

Natural Resource Governance Framework

A knowledge basket¹ of the International Union for Conservation of Nature

Strategy Update

Why a focus on natural resource governance?

Natural resource governance refers to the norms, institutions and processes that determine how power and responsibilities over natural resources are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens – women, men, indigenous peoples and local communities – participate in and benefit from the management of natural resources. The effectiveness and equity of governance processes critically determines both the extent to which ecosystems contribute to human well being and the long-term prospects for successful conservation of nature. Securing rights and sharing power and responsibilities through strengthened natural resource governance, including legal entitlements, benefits both people and biodiversity. Thus, governance is a necessary foundation for a just world that values and conserves nature.

What is the IUCN Natural Resource Governance Framework?

The Natural Resource Governance Framework (NRGF) is an IUCN 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. The overarching goal of NRGF is to: *set standards and guidance for decision-makers at all levels to make better and more just decisions on the use of natural resources and the distribution of nature's benefits, following good governance principles, such that improved governance will enhance the contributions of ecosystems and biodiversity to equity and sustainability.*

The NRGF is hosted by the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP), working in close collaboration with the IUCN Secretariat and partners across the Union. An initial phase of work began in 2013 and will continue to the end of 2016. This brief provides an update on the work of the NRGF, with a particular focus on strategic approaches, lines of work, and main products expected in this first phase.

Strategic Approach and Main Lines of Work

One important aspect of NRGF's work in this initial phase has been to define NRGF's niche, main functions and strategies, given the wide scope and complexity of natural

¹ The term 'knowledge basket' is inspired by the Maori tradition of the God Tane's ascent through the twelve heavens to bring three baskets of Knowledge back to earth. It is used here as a metaphor for working in a holistic way, valuing ethical, respectful and reciprocal relationships, as well as investing in the human social and cultural dimensions of environmental knowledge.

resource governance issues. NRGF is focusing on the following four strategies and associated activities:

1. ***Developing standards, methods and tools to assess natural resources governance and promote its improvement***

As highlighted in the IUCN Program (2013-2016), the NRGF will create a robust set of principles, standards and tools for assessing natural resource governance and promoting its improvement. Central to this is the development of a framework for independent assessment of the status of natural resource governance – emphasizing issues of rights, equity and social justice - in multiple contexts. The ultimate aim of this work is to create a “go-to” standard and resource on natural resource governance, particularly one that is responsive to the needs and interests of key constituencies such as indigenous peoples and local communities, women and youth.

In the current phase of NRGF work, activities are focused on producing the following resources:

- A Natural Resource Governance Framework to serve as a standard and framework of principles, criteria and indicators for assessing natural resource governance. Framework development is building on and consolidating existing work, including an initial set of NRGF Values and Principles, a legal framework developed by the World Commission on Environmental Law and IUCN Environmental Law Centre, and relevant work of other organizations. This work is using an iterative approach, including interaction with regional scoping processes to ensure the framework is grounded in local realities.
- Guidance on use of the Framework – Guidance is also being prepared on how to use the NRG Framework to conduct assessments. Guidance materials will support both the assessment of governance contexts (at multiple scales), and assessment of the roles of intervening agents (such as governments and conservation organizations, including IUCN). Guidance tools will enable rights-holders and duty-bearers to assess the status of natural resource governance in specific situations and identify steps needed to improve it.
- A set of conceptual papers to elucidate and illustrate key components of the natural resource governance framework.

2. ***Building a body of knowledge on governance of natural resources***

A key role of the NRGF knowledge basket is to build up a body of knowledge on natural resource governance. In the current phase, this work is focusing on regional scoping activities to identify and assess natural resource governance issues, understand critical factors constraining effective governance, exchange experience and lessons, and identify key actors and initiatives focused on natural resource governance. Initial scoping activities have been carried out in

Mesoamerica, Southeast Asia and Southern Africa. Priorities for 2016 are to complete regional scoping activities in up to four regions, including preparation of scoping reports and/or case studies.

Results of this work will be posted and shared on a dedicated web-space, which will serve as a broader repository for knowledge resources on natural resource governance. Opportunities to conduct assessments focused on other natural resource “units” (such as landscapes or ecosystems) are being explored for subsequent phases of work. The aim of these assessments will be to build up a body of comparative analysis over time, highlighting gaps and priorities for action to strengthen natural resource governance.

3. *Serving as a platform to promote linkages, share experience, and mobilize concerted action to improve natural resource governance*

A third key strategy for NRGF is to create platforms convening key actors concerned with natural resource governance, rights, and equity issues, and enabling them to mobilize concerted action for improved governance. The ongoing regional scoping work is building engagement with organizations in those regions, including to explore interests and areas of focus for platforms at regional or national levels. At the global level, NRGF is undertaking a survey to map existing and planned work on governance issues across IUCN, to be completed by July 2016. In addition to documenting existing tools and knowledge resources on natural resource governance, the survey is identifying opportunities for NRGF to build synergies and linkages across the governance-related work of IUCN programs, offices and Commissions. This work will also expand to engage a broader range of IUCN Members over time.

At all levels, the aim of these platforms is to provide space for exchange and joint action, both for further development of natural resource governance tools and knowledge, and for action to address issues identified through governance assessments. Platforms will contribute to IUCN’s role in policy influencing, drawing on the combination of its expertise and convening power.

4. *Promoting and supporting improved action on natural resource governance in IUCN projects and programs*

Work to promote and support improved action on governance in IUCN projects and programs is proceeding in two ways. At one level, NRGF is supporting the development and application of tools and approaches to ensure greater coherence in how governance challenges are addressed across all IUCN projects. This work is building on the standards, tools, knowledge resources, and engagement platforms developed through the above three strategies, and will also include dedicated outreach and training activities.

At another level, and drawing on the results of initial scoping, survey and assessment activities, NRGF is identifying a set of opportunities for high-impact projects focused on improving natural resource governance. Development of collaborative initiatives involving IUCN programs, CEESP, and other IUCN members and commissions is ongoing in this first phase of NRGF, with direct implementation anticipated to occur mainly in subsequent phases. Across these two levels of engagement, NRGF will work with and through CEESP to identify and link relevant expertise on governance issues to IUCN projects and programs.

Collaboration

The NRGF Working Group of over 35 members supports technical development and provides an initial platform for engagement across IUCN programs, Commissions, Members and partners. Task teams engage experts and stakeholders in the development of specific activities and products.

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