



Forest partnerships at the grassroots level

1. Introduction

Growing Forest Partnerships has now been operational as an initiative for 18 months now, having started its first discussions with partners in-country in February and March 2009. The initiative as a whole was started in order to catalyse and reinforce effective partnerships that deliver real results for forests and people: its stated vision is that it is “an initiative that helps create and strengthen ways of working together for the benefit of forests and the people that depend on them”. For many involved, the hope has been that collaborations that start on the ground, involving the people who are directly involved with forests on a day to day basis finding new and creative ways to work together, might offer real and practical solutions to the global challenges that forests and forest people face – and offer an alternative to the large-scale, generally top-down and one size fits all approaches that many organisations have a tendency to fall back on.

The basic theory of change has thus been that reinforcing partnerships working on forest issues will deliver real positive change. What this document will be examining, therefore, is what makes for an effective partnership, what principles GFP is applying in the partnerships it chooses to work with or to catalyse and what approaches will deliver effective partnerships. In particular, it will examine how to bring new actors in – how to ensure that the partnerships being fostered are inclusive and start to get at the roots of the challenges facing forests.

2. What partnership means for GFP

Although growing partnerships is what GFP is all about, it must be noted that they are seen as a means not an end: the stated *objective* of GFP is that “forest rights holders and stakeholders have access to increased levels of support in their efforts to secure livelihoods and maintain ecosystem services”. However, in order to deliver that, collaboration between key actors who have an effect on forests is absolutely necessary. Many other initiatives have aspirations to improve forest management and the lives of forest dependent people: GFP’s specific niche is to provide support for *partnerships* that tackle these issues to develop and have an impact.

2.1 Background: criteria for effective partnerships

In the original assessment¹ that led to the establishment of GFP, existing partnerships were analysed and a detailed checklist of the key criteria of effective partnerships was produced:

Partnership design

- Power: Resilient partnerships address any initial power imbalances that weight decisions against particular members
- Comparative advantage: Efficient partnerships delegate key roles to partners or others with the best ability, agree on partners not exercising unsuited roles within the partnership, and seek synergies
- Purpose: Clear, specific and purposive goals are needed to assure functionality and additionality to that of individual partners
- Niche: Too few global forest partnerships involve the Southern and forest-dependent stakeholders who are critical to forestry success

Process of partnership constitution and evolution

- Participatory development: An exploratory or development group can help to refine the goals and principles of the partnership
- Independents: Trusted intermediaries who have access and credibility to different stakeholders – and who can link global and grass roots levels can help facilitate partner engagement and symmetry
- Inclusion and transparency: Attracting the right partners and agreeing the right goals are assured through an open approach
- Deliberation and learning: The development process needs to explore and test the range of managerial and political possibilities – the choice itself affecting who the partners will be
- Launch events: These give partnerships legitimacy and visibility, best used to confirm an agreed partnership following the above process

Governance structures and principles

- ‘Stakeholder’ forms of governance: An emphasis towards ‘stakeholder’ governance will be needed to address weaknesses in existing international arrangements biased to ‘shareholder’ governance
- Donor roles: However, even a stakeholder model can benefit from involving progressive donors prepared to adhere its principles
- Precedents: The ‘wiring’ for a new partnership may well exist in existing formal or informal partnerships, which can be built on
- Negotiated approach: Broadly agreed rules are essential to define leadership, accountability to membership and membership criteria. This will take time, even if it builds on best-practice precedents
- Symmetry: It is key to develop this, even if the initial partnership ‘drive’ comes from a few partners. Language translation, travel support, time to consult, and involving local rather than international NGOs can help

¹ Available at: <http://www.iied.org/pubs/pdfs/13551IIED.pdf>

- Representation: Strong and deliberate processes and resources are needed to ensure fair representation in leadership and membership from indigenous peoples CBOs and small enterprise
- Secretariat: Take care to avoid a secretariat hosted by one partner having to respond as much to that partner as to the partnership
- Seven principles: of good governance apply equally to partnerships and can be used in structuring them: legitimacy, accountability, responsibility, fairness, transparency, efficiency, and probity

2.2 How partnership development has progressed in GFP

To date, GFP has been supporting the development of partnerships in Ghana, Guatemala, Mozambique and Liberia, as well as between the three rights holders groups and other actors at international level through the Investing in Locally Controlled Forestry Process. A detailed analysis of how partnerships have developed against the criteria outlined above is attached in Annex 1, which examines the progress of GFP's overall management and governance, the in-country processes and the ILCF process.

From this analysis, it would appear that on the whole, the GFP processes both in the different countries and at international level are delivering real progress in respect to the different elements of an effective partnership. In terms of participatory development of the partnerships, exploring comparative advantage of existing partners, building on existing institutions and partnerships, reflecting on and learning from processes and taking the time to negotiate processes and partnerships, the initiative is making real steps.

However, there are some areas of weakness: power, inclusion and representation and expanding the partnerships beyond the usual forest sector actors.

At present, the fact that the CG members hold the funding and have to account for it means that they are seen as donors and thus in control of the process. Whether an institution wishes to be in that position or not, they end up, *de facto*, having more attention paid to their input than other actors in the process. Change in this respect is probably a matter of time and of attention to the issue on the part of all CG members as they facilitate processes.

In relation to inclusion and representation, there have been good advances made so far, but there remains the perpetual challenge of how to ensure that what is being done is really reaching the people it should do – and that they have a say in what is being done if they wish to do so. In the case of GFP, which is trying to include those who are frequently marginalized, particular attention should be paid to this. In Mozambique and Ghana, GFP participants in each case have identified the fact that local communities do not yet feel any ownership of the process and are not really engaged at a decision making level. In Guatemala and Liberia, no analysis has yet been made of whether GFP is reaching the grassroots,

so it is hard to draw conclusions. It is targeting community associations, but the extent to which these associations represent the interests of their communities, including the more marginalized members, has not been explored. In Liberia, for example, one possible gap is that the community groups targeted are only those that have formal Community Forest Development Committees, (in other words, only those that have logging concessions on their lands).

As far as reaching out to other sectors is concerned, the issues are somewhat different. Other sectors are forest stakeholders rather than rights holders. However, they are stakeholders who can have a massive impact on forests and, as the initial assessment pointed out, the failure to include external actors in previous partnerships and initiatives has been one of the reasons for lack of success. So far, GFP has been relatively conservative and has not managed to break away very far from its usual forest sector partners. One area where some new links have been made is through the ILCF process, which has succeeded in bringing in some financial actors who are not normally at the table at forest events.

However, in in-country processes, even when, as in Mozambique, efforts have been made to include other sectors, GFP has not yet had much success in engaging their interest and keeping them engaged. Hopefully, the Mid Term Review will identify some of the reasons for this, but for the present our assessment is that the main reason is that other sectors have not yet identified sufficient interest for them in getting and staying involved. Thus GFP has to take a close look at how it is explaining partnerships to other actors and the potential benefits of working together for forests.

3. Recommendations for a strengthened approach to building partnerships at local level

3.1 Identification of new partners

As outlined above, there are two areas of weakness with current GFP partnerships: inclusion of community level actors and inclusion of key actors from other sectors who may have a key role to play.

The first step is thus an analysis of who has been included and who has not, to date, asking the two key questions for any groups or individuals identified who aren't yet included: Does this actor have a right to participate in the process that has to be respected? Is this actor's involvement essential if GFP is to achieve its desired results?

Possible tools for analysis might include:

- Stakeholder influence mapping: <http://www.policy-powertools.org/Tools/Understanding/SIM.html>
- Stakeholder power analysis: <http://www.policy-powertools.org/Tools/Understanding/SPA.html>

- The Four Rs: <http://www.policy-powertools.org/Tools/Understanding/TFR.html>

Following are a range of suggestions of routes through which GFP participants might identify the groups that are currently not getting involved:

- Other government ministries: Agriculture, Environment, Trade, Planning, Climate Change, Mining and/or Hydrocarbons.
- International development NGOs: Action Aid, PLAN, CARE, Christian Aid, Oxfam, GRET, etc
- Donors: particularly donor staff other than those directly engaged in forestry
- Social movements: indigenous peoples organisations, trades unions, community associations
- Other UN institutions: UNESCO, UNDP, UNEP, ILO
- National NGOs : not only forest sector NGOs but those targeting community organisation and small enterprise. Possible routes in to meeting with these are via international development NGOs such as Oxfam, GRET, IRS, etc, as well as through research institutions and regional networks.
- Faith organisations: the churches, Islamic community groups and other faith organisations often have very strong community links and are active in a range of local initiatives.
- Private sector: social ventures, small business support networks, etc
- Direct engagement with communities

In terms of approach, this should include a whole battery of forms of contact: email; phone calls; arranging one to one meetings; identifying meetings, conferences and events where key actors will be attending and seeking them out; organizing launch and publicity events designed to appeal to specific actors that you want to target; etc. For some further information on contacting communities in particular, have a look at <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/comcon.html> which has some useful guidelines for community consultation.

In exploring new partners, GFP participants have to keep on thinking laterally – what skills, knowhow and experience do the organisations or individuals concerned have that might contribute to GFP’s objective? What influence does this actor have on key processes that GFP is tackling? Where are there synergies between their activities and those of GFP?

3.2 Presentation of GFP’s vision of partnership

A key element of bringing in new partners or further engaging existing ones is how GFP is explained and how the synergies with that actor’s own interests can be articulated.

In terms of explaining partnership, the detailed checklist of criteria used in the original assessment is very useful, but one of the challenges that GFP has been facing all along is the fact that the initiative is difficult to explain to new partners

and it takes time for people to absorb the idea. Although all the issues identified in the checklist are important and need to be kept under review as partnerships develop, we would suggest that it would help from the start to have a simpler way to present the vision to new actors.

Thus, we propose that GFP explains that it is in place to support partnerships that exhibit the following five criteria:

- **Vision** – a partnership that has a specific goal in sight
- **Innovation** – a partnership between actors who do not usually collaborate, or a partnership that has as its objective something which has not previously been tried.
- **Inclusion** – a partnership that makes an express commitment to include those groups that are frequently marginalised from decision making processes.
- **Action** – a partnership that is trying to move beyond discussion to actually doing something, be that changing policy, mobilising investment, offering training and advice...
- **Reflection** – a partnership that is committed to learning as it develops

This short list is easy to present and explain and local examples could easily be identified and explained. It would enable people to understand the partnership focus of GFP and where its emphasis is.

Annex 1: Analysis of GFP partnerships against original criteria

Analysis presented in original assessment report		IIED's initial assessment of how GFP has managed in relation to these by mid-2010		
Partnership elements	Main lessons for GFP	International Governance: Catalytic and Reference Groups	In country	ILCF
Partnership design	Power: Resilient partnerships address any initial power imbalances that weight decisions against particular members – but this requires concerted effort and cannot be assumed	The different institutional capacities and their different roles as CG members mean that they have had to negotiate a workable compromise in the process of partnership development. The Bank's role as funder gives it a degree of power in the relationship.	In in-country processes, the CG members frequently have substantial influence over the direction of work of in-country members, through the mere fact of being the holders of the funding. This has been a challenge in facilitating the development of processes that are genuinely owned by in-country actors.	The three rights holders groups are constantly discussing this challenge: the experience of indigenous groups in particular over the years has informed these discussions. One challenge is the different levels of experience in international processes: GACF for example is much younger than the other two alliances and as a platform, has had less time to work out its own internal functioning.
	Comparative advantage: Efficient partnerships delegate key roles to partners or others with the best ability, agree on partners not exercising unsuited roles within the partnership, and seek synergies	There is a division of roles within the CG at the moment, although those of the FAO and IUCN are divided geographically rather than in terms of areas of work. So far, the CG has reached out to some other organisations to reinforce their work: TFD were brought in to facilitate the ILCF dialogues and the G3 are playing an active role in shaping the future of the ILCF process.	How comparative advantage is being built on in-country is yet to be seen in full as they are still in the development stage. So far, both Liberia and Mozambique are showing examples of partnerships which bring in comparative advantages: in Liberia, three different organisations are taking on the three GFP objectives for this year; in Mozambique, a range of local partners are working in each site to bring their different areas of expertise to the table	The alliances are proving quite active in planning work collectively and building on the strengths of each. For example, IFFA have taken responsibility for disseminating information about G3 activities through their website.
	Purpose: Clear, specific and purposive goals are needed to assure functionality and additionality to that of individual partners	The CG and RG put time into arriving at a common vision, but are still struggling to define the more specific objectives collectively.	Most in-country teams are still finding it a challenge to define their own clear goals for the partnerships formed. The definitions of specific actions and the work on each country's Theory of Change are proving helpful in enabling country teams to tackle this issue.	A range of partners have been participating in steering the dialogue process with TFD and a lot of work has gone into agreeing on overall objectives and specific objectives for each dialogue. The alliances have put work into agreeing a common vision and on certain areas of work have identified some specific objectives.
	Niche: Too few global forest partnerships involve the Southern and forest-dependent stakeholders who are critical to forestry success	As yet, no Southern or forest-dependent groups are members of the CG, although there are several in the RG. The RG is in fact pushing the CG to include more, both in the CG itself and in the RG, and the RG now has responsibility for strategic decisions concerning GFP, which the CG then needs to implement.	At country level, considerable attention and energy is being put into ensuring that marginalised groups can benefit from the initiative, a notable example being the Alianza in Guatemala. However, the overall planning of the initiative in each country is still resting mainly in the hands of institutions that tend to have more power: governments, NGOs, etc. This has been noted in Mozambique, where internal reflections by the partners concerned suggest that communities themselves do not yet see a place for them in the steering of GFP.	The alliances in the ILCF meetings have been increasingly taking on a decision making and planning role within the dialogue process. Alliance representatives have been co-chairs of each dialogue and the G3 have been resourced directly to further facilitate their analysis and input into the ILCF agenda.

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Process of partnership constitution and evolution	Participatory development: An exploratory or development group can help to refine the goals and principles of the partnership	This is the purpose for which the Catalytic and Reference Groups were formed and discussion about principles and goals is regular within them. What remains to be seen is how a transition could be managed from the "usual suspects" at international level to a greater diversity of more local and national actors playing a key decision making and implementation role at international level.	In each country, a small steering or catalytic group has been established to explore ideas. This was a particularly strong focus in Ghana, where the diagnostic process was steered by a small group from a diversity of fields.	The Dialogue process in the ILCF initiative has played the role of exploratory development and is still refining and defining scope.
	Independents: Trusted intermediaries who have access and credibility to different stakeholders – and who can link global and grass roots levels can help facilitate partner engagement and symmetry	TFD was brought in to deliver the ILCF dialogues and two consultants with connections in community and finance fields were brought in to look at options for funds for locally controlled forestry. However, in the development and delivery of GFP overall, the CG and RG have tended to look only to their members so far: the identification of other contact points to bring in new partners and ideas could be a priority for the future.	In-country, some trusted intermediaries have been brought in to help. In Mozambique, the national steering group chose a national NGO as facilitator for the process. In Guatemala, a national co-ordinator was chosen by a small committee of Guatemaltecos. In Liberia, the identification of local actors to implement elements of the programme was done through a public call for tender.	TFD and the steering groups working on the ILCF process have made use of their extensive networks of intermediaries to bring in a range of people to the ILCF dialogues.
	Inclusion and transparency: Attracting the right partners and agreeing the right goals are assured through an open approach	The composition of the initial Catalytic Group was not designed through an open approach, nor that of the Reference Group, although there was a selection process for civil society members. This has caused some complications in the operation of the RG. However, decision making is now clarified, with the role of the RG for strategic choices clearly stated, and as the RG develops and asserts itself more strongly, this may open out still more.	Efforts have been made to develop a transparent and open process in country. However, several in-country actors have identified a tendency of the CG to always go to their usual partners and allies and, as yet, there hasn't been a real exploration as to whether what is developing is genuinely including all those who might play a role.	At present, the G3 includes three existing alliances and their members. Each member alliance is currently exploring how they can attract more members and reach other communities, indigenous peoples and family foresters.
	Deliberation and learning: The development process needs to explore and test the range of managerial and political possibilities – the choice itself affecting who the partners will be	This has not been strong so far: each CG institution involved has its own way of operating and as yet there has not been an exploration of how each can understand the other's way of working and indeed other models of operation. The Mid Term Review may offer opportunities to explore this	In-country processes are in the process of defining and identifying their Theories of Change which are providing space for leaning and reflection.	The ILCF process is probably at too early a stage to assess progress on this front, although there are review discussions and analyses at the end of each dialogue which inform the next one.
	Launch events: These give partnerships legitimacy and visibility, best used to confirm an agreed partnership following the above process	Presence at a range of international events such as the CBD, World Forestry Congress, COP 14, etc	In each in-country process there have been launch events, usually taking the form of opening workshops or diagnostic meetings. A working session appears to be the best way to get started, rather than a formal launch	No formal launch events have been held, but the G3 have been doing a lot of work to promote their alliance at a range of national and international events.

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Governance structures and principles	'Stakeholder' forms of governance: An emphasis towards 'stakeholder' governance will be needed to address weaknesses in existing international arrangements biased to 'shareholder' governance	The Reference Group is intended to be the stakeholder governance body, although real exploration of what its composition should be has not been undertaken for some time. This is something that will probably develop with time..	National processes have their steering committees, but decisions appear to be taken by co-ordinators or facilitators in-country rather than stakeholders collectively. Attention will need to be paid as the in-country processes develop that the CG members and IIED relinquish control over these processes and allow for genuine stakeholder governance of the process.	The shift from "stakeholder" to "rights holder" has been an interesting feature of ILCF that is challenging some preconceptions.
	Donor roles: However, even a stakeholder model can benefit from involving progressive donors prepared to adhere its principles	All CG members and IIED play the role of donor from time to time and two individuals that work for donor organisations are active RG members. Some of the CG's power is due to that donor role	The role of donors other than CG members in national processes varies.	Donors have started to get involved in the ILCF process in the most recent dialogue in London.
	Precedents: The 'wiring' for a new partnership may well exist in existing formal or informal partnerships, which can be built on	All CG members had collaborated in one way or another and the continuing development of the partnership has built on this.	Each in-country process has built on existing partnerships and initiatives: VPA FLEGT in Ghana, NFP in Guatemala and Liberia, CBNRM in Mozambique	Some informal partnerships were already in existence: ILCF has allowed some of these to consolidate further
	Negotiated approach: Broadly agreed rules are essential to define leadership, accountability to membership and membership criteria. This will take time, even if it builds on best-practice precedents	Negotiation is an ongoing process: the common principles and vision are agreed, but the detail of strategy, membership and accountability are still being discussed	In most countries, this is at an embryonic phase. In Mozambique, there was a lot of discussion about criteria for the facilitating organisation, as there was in Guatemala for the selection of the co-ordinator. In both Mozambique and Ghana, participants have identified that accountability to community actors in particular needs further attention.	The G3 are currently exploring and analysing leadership and membership issues between them.
	Symmetry: It is key to develop this, even if the initial partnership 'drive' comes from a few partners. Language translation, travel support, time to consult, and involving local rather than international NGOs can help	Information on GFP is now available in English, Spanish, French and Portuguese. Inclusion is a challenge in RG and CG meetings, however, with no really satisfactory solution as yet having been found to ensure full inclusion of non-English speakers. Likewise, real inclusion of more marginalised people has not yet been addressed. Thus there is an asymmetry based on language and access to information.	Efforts have been made in all in-country processes to include local people and not just those from the capital cities. This has been done via regional and local meetings and discussions and through working with national platforms that include a range of people. In terms of communications, this is something that will be explored during this year.	Each of the alliances is looking at their own strategies and how they balance power within their structures. The challenge in working between all three is language, with translation and interpretation skills and facilities being limited.
	Representation: Strong and deliberate processes and resources are needed to ensure fair representation in leadership	At present, this has not been tackled at CG level at all. At RG level, there is a fairly mixed group, but there has been no real analysis and discussion about how to ensure adequate representation.	At national level, there have been differing levels of attention paid to this and different approaches have been tried. In Guatemala, the focus has been on strengthening indigenous and community organisations	During the dialogue process, decisions have been made by the steering group before each dialogue about proportions of rights holders and other groups. These have been carefully

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	and membership from indigenous peoples CBOs and small enterprise		to enable them to participate whilst in Ghana, efforts have been made to bring in enterprises that have not previously been involved in the national debate in the same way.	negotiated.
	Secretariat: Take care to avoid a secretariat hosted by one partner having to respond as much to that partner as to the partnership	At present, IIED is playing the secretariat role to the RG, with FAO organising some RG meetings and IUCN supporting the TFD process. So far, there has not been a conflict of interest arising around IIED's role as secretariat and its own agenda, but this should always be kept under review.	In each country, an individual or an organisation is playing the role of secretariat. It would be worth exploring with in-country actors how they feel about the balance between GFP demands and those of the organisation playing a secretariat role.	This has not, at yet, been relevant.
	Seven principles: of good governance apply equally to partnerships and can be used in structuring them: legitimacy, accountability, responsibility, fairness, transparency, efficiency, and probity	There has been no review of how these seven principles have been applied in this case, although all CG and RG members would subscribe to the principles.	There has been no review of how these seven principles have been applied in this case, although all country team members would subscribe to the principles.	There has been no review of how these seven principles have been applied in this case, although all three alliances would subscribe to the principles.

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