Why assess natural resource governance?

Achieving a sustainable future is one of the most urgent challenges of our time. With fundamental shifts in how we govern and manage our ecosystems and natural resources, we can loosen the grip of inequity, poverty, and conflict and enhance human-wellbeing as well as livelihood and development opportunities adding fuel to the vision of United Nations Rio +20 conference in 2012.

Weak or inappropriate natural resource governance contributes to a wide range of problems that deplete ecosystems of their diversity, abundance, productivity, and resilience. People are experiencing the consequences of this in very real ways. In Africa, for example, natural resource extraction has underpinned growth of 4.8% per annum over the last decade, but recent research shows that “lived” poverty remains largely unchanged, with 50% of people experiencing food shortages.1 Over this period, there has also been a massive expansion in foreign investments in land—estimated to be upwards of 134 million hectares in Africa and 203 million worldwide between 2000 and 20102. This agriculture industrialization trend is reducing the availability of wild and farmed foods for marginalized communities.

What is the IUCN Natural Resource Governance Framework?

IUCN is committed to developing a framework that enables practical improvements in the making and implementation of decisions that address these complex realities with:

- **The overarching goal** of setting 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 purpose** of providing a robust, credible approach to assessing and strengthening natural resource governance at multiple levels in diverse contexts.

Achieving this purpose will require corresponding tools and processes to support decision-making, planning, implementation and accountabilities of action, policies, programmes and projects that affect natural resources and the people who most directly rely upon them.

The Framework will comprise a set of normative principles that are applied through a suite of diagnostic and decision support tools that are context specific. The core principles and values will be developed through a regional approach that ensures that different legal regimes including national constitutional law, international human rights obligations and Indigenous Peoples’ and local communities’ rights will be reflected.

Based on the NRGF values and principles, governance tools will help support communities and other rights-holders, including Indigenous Peoples, small-scale agricultural and pastoral peoples, women and other stakeholders to assess the status of governance in specific situations and identify approaches and processes to improve, address and track specific governance outcomes for natural resource management. The NRGF includes targeted engagement at all levels including in national and international policy-making. Assessments of governance will use indicators of, inter alia, rights, equity and effectiveness to assess the state of governance of natural resources in different decision contexts, and to facilitate the identification of concrete approaches and measures for gradual improvements.
At the same time, application of the NRGF will be designed to support and build the capacity of stakeholders at all levels to enhance their contributions to better governance of natural resources.

The framework and tools developed will be grounded in lessons drawn from studies at all levels, and engagement with diverse actors and decision makers, and include technical guidance for application.

**Next steps in building the IUCN Natural Resource Governance Framework**

The NRGF is being developed through the Natural Resource Governance Framework (NRGF) Working Group (NRGF WG) at the World Conservation Congress in Jeju, Korea in September 2012. IUCN has broad-based global membership, including governments, civil society, and think tanks and recognized technical expertise in conservation policy and practice, including in its six Commissions. Consequently, it is well placed to undertake this ambitious initiative.

NRGF development was mandated by the IUCN Members Assembly at the World Conservation Congress in Jeju, Korea in September 2012.

The NRGF is an IUCN-wide initiative led by the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP) in collaboration with the Secretariat’s Nature Based Solutions & Rights Group, its Environmental Law Centre (ELC), IUCN Members and other commissions under the “One Programme Charter”.

IUCN’s experience with the natural resource governance challenges encountered around the world, and its experience in developing and applying other knowledge products such as the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, provide an important foundation for creating a robust NRGF that can address governance challenges in diverse circumstances.

**Supporting the Natural Resource Governance Framework**

Funding for early development and pilot applications of the NRGF has been provided by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of International Development Cooperation (FINNIDA) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The Forest Carbon, Markets and Communities Program (FCMC) funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided technical support to the development of the NRGF.

IUCN continues to seek support for further development and application of the NRGF to enhance work within rights-based development and environment strategies.

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1 Boniface et al (2013) After a Decade of Growth, Little change in Poverty at Grassroots  