Responsive Forest Governance Initiative (RFGI)

Supporting Resilient Forest Livelihoods through Local Representation:
A REDD+ and Adaptation Endeavour

Introduction

The Responsive Forest Governance Initiative (RFGI) is an Africa-wide environmental-governance research and training program focusing on enabling responsive and accountable decentralization to strengthen the representation of forest-based rural people in local-government decision making. Many nations have introduced decentralization reforms to make local government responsive and accountable to citizen needs and aspirations. Natural resources play an important role in decentralization; they provide local governments and people with wealth and subsistence. Responsive and accountable local governments can provide resource-dependent people the flexibility to manage, adapt to, and remain resilient in their changing environment.

To date, government, private, and civil society natural resource management professionals have rarely capitalized on the potential of representative local government to serve the needs of resource-dependent populations—they have not taken advantage of its institutional durability (for sustainability) and geographic coverage (for scaling up). These professionals may lack the technical and organizational capacities to assess the potentials of democratic local government or to structure efficient and equitable forestry decentralization. With two decades of local government reforms across Africa, there is a great opportunity for a transformative move toward institutionalized local participation in natural resources management and decision making.

RFGI aims to enhance and institutionalize more responsive and accountable local governance processes that reduce vulnerability, enhance local well-being, and improve forest management, with a special focus on developing safeguards and guidelines that will ensure fair and equitable implementation of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), and climate-adaptation interventions.

Programme Background

Drawing on new and existing decentralization research and experience, RFGI identifies ways to implement decentralization and strengthen the links between decentralization and locally responsive, accountable results for rural people. It will assess the conditions under which central authorities devolve forest management and use decisions to local government, and the conditions that enable local government to engage in sound, equitable and pro-poor forest management. The programme aims to enable local government to play an integrative role in rural development and natural resource management by serving as the institutional infrastructure for scaling up local participation in decision making. RFGI is training a new generation of policy

James C. Murombedzi
Coordinator
RFGI Programme

researchers and analysts and building an Africa-wide network of environmental-governance policy analysts.

RFGI will provide decision makers and practitioners with a tested handbook for assessing, improving, and monitoring the effects of forestry policies and projects on local responsiveness and accountability of forest-governance institutions by (a) identifying the elements of responsive and accountable local decision-making institutions,(b) developing indicators for the presence and quality of each of those elements, (c) providing methods for measuring these indicators, and(d) providing guidelines for indicator measurement and for their use in assessing and designing interventions.

The Responsive Forest Governance Handbook (RFG Handbook) will highlight these indicators and guidelines, analyze the data, and identify means for policy design and influence. This will help leverage forestry decisions that are more beneficial to local communities, are pro-poor, and counterbalance the common biases that exclude women, minorities, and migrants. The RFG Handbook will enable practitioners and policy analysts to ensure that policies and projects support responsive and accountable local forestry decision-making processes. RFGI will test the ease of use of the RFG Handbook indicators and guidelines and their effectiveness in a variety of countries. A Community Monitoring Handbook (CM Handbook) will be developed to accompany the RFG Handbook so communities can evaluate and learn from policy-making and implementation processes.

A Collaborative Approach

RFGI will work in ten African countries over five years. Phase I is three years of field-based policy research and analysis for developing and testing the RFG and CM Handbooks. Phase II is 2 years for fine tuning, learning from practice, and diffusion of the RFG Handbook set for use by forest management practitioners. The expected Phase I results and impacts include a scaling up of responsive and accountable forest management, enhanced policy analysis and practitioner capacity, and knowledge generation and diffusion. RFGI will work in close partnership with African research institutions and universities.

The core goal of RFGI is to produce strong representative decentralized pro-poor processes and benefits delivered at landscape and community levels taking into account gender and equity, and providing lessons for national, regional, and global levels. RFGI's purpose is to improve representative local forest governance and responsible natural resource management in country-based landscapes across Africa. RFGI supports this endeavor through research used to develop handbooks for the

design and improvement of accountable and responsive local forest-governance processes and through the training of a new generation of African environmental governance analysts.

Country Details

RFGI is based in and focuses on Africa. The six core RFGI countries are Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Senegal and Uganda, where RFGI is establishing full research teams. Single case studies are being developed in six comparative RFGI countries, including Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, South Africa, and South Sudan. RFGI is also working with institutions in Asia and Latin America to provide a comparative perspective on local representation in forestry experience. The RFGI program has recruited and is training twenty six (26) young in-country policy researchers and analysts to help build an Africa-wide network of environmental-governance policy analysts. A methods meeting of the in-country researchers and the RFGI core team, supported by resource persons, was convened in January 2012 in Senegal to launch the RFGI program. To-date, all the 26 RFGI researchers have started field based research in their countries and are expected to produce draft research reports by December 2012.

The RFGI Approach

In the core countries, RFGI is working through national-level research institutions with an interest in decentralization. In the comparative countries, RFGI is working with and training young capable individual researchers. The field site areas include the landscapes where IUCN's Livelihoods and Landscapes Strategy has activities. Research oversight is provided by senior researchers at the national level, and by CODESRIA, the University of Illinois, and IUCN at the regional and global levels. IUCN and CODESRIA will use their convening ability to bring the research findings to national and regional fora, as well as the African Union and relevant global fora. The efforts and results will be sustained through (a) training of young governance analysts for the research teams, (b) training of practitioners during the testing of the RFG and CM handbooks, (c) wide diffusion of the developed handbooks, and (d) support responsive and accountable representation processes within local institutions.

Local Environment Governance Assessments (LEGAs) are being carried out to provide baseline data on the effects of forestry interventions on forest governance, and greater understanding of the potential effects of climate-change readiness (REDD+, adaptation) interventions. From the LEGAs, local governance indicators will be developed to evaluate local governance effects of forestry interventions. Guidelines will be developed for indicator measurement and for their use in assessing and designing interventions. This will form the basis for developing and testing the RFG Handbook, designed to ensure that forestry interventions strengthen local representation. The RFG Handbook will be complemented by a developed and tested Community Monitoring Handbook to empower communities to monitor and learn from forestry interventions. A wide range of knowledge products will be produced, including the RFG and CM Handbooks, research publications, policy briefs and a popularly oriented video.

Relevance to Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

REDD+ is a global program for disbursing funds, primarily to pay national governments in developing countries to reduce forest carbon emissions. REDD+ will have a major impacts on forest management and use—including local decision-making structures, distributional equity, rights and recourse, and forest and land tenure. As REDD+ incentives increase national government interest in forest management, new checks and balances will be required to guarantee that forestry interventions are negotiated through local representative decision-making bodies. Interventions must support the ability of forest-dependent populations to negotiate forest-management arrangements with national and international agents that meet their needs and favor their aspirations. REDD+ interventions will affect the entire set of rights and institutions that make up the world of forest-dependent communities. To ensure that REDD+ interventions seriously engage local people, local representation in decision making will have to be guaranteed. This will mean strengthening of local rights and representation and creating guidelines so that REDD+ interventions use representative local institutions as their point of entry into new forestry management regimes. REDD+ will require permanent local institutions that can integrate local needs with national and international objectives. Permanent representative local institutions will be necessary ingredients of any sustainable REDD+ and climate adaptation strategy. While many social protections have been proposed for REDD+ interventions to date, none guarantee respect for democratic institutions and procedures.

Informing Policy and Scaling up Learning

To ensure a deep policy engagement, RFGI is working with a number of different groups from the start. RFGI is conducting detailed briefings for government departments on RFGI and how it can support decentralization in practice and respond to their own specific concerns. Government staff will be represented on national advisory groups to foster ownership from the start.

Project results will be widely disseminated at national, regional, and global levels, which will result in increased awareness and understanding of improved and more-widespread local representation in forestry decision making. RFGI will use its research results to inform and influence national, regional, and global fora, with respect to the value and importance of local-level forest governance. Close collaboration with programs such as the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Program, World Bank, African Union, the UN Economic Commission for Africa, and African regional economic communities such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Central Africa Forest Commission (COMIFAC) could lead to the adoption of appropriate regional policies that would, for example, address the problem of the large-scale alienation of land.

For more details: http://www.codesria.org/