is achieved by clarifying the relationships, rights, responsibilities and incentives among [civil society, forest users and government actors] on the direction and nature of how forests are used” (RECOFTC 2005). The **Forest Governance Learning Group**, steered by the International Institute for Environment and Development, has a working definition of good forest governance – “the decisions and actions that remove the barriers and install the policy and institutional systems which spread local forestry success” (IIED 2005).

The actual governance of access and control of forest resources generally bears little relation to the stated situation by governments. Regulations and formal institutional mandates rarely determine access and use of resources as such, but create opportunities for negotiating this. The discretionary enforcement of laws and regulations provides possibilities for monetary and political rent seeking. This depends on the possibility of invoking severe rules and punishment, the relaxation of which must be paid for (Wardell and Lund, in press). Often, it is people’s lack of awareness of the extent of their property and use rights that provides scope for local authorities to define current practices as illegal despite what is enshrined in official documents.

Yet such situations are increasingly questioned - fragile economies have decreased the ability of leaders to counter public dissatisfaction with the use of state patronage, and civic organisations have grown more effective in their demands for greater resources and public accountability. A focus on improved justice in forest governance is increasingly being called for (Colchester 2004, Kazoora and Carvalho 2005). Box 2 summarises some of the conceptions about social justice that are finding growing resonance in forest governance debates.

**BOX 2 Social justice – another vital but troublesome notion**

- Social justice refers to the overall fairness of a society in its divisions of rewards and burdens. (Wikipedia 2005)
- Social justice is the virtue which guides us in creating those organized human interactions we call institutions. Social justice also imposes on each of us a personal responsibility to work with others to design and continually perfect our institutions as tools for personal and social development. (Center for Social and Economic Justice 2005)
- Social justice is the equitable access to resources and the benefits derived from them; a system that recognizes indelible rights and adheres to what is fair, honest, and moral. (Cunningham and Cunningham 2003)

Social justice is a notion largely based on various “social contract” theories. It came to prominence in particular towards the end of the nineteenth century as an appeal to the ruling classes to attend to the needs of the new masses of uprooted peasants who had become urban workers. Most variations on the concept hold that as governments are instituted among populations for the benefit of members of those populations, those governments which fail to see to the welfare of their
citizens are failing to uphold their part in the social contract and are, therefore, unjust.

Government action to promote social justice is thought by many to mean: that historical inequities should be corrected by governmental action until the actual inequities no longer exist; that temporary favoritism towards some classes of people is acceptable if it advances important public policy goals; and that it is government’s responsibility to ensure a basic quality of life for all its citizens.

Critics of social justice as policy commonly argue that personal liberty is more important than government’s social policies and that social justice is just a cover for social engineering, which is expensive and always fails.

Much of the information about the links between governance, forest resources, livelihoods and poverty is incomplete and out-of-date, and reality is highly dynamic and diverse (Kaimowitz 2003b, Vedeld et al. 2004). Theoretical and conceptual work on forest governance, being done by think-tanks and academics, is not getting through to those actually trying to make or deal with claims or decisions about people’s use of forests. Conversely, there is much to learn from the under-recognised and poorly-connected practical systems of governance to be found in the day-to-day workings of some on-the-ground institutions - forest departments, NGOs, donor-assisted projects, local governments, companies and communities (Mayers et al. 2001, Sithole 2002).

APPROACH OF THE FOREST GOVERNANCE LEARNING GROUP

The Forest Governance Learning Group (FGLG) is an alliance of individuals from independent agencies and government active in Africa in some of the difficult forest governance situations described above. Constituted by several internationally-active agencies and a range of connected sub-groups in countries of Africa, the FGLG has been facilitated since August 2003 by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED 2004). It has to date focused on issues of forest illegality and regulation and their effects on livelihoods.

Interested people in Mali, Niger, Ghana, Uganda, Mozambique, Malawi and – just starting – South Africa have each formed FGLG sub-groups. A sub-group in Tanzania is also likely to emerge. In each sub-group there are broadly three interconnected parts to the work:

- A small ad-hoc group of ‘governance-connected’ individuals dedicated to exchanging and developing experience and ideas.

- Policy research on situations where livelihoods and forests are in trouble because people are marginalized from governance.
- Development of practical guidance and tools for making progress.

Participants are identified on the basis of their willingness, experience, good connections and ideas, and the prospects they offer for developing strategic links between the forest sector and other sectors and influence-groups. A typical mix includes: a senior department or ministry level forest sector decision-maker; an experienced forestry opinion-former – who has experience in the sector and has the ‘ear’ of at least some decision-makers; a macro-planner/economist in the ministry of finance or similar agency whose decisions on Poverty Reduction Strategies, and the like, may greatly affect the forestry sector; an interested parliamentarian or other player who can engage with the national political process; and opinion-formers and decision-makers from a small number of other key agencies, such as lands and agriculture departments, and/or effective private sector and civil organisations.

Internationally, the sub-groups exchange experience and ideas within a loose network involving several active organisations alongside IIED and through specific learning events. The FGLG aims to contribute to the Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance AFLEG process.

The focus of the group to date has been on illegal forestry and livelihoods. Getting forestry department directors seeing eye-to-eye with ministry of finance planners, parliamentarians and other sectoral heads - and collectively recognising their understanding and power to bring about practical change – is still in its initial early stages, but shows promise. So too, does the research work that explicitly aims to confront these ‘well-connected’ individuals with the problems of those marginalized from governance.

BOX 3 Overheard at forest governance learning events in Ghana and South Africa

- “Governance starts with a smile when we leave home in the morning, then things generally go from bad to worse over the course of the day"  
- “Working on policies, institutions and power requires intelligence, in both senses – getting good information, and knowing how to use it"  
- “This corruption and governance stuff makes for uncomfortable listening for us in government, but we have stayed in the group and are learning together"  
- “Reading and writing may be a problem, but there is nothing wrong with our hearing – use the media!”  
- “Why do the drivers of consultation often ignore its
results?”
- “Why do we keep identifying the most important stakeholders, then channel all the money to others instead?”
- “People say ‘the trees don’t vote so why keep the trees?’ Our job is to help the trees to vote”
- “We are walking on thin ice and playing with a hot potato”

RESULTS FROM SIX COUNTRIES OF WEST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Uganda Convened by individuals in the National Forestry Authority, and connected with several NGOs, the FGLG in Uganda has established an important niche in improving the administration of justice for forestry. It has used the space created by a generally positive process of decentralisation and some high-profile cases of corruption linked to the timber trade to examine some of the practicalities of tackling forestry corruption and improving returns to sustainable livelihoods from better use of the justice system.

The group has got the attention of the new leadership in the National Forestry Authority, which is giving positive signals about funding its work in future, and is looking forward to having impact with its proposals on: an improved timber tracking system; more effective information flow; better forestry integration with the penal code; a light but effective local reporting and rapid response system at source of production and in the domestic trade chain; and a stronger system of adherence and accountability to a professional forestry code (Kazoora and Carvalho 2005).

Ghana Major institutional innovations have been made in Ghana’s forest sector in the last three years: competitive bidding for timber utilization has finally begun; stumpage prices have begun to reflect market prices; a new log-tracking system is in the pipeline; benefit sharing mechanisms have improved; forestry customer service centres have been set up in many districts; and district forest fora have begun to be effective. Yet work carried out by the FGLG highlights major problems which threaten to undermine all this. Bad implementation and flagrant abuse of forestry law have created a situation where almost all timber utilisation in Ghana is illegal and the revenue lost to government from this is estimated at about $100 million annually. At community level, the work points to the potential powder keg created by those involved in flouting the law and over-harvesting. Communities have lost confidence in the timber-men and the government and are threatening to take matters into their own hands (Arthur and Brogan 2005).

The FGLG supports and expands an existing alliance - of new civil society voices in forestry (Forest Watch) and key individuals in the Forestry Commission, parliament, the Ministry and private sector. A renegotiation amongst stakeholders in forestry is being called for to avert major crisis and to build on the gains already made. Those involved in the FGLG are helping get information into the public domain, gearing up to a national forest forum process in 2005 and encouraging and engaging with the political debate about potential solutions (Danso and Opoku 2005).

Mali Making devolved natural resource management work is the main challenge facing forest governance in Mali. Whilst Mali’s forest resources are nowhere near as valuable as timber in Ghana, for example, their relative local value particularly as fuelwood is high and there is much practical institutional innovation at local level in their management. All forests are state owned yet the state is on the cusp of transferring real authority over natural resources to communities. Rural fuelwood markets and local conventions on natural resource management represent critical means for learning about how this can be done.

The FGLG has focused on these to understand why for example some fuelwood markets appear to provide good returns to local incomes, whilst many more do not, and why environmental impacts appear to differ greatly. As a result of the work, several key practical constraints to better governance are on the agenda for the first time, including issues of corruption. The group is facilitated by SOS Sahel and has key government decision-makers actively participating - and beginning to set aside portions of their own budgets for taking the work forward (Cisse and Allen 2005).

Niger As in Mali, the work has focused on the experience of local management structures set up for rural fuelwood markets as actual and potential entry points for wider processes of natural resource governance. Ways to improve the situation being worked on include: law changes and how they might be brought about e.g. by MPs lobbying the Minister of the Environment to hold a parliamentary debate to change the law; and an independent ombudsman to adjudicate disputes between the State and elected local government/communities. Practical approaches to help others interested in pursuing similar analysis and improvements are also being worked on.

The group has concluded that it fulfils a need not met by any other process and has developed plans for actions which can be locally financed. The group’s work is being recognised and drawn in to key processes for improving governance – for example, the Union of Magistrates of Niger have asked the group to bring together thinking about the big principles in the new Rural Code with the use of the Forestry Code to see what these principles could mean in practice and how the Forestry Code can be improved as one route to achieving them (Bachir 2005).

Mozambique A National Forest Forum has begun to be effective in Mozambique – and has created momentum around ideas which the prevailing sector-wide programme, ProAgri, can take forward. The FGLG is finding its niche as a sub-grouping of that Forum – focused on overcoming key practical governance problems with decentralisation and
the effectiveness of law. It has been active in reconciling the very different approaches used in the development of new policies for land and for forests (Macqueen and Bila 2005). The process of developing the new land law was highly inclusive of marginalized rural communities and a clear process is now in place whereby communities register their rights, define their group and gain legal personality. The development of forest law on the other hand was a more top-down affair and there is now considerable confusion about how communities can be granted rights to forests and how can they make such rights effective. There is a real danger that communities will disengage from a role in forest stewardship unless practical mechanisms for their ownership and responsibility are soon found (Johnstone et al. 2005a).

The group – convened by individuals in the University and engaging with key government decision makers and NGOs - has developed a tool which can help bring the land and forest processes more effectively together (Johnstone et al. 2005b), and sees its future role in being increasingly effective as a think tank for the Forum on practical governance mechanisms.

Malawi There is a strong national forestry programme framework in Malawi. There is also strong evidence from past interventions that rural communities manage forest resources if properly empowered to organise themselves, and receive capacity support for organisation and management. But rapid forest resource depletion, and its negative effects on livelihoods, still continues. In doing something about it, there is now much confusion about roles, responsibilities and functions, following structural decentralisation across all sectors. This reflects partial decentralisation plans being made by various sectors, poor communication and weak levels of ownership of the process at local level (Sibale and Banda 2005).

Much effort has gone into planning for provision of decentralised forestry services from national-to-district levels. However, the district-to-village level has had less attention with the assumption that Local Government Authorities will simply adopt the service models previously followed by Central Government. This needs, more work. The Malawi FGLG - key individuals from NGOs and government departments - has commissioned and debated analysis of the effectiveness of such service provision to date, and of the law at this level (Kafakoma et al. 2005). The group now plans to institutionalise itself within several government and donor-supported programmes as a lobby group for making local forest control and service provision work for the poor.

DISCUSSION OF EMERGING THEMES IN GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

Good governance – a consequence not a precondition of effective action

In the burgeoning literature on good governance, and its influence on national macro-economic planning, a common message is that transparency and good governance are key conditions for all good things to follow. Yet even a cursory look at history in many developed countries, regularly branded as pinnacles of good governance, shows that factors now considered preconditions for development were actually consequences of it (Grindle 2002). The first country to adopt Universal suffrage for example, was New Zealand in 1907 (UK in 1928, the US in 1965). Modern judiciaries were only introduced in the UK in the 1930s.

Transparency is clearly important but, along with some other elements of governance, is a consequence not a precondition of effective action. Furthermore, when information is weak government, or others responsible for it, may be embarrassed by it but transparency alone will not improve this situation. A broader focus on improving generation of, access to, and use of, the right information (on natural resources and their potential) is needed. This implies further emphasis on enabling local institutions to make better information more useful: brokering agencies, advice provision and extension programmes, targeted information clearing houses and one stop shops.

Using forestry levers for reform – in the right order

Most problems of governance and forestry are governance problems that affect forestry rather than forest governance problems. Greater weight should be thrown behind efforts to achieve wider accountability and equity in decisions that affect the forest sector, but also behind efforts that recognise the key advantages and ‘levers’ that the forest sector has in contributing to that wider reform. In Ghana, for example, strengths of earlier reforms in the forest sector provide a good base of information and argument to work with in this wider arena (Kotey et al. 1998). From the forestry corner it can be argued that getting the right sequence in governance improvements is vital - e.g. work must be done to secure land tenure or there is little incentive for land-users to collaborate with each other or the state.

Working with the politics of timber

Lack of social cohesion and lawlessness are being created by the way natural resources are currently used in large parts of Ghana and Cameroon, and some parts of Uganda and Mozambique. In Ghana, it is not surprising that forest communities condone illegal chainsaw men when the big timber companies are operating illegally and violating communities’ rights (Danso and Opoku 2005). In Cameroon it is said that the tax collectors are so corrupt that when the computer tax database system crashed – the government collected more revenue, because a few companies still paid up and the tax authorities were not ‘fixing’ the data. Timber may not be the biggest revenue source but it can be the most accessible for party financing. Indeed timber revenues can act as slush funds for political parties – which is both a current threat and a potential political opportunity, if for example parliamentarians demand accountability of forest
Linking the people who can make changes

It is often noted that it is only resource scarcity that raises the importance of a resource to people, which in turn stimulates pressures for better governance. Where real scarcity is yet to hit - in resource-rich contexts - it is harder to get law enforcement solutions and make progress on essential processes such as decentralisation. The big question is, how can lessons be learned before the resources run out? It is clear that use of the right information in a reasonably free press and some private radio stations can work wonders. There is often a constituency for change (even in apparently intractable institutional situations) – and their influence can be much greater than their numbers. Whilst the idea of individual ‘champions of change’ is misleading because people come and go, and change their minds, there are many links amongst innovative individuals that can be built on using astute tactics (Geller and Thornber 2005).

Despite forest staff being accused of collusion, they are still preferred as the first point of call by the public in seeking justice in Uganda (Kazoora and Carvalho 2005). In Mali, forest agents were seen as the most common instruments of state repression in rural areas ten years ago, but today this has been largely turned around (Cisse and Allen 2005). And in Niger, local management structures for fuelwood markets offer a basis, and a source of many lessons, for wider processes of effective decentralisation (Bachir 2005).

Untying the legal knots around communities and local enterprise

Forestry seems to have more regulations than most sectors. Almost anything sensible that people at local level want to do is illegal. Regulations are overloaded and much injustice is created, often in the name of sustainability. In South Africa for example, heavy-handed action by forestry officers in the cause of law enforcement in one area destroyed a year’s careful work by communities building up their local institution for forest management. Double standards seem to prevail – management plans are demanded of small communities but repeatedly avoided by big companies. The same license process for tree planting in South Africa is required for a few trees on a small farmer’s plot or a big plantation, which is a disproportionate cost for the smallholder. These double standards need to be further highlighted and addressed. Communities are rarely fooled by commonly used notions like ‘a sense of ownership’ and ‘a seat at the table’ – they generally want full ownership and control.

On forest forums...

Local and national forest forums have been worked on a good deal by FGLG participants. When a governance situation is conflictual, credible neutral facilitation is needed and a lot of steam may need to be let off before the parties can even begin to talk. However, when the situation is less conflictual, many open-agenda consultations with neutral facilitation waste everybody’s time and go nowhere because they are too open. Findings from group works suggest that it is better to do some homework, create a clear agenda, be transparent and honest about it and provoke responses with strong argument. A key is to build momentum around particular issues and move on – building from the bottom. If the right issues are focused on it may not even cost much. For example, some local groups in Ghana are demanding from their chiefs a proportion of timber revenue to fund their local forest forum. These forums aspire to a true national renegotiation of the ground rules in forestry.

PRACTICAL TACTICS IN PUSHING GOOD FOREST GOVERNANCE

Tactics for making progress were identified through the FGLG’s country sub-group work and at forest governance learning events in Ghana and South Africa. At the learning events, more critical examination of governance problems was possible in some country contexts than others. For example, an open spirit and process of critical reflection was generated by the Ghanaian group – which inspired participants from other countries. Following the learning events, the increasing level of engagement of those beyond the groups with the thinking and processes of the groups bears out the theory that deliberative critical reflection can help make very useful progress. There is clearly much to do to capitalise on the strong sense of purpose and direction for the work generated. Some questionable insights made at the learning events are noted in Box 3.

BOX 3 Overheard at forest governance learning events in Ghana and South Africa

- “Goverment starts with a smile when we leave home in the morning, then things generally go from bad to worse over the course of the day”
- “Working on policies, institutions and power requires intelligence, in both senses – getting good information, and knowing how to use it”
- “This corruption and governance stuff makes for uncomfortable listening for us in government, but we have stayed in the group and are learning together”
- “Reading and writing may be a problem, but there is nothing wrong with our hearing – use the media!”
- “Why do the drivers of consultation often ignore its results?”
- “Why do we keep identifying the most important stakeholders, then channel all the money to others instead?”
• “People say ‘the trees don’t vote so why keep the trees?’ Our job is to help the trees to vote”
• “We are walking on thin ice and playing with a hot potato”

Work done by the country sub-groups and in the forest governance learning events has highlighted a wide range of practical tactics for making progress in intractable forest governance situations. Some of these are summarised in the following list:

Ways of thinking

• ‘Read’ the way the political agenda is going and find ways to work forestry into it.
• Turn your logical framework around - put the assumptions column into the objectives column - and create your strategy around addressing some of those big assumptions and risks.
• Encourage opening the door and risking some of the chaos – experimenting with letting go – when change is inevitable. Better to try a few things than let crisis overwhelm.

Where to focus

• People are fed up being eternally interviewed and consulted stakeholders – they want to be real shareholders – so focus on the areas for which there is something real to negotiate and build from that.
• Push for the transfer of human and financial resources, and for development of effective sanction systems, in parallel with the transfer of responsibility for natural resource management to local levels.
• Capitalise on the realignment of institutions e.g. in South Africa opportunities were seized to install forestry in the development plans of new local governments and to get small-growers represented in the main private sector association.
• Reporting systems using ‘hotlines’ (land lines, mobile phones and radio communication) can be effective - speed of response, reward systems and protection of reporters are crucial issues.

Who to work with

• Work more with the unions - timber and woodworkers unions, trades union congress, national associations of teachers, national unions of students.
• Work with progressive members of ‘demonised’ groups e.g. chainsaw operators who want to act responsibly.
• Parliamentarians can lobby for accountability of forest agencies and the way key appointments are made - influence the statements made by prospective parliamentary candidates so that when some of them are elected they can be called on to deliver.
• Work with the police force, magistrates, local government on training with abridged locally usable versions of the law in local languages.

Useful provocation

• Veiled threats can be useful expressions of community power – e.g. a community’s chief in Ghana could threaten to sue the government for purporting to licence a timber company that is technically illegal.
• Get the members of a policy-marginalised group into a pick-up and go and shout at the Minister!
• Make trade statistics and other existing information bases public.
• Develop an advocacy approach that explicitly aims to ‘capture’ each target group – one by one - get some media on board, and try, for example, bumper stickers!
• The Africa Peer Review Mechanism under the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) – by which countries judge each other (Uganda and Ghana have offered to be first in line) – might be a route to further government competition in improving forest governance.

Crucial behind-the-scenes action

• Ban the production of more analysis for a while – and go and do something with what already exists!
• Develop peer pressure and a practical public accountability system to make professional codes for foresters work (like the lawyers code of the bar).
• Draw out the social components of non-forestry national policies and statutes and work on them to help progress social sustainability in forestry.
• Ensure the results of negotiation are specific and achievable – if the agenda is too grand-scale and over ambitious it will demotivate and dis-empower.

The FGLG intends to take this work forward by supporting well-targeted studies of land use and forestry injustice, and working in support of practical legal and institutional systems with government bodies, other forest sector players, politicians and the justice system. Those within the FGLG will aim to increase country-to-country links, create political space for each other by publishing and using information generated, and holding more joint issue-based events. It is also anticipated that links between the FGLG and other groups, key networks and forums will be steadily built, such as NEPAD and the European Action Plan on Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade.
CONCLUSION

Recent years have seen some progress in developing forest governance. National policy debate and implementation tends now to involve multiple stakeholders and partnerships, and not merely government and some elites. Policy objectives in many countries have opened up, from overriding concerns with forests as timber resources or land banks for development, to a concern for a wider range of forest goods and services and stakeholder needs. Forest-dependent communities in some countries are beginning to have rights recognised, to enable them to be effective forest managers. Meanwhile, over the last three years in particular, many international debates have identified better forest governance as a desirable goal. All of these initiatives provide building blocks, but there is a long way to go.

Forestry’s protagonists, particularly at national and international levels, often bemoan their powerlessness in the face of others responsible for non-forest sectoral policies and institutions when they constrain or prevent forestry from reaching its potential. Yet when good forestry’s advocates generate solid evidence, collectively make their case, and push for change, they can surprise themselves with what can be done. The FGLG aims to help fill the gap between proliferating prescriptions for changes needed in forest governance and the dearth of practical ways to make them happen, i.e. there is plenty of advice on what must be done, its time to work out how to do it.

Work by the group shows that enforcement of current laws is in some contexts irrelevant or, at worst, highly detrimental to poor people. Laws frequently prop up existing exploitation systems, denying the rights and blocking the potential of poor people at local level. Corruption thrives in such environments. The current international drive to combat illegal forestry could do more harm than good if social justice is not brought centre-stage. Some of the momentum for preventing illegal forestry needs to be converted into real capacity for targeting the major abusers of forest and land laws, correcting unfair legal frameworks and ensuring their even-handed implementation. Governance approaches that effectively address these problems must therefore involve fundamental rights, institutional roles, policy sticks-and-carrots, and systems by which decisions are actually implemented and monitored.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This draws on the hard but inspired work of a great many people, they include: Paddy Abbott, Andrew Adjei-Yeboah, Sa’adou Aladwan, Mary Allen, Alistair Anton, Emelia Arthur, Cadjoe Awudi, Amadou Bachir, Chris Beeko, Nayon Bilijo, Neil Bird, Erik Buiten, Paolo Cerutti, Jeanette Clarke, Felix Dakouo, Elijah Yaw Danso, Eúrico Guerreiro Da Cruz, Kalifa Diakite, Scott Geller, John Hudson, Adamou Ibro, Moenieba Isaacs, Noshie Iddisah, Robert Kafakoma, George C. Kajembe, Cornelius Kazoora, Fonda Lewis, Stuart N.M. Ligomeka, Rory Mack, Thomas Mackenzie, Duncan Macquean, Renny Madula, Tsepo Malatji, Stephen Mariki, Bennet Mataya, Linda Mossop-Rosseus, Joel Daniel Muzima, Mandrate Nakala Oreste, Steven Ngubane, Motsamai Nkosi, Simon Norfolk, Tapani Oksanen, Gershom Onyango, Joseph Osiaakwan, Edward Prah, Matthias Rhein, Bright Sibale, Ahamadou Houna Sidibe, Themba Simelane, Winston Smit, Bueylwa P. Sonjica, Hugh Speechly, Sonja Vermeulen, Gill Vogt and David Young. LTS International from the UK and Indufo Ory from Finland have played key roles, in this work, and practical collaboration is steadily growing with the Centre for International Forestry Research, Overseas Development Institute, and Global Witness. The UK Department of International Development and the Dutch government have supported the work to date. The authors accept sole responsibility for all errors.

REFERENCES


ARNOLD, J.E.M and TOWNSON, I. 1998 Assessing the potential of forest product activities to contribute to rural incomes in Africa. ODI Natural Resource Perspectives, No.37, Overseas Development Institute, London


DANSO, E. and OPOKU, K. 2005. Impacts and legality


