



## An Introduction

to the

# IUCN Natural Resource Governance Framework (NRGF)

Version 1 - July 2019<sup>1</sup> \* Prepared by [CEESP](#) and IUCN [GPGR](#)

The Natural Resource Governance Framework ([NRGF](#)) is an IUCN initiative created to provide a *robust, inclusive, and credible approach to assessing and strengthening natural resource governance, at multiple levels and in diverse contexts.*

This document includes:

- An introduction to the concept and importance of natural resource governance
- An overview of the NRGF and its components
- Ideas for how you can apply the NRGF in your work
- Links to NRGF resources

This is meant only as an introduction to the NRGF. We welcome and encourage you to read the full NRGF Conceptual Framework document<sup>2</sup> and explore the supporting tools and resources, as well as other NRGF reports, available [here](#).

For more information, please email [nrgf@iucn.org](mailto:nrgf@iucn.org).

## Background and Rationale

### What is natural resource governance and why is it important in conservation?

Governance is a critical determinant of the social equity, effectiveness, and sustainability of natural resource use and conservation. Improving natural resource governance, including securing rights and sharing power and responsibilities, can benefit both people and biodiversity, e.g., through improved ecosystem health and human wellbeing.

Accordingly, governance is a core focus of work across the Union. “Promoting and supporting effective and equitable governance of natural resources” is one of three core areas of the [2017 – 2020 IUCN Programme](#), and governance and rights are a [thematic focus](#) of the 2020 World Conservation Congress.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this, governance remains relatively poorly understood and addressed in natural resource and conservation policy and practice. It is critical that the conservation community continue work towards improved natural resource governance.

Natural resource governance can be understood as the **norms, institutions, and processes** that determine how **power and responsibilities** over natural resources are exercised, how **decisions are taken**, and how rights-holders and stakeholders – including women, men, youth, Indigenous peoples and local communities – secure access to, participate in, and are impacted by the use and management of natural resources.<sup>3</sup>

## NRGF Overview

### What is the NRGF?

The Natural Resource Governance Framework ([NRGF](#)) is a flagship IUCN [knowledge basket](#) co-convened between the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy ([CEESP](#)) and the Global Programme on Governance and Rights ([GPGR](#)). It is an initiative created for the purpose of providing *a robust, inclusive, and credible approach to assessing and strengthening natural resource governance, at multiple levels and in diverse contexts*. Its goal is to *set standards and guidance on natural resource governance for decision makers at all levels*.

The NRGF is an integral part of IUCN’s work towards a just world that conserves nature.

### What is NRGF’s mandate within IUCN?

In the 2017 – 2020 period, the NRGF initiative has been mandated with:

- Consolidating an overarching conceptual framework for natural resource governance
- Supporting development and application of tools to assess and strengthen governance at multiple levels and in diverse contexts
- Strengthening and building increased coherence across IUCN work on governance
- Promoting wider use of NRGF in conservation and natural resource governance

The NRGF is not intended to replace or duplicate existing governance frameworks or tools, but rather to offer a shared point of reference and promote greater coherence across governance approaches (Springer et al, forthcoming).

## What is 'in' the NRGF basket?

The NRGF includes a central Conceptual Framework (see Figure 1 and Table 1) and a suite of tools and other technical resources to support diverse applications of this Framework. The NRGF can be used to assess:

- Governance of a particular context or system
- Governance aspects of other related tools and approaches
- Governance aspects of programs, projects, and/or actors

The NRGF can also be used to help analyze and communicate lessons about governance using a common frame of reference. The Conceptual Framework and its potential applications are described in more detail below.

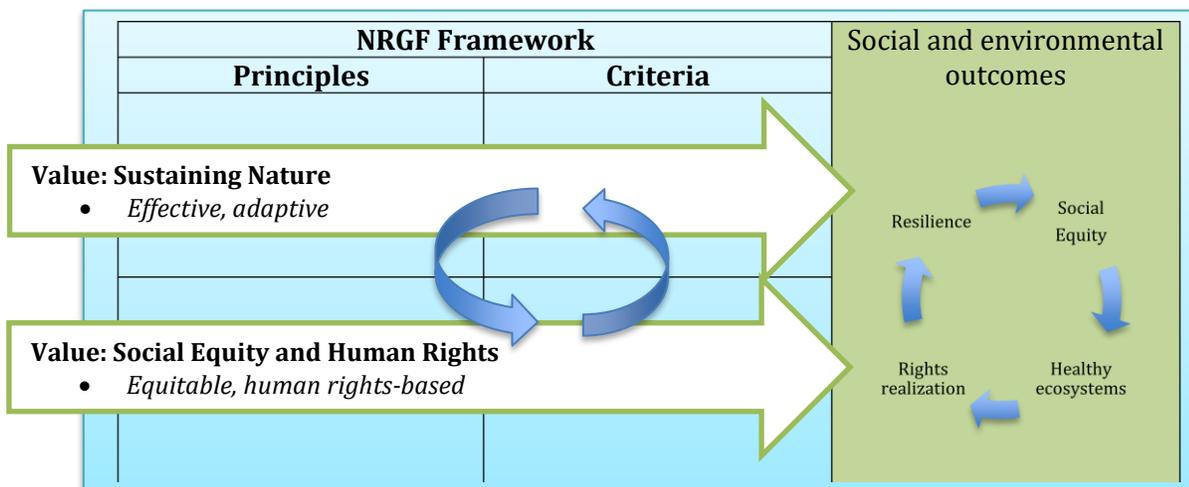
## NRGF Conceptual Framework

The NRGF Conceptual Framework is comprised of three inter-related components important for the realization and maintenance of effective and equitable governance:

1. **Two Cross-cutting Values** – Orientations and foundational ethics and goals of NRG (See Figure 1)
2. **Ten Principles** - Key elements that need to be in place to realize effective and equitable NRG (see Table 1)
3. **Fifty-two Criteria** - Aspects important to the realization of the principles (see Table 1)

**Figure 1: Cross-Cutting NRGF Values in Relation to Principles and Criteria**

Source: Springer et al., forthcoming



**Table 1: NRGF Principles and Criteria**

Source: Springer et al., forthcoming

NRGF Principles	Criteria
<p><b>1. Inclusive decision-making</b></p> <p><i>Decision-making regarding natural resource policies and practices is based on the full and effective participation of all relevant actors, with particular attention to the voice and inclusion of rights-holders and groups at risk of marginalization</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Relevant legal/policy frameworks include robust provisions on the inclusion of rights-holders and stakeholders in decision-making</li> <li>– Platforms/processes are in place to enable full and effective participation in decision-making</li> <li>– Processes for inclusive decision-making engage diverse groups, are socially and culturally appropriate, and take account of power dynamics within and between groups</li> <li>– Rights-holders and stakeholders have access to information concerning the environment and natural resources</li> <li>– Rights-holders and stakeholders have the capacities and support they need to participate in decision-making, including through appropriate representation</li> <li>– Natural resource decisions take account of the views expressed through consultation/participation processes</li> <li>– Free, Prior, and Informed Consent is required and secured for decisions concerning indigenous peoples/customary rights-holders, their lands or their resources</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Recognition and respect for tenure rights</b></p> <p><i>Rights to lands, resources and waters are recognized and respected, with particular attention to the customary, collective rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, and to women’s tenure rights</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Relevant laws/policies/rules mandate recognition and respect for all tenure rights, with particular attention to customary (including collective) rights and women’s rights</li> <li>– Tenure rights are robust – enabling rights-holders to sustainably manage, use/benefit from and protect lands/resources from threats</li> <li>– Processes and capacities are in place to recognize and respect land and resource rights, including for purposes of formal recognition</li> <li>– Processes and capacities are in place to protect and enforce tenure rights</li> <li>– Overlapping tenure rights/claims are clarified in law and resolved in practice</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Recognition and respect for diverse cultures and knowledge systems</b></p> <p><i>Natural resource governance is grounded in sound and diverse forms of knowledge and respect for diverse natural resource values and practices</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Governance strategies and actions are informed by sound and diverse forms of knowledge, including traditional knowledge</li> <li>– Diverse cultural values and practices sustaining natural resources are respected and protected</li> <li>– Governance institutions foster a culture of learning and adaptive management</li> <li>– Traditional knowledge is integrated in natural resource governance in respectful, appropriate and meaningful ways</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Devolution</b></p> <p><i>Decisions are taken at the lowest possible level appropriate to the social and ecological systems being governed, with particular attention to supporting the roles and authority of local communities in natural resource governance</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Legal/policy frameworks devolve natural resource management to capable institutions closest to natural resources</li> <li>– Legal/policy frameworks for devolved natural resource governance, including community-based natural resource management, are widely implemented.</li> <li>– Local institutions have the capacities and support they need for effective and equitable natural resource governance</li> <li>– Appropriate consideration is given to the roles and authority of local communities in natural resource governance</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Strategic vision, direction and learning</b></p> <p><i>Natural resource governance is guided by an overall vision of desired environmental and social ends, and allows for adaptation in</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Relevant legal/policy/management frameworks establish strategic vision and direction for natural resource governance</li> <li>– Strategic vision and direction are set through inclusive processes that take account of diverse values and forms of knowledge of rights-holders and stakeholders</li> <li>– Strategic vision and direction incorporate key principles of environmental sustainability, such as the precautionary principle against risks of</li> </ul>

<p><i>response to learning and changing conditions</i></p>	<p>environmental and social harm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Strategic vision and direction address present threats and anticipate future challenges</li> <li>– Governance of natural resources is consistent with defined strategies</li> <li>– Governance institutions incorporate ongoing monitoring, reflection and learning that enables responsiveness to changing conditions and needs</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Coordination &amp; Coherence</b></p> <p><i>Actors involved or affecting in natural resource governance coordinate around a coherent set of strategies and management practices</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Legal/policy frameworks across sectors responsible for and/or affecting natural resource governance are aligned</li> <li>– Coordination mechanisms are in place to enable “horizontal” collaboration and coherence among multiple actors and/or sectors operating in the same geographical space</li> <li>– Mechanisms are in place to enable “vertical” coordination across multiple levels of actors with roles in the governance of the same ecosystem or resource</li> <li>– Institutions collaborate and overlap functions in ways that enable resilience</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Sustainable and Equitably Shared Resources</b></p> <p><i>Actors responsible for natural resource governance have the resources they need to carry out sustainable management and governance activities, including from the equitable sharing of benefits generated from natural resources</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– People responsible for natural resource governance have access to revenues and/or livelihoods activities that enable them to carry out management activities</li> <li>– Resources/revenues provide sufficient financial sustainability for the people and actions required to manage and conserve natural resources.</li> <li>– Benefit-sharing from the use of natural resources is equitable.</li> <li>– Resources and benefit-sharing provide incentives for the conservation and/or sustainable use of natural resources.</li> <li>– Losses stemming from restrictions to enable natural resource sustainability are minimized and compensated where unavoidable</li> <li>– Natural resources and the environment are sustained so that each successive generation has equitable access to their benefits</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. Accountability</b></p> <p><i>Actors responsible for or affecting natural resource governance are accountable for their actions and the environmental and social impacts they produce</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Institutions responsible for natural resource governance have clearly-defined roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>– Actors responsible for or affecting natural resource governance operate transparently, sharing open and accessible information on their actions</li> <li>– Capacities and mechanisms are in place to hold natural resource governance authorities responsible for their actions</li> <li>– Social and environmental safeguards that explicitly take account of the situation of vulnerable groups and environments are adopted and implemented</li> <li>– Potential impacts on vulnerable environments and people are understood in advance and avoided or minimized to the extent possible</li> <li>– Accountability mechanisms effectively rein in corruption (use of public power for private gain)</li> </ul>
<p><b>9. Fair and effective rule of law</b></p> <p><i>Natural resource-related laws and their application are fair, effective, and protect fundamental rights</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A clear system of natural resource norms and sanctions is defined in law/policy and widely publicized</li> <li>– Natural resource-related laws/policies/rules are consistent with human rights and take account of the situation of indigenous peoples and local communities, women and vulnerable groups</li> <li>– Natural resource-related laws/policies/rules incorporate principles of environmental sustainability</li> <li>– Enforcement bodies have capacity to uphold established norms and sanctions</li> <li>– Natural resource-related laws/policies/rules are carried out equitably and humanely</li> </ul>
<p><b>10. Access to justice and conflict resolution</b></p> <p><i>People are able to seek and obtain remedies for grievances and resolve conflicts regarding land and natural resources</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Formal and/or non-formal mechanisms are in place to resolve conflicts and grievances regarding land and natural resources</li> <li>– People are aware of their natural resource governance-related rights and the avenues available to them for resolving conflicts or seeking redress</li> <li>– Grievance/dispute resolution mechanisms are accessible to rights-holders and stakeholders, including vulnerable and marginalized groups</li> <li>– Mechanisms operate impartially and effectively to resolve disputes</li> </ul>

# Applications of the NRGF

Source: Adapted from Springer et al., forthcoming

The NRGF Conceptual Framework can be applied in various ways, including as described below.

## Assessments of a governance context or system

This central NRGF application may focus on assessment of:

- A particular governance context, e.g. a landscape, site, sector or country, etc.
- A particular governance system, e.g. an institution or network of actors with responsibilities for governance

Such assessments may be conducted with the aims of, *inter alia*:

- Gaining an overall understanding of governance at a point in time, including strengths and challenges
- Monitoring changes in governance over time in a particular context or system
- Developing a comparative understanding of governance contexts or systems

This can, in turn, help to, *inter alia*: identify actions to improve governance; shape development or implementation of an initiative; and / or inform advocacy actions, e.g. for claiming and upholding related rights.

The NRGF Assessment Guide<sup>5</sup> provides overall guidance on designing and conducting assessments of governance contexts and/or systems, organized around four broad phases (see Figure 2). As emphasized in the Guide, assessment processes should themselves be in keeping with NRGF governance principles, including being highly collaborative and rights-based, learning focused, appropriate, and respectful.

**Figure 2: Phases for assessment of governance context or system**

Source: Campese et al. 2019



## **Assessments of projects/programs and actors**

The NRGF can also be used to assess activities (such as projects or programs) and/or the roles of actors undertaking those activities. Towards these ends, the NRGF Programme and Project Screening Tool enables developers, implementers, and partners to identify the extent to which they are addressing natural resource governance issues, and to explore options for strengthening governance. It can be used at any project phase, though may be most impactful during design or early implementation, when projects are most flexible. It is meant to be used through a participatory process.

## **Assessment and alignment of governance-related tools and approaches**

There are many existing tools and approaches that address natural resource governance issues. The NRGF is not intended to replace or duplicate these, but rather to provide a common point of reference within IUCN. Towards this end, the NRGF Conceptual Framework can be used to reflect on the extent to which existing tools and approaches align with its principles and criteria. These may be governance-focused tools or approaches, or other tools or approaches that integrate (or wish to integrate) governance considerations. The NRGF Correspondence Analysis Tool was developed to enable this type of comparative review / gap analysis.

## **Analysis and Communication about Governance**

The NRGF Conceptual Framework can be used by actors engaged in diverse conservation and natural resource-related initiatives to analyze and communicate about their experiences related to governance using a common Framework and point of reference. This can, in turn, enhance the exchange of knowledge, learning, and action for improved governance across the Union.

### **Resources for More Information**

The NRGF Conceptual Framework<sup>6</sup> document and the suite of supporting tools and other resources, including conceptual papers and a pilot assessment report, are available [here](#). More resources will be added over time.

For more information, please email us at [nrgf@iucn.org](mailto:nrgf@iucn.org).

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This document will be updated periodically, including as new NRGF tools and resources become available.

<sup>2</sup> Springer, J et al. (forthcoming). *NRGF Conceptual Framework*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN and CEESP

This document is currently going through the IUCN publication process, including peer review.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Graham, J., B. Amos and T. Plumptre (June 2003:2). *Governance Principles for Protected Areas in the 21st Century*. Prepared for the Fifth World Parks Congress Durban, South Africa. In collaboration with Parks Canada and the Canadian International Development Agency and IUCN WCC-RES 3.012

<sup>4</sup> The targeted global results of the current programme include global results including that: “*Natural resource governance at all levels enables delivery of effective conservation and equitable social outcomes by integrating good governance principles and rights-based approaches*”. While the 2021-2024 Programme is still being development, governance is likely to remain a central consideration of our work going forward.

<sup>5</sup> Campese, J., B. Nakangu, M. Jones, A. Silverman, and J. Springer (2019). *The NRGF Assessment Guide: Learning for Improved Natural Resource Governance – Version 2*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN and CEESP

<sup>6</sup> See note no. 2