



**arborvitaespecial**

## Strengthening Voices for Better Choices

A review of the lessons and experiences of IUCN's global multi-stakeholder forest governance project

Brazil • DR Congo • Ghana • Sri Lanka • Tanzania • Vietnam



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## NOTE ON RESOURCES

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# Connecting people to the processes and institutions of forest governance

**Stewart Maginnis, Matthew Markopoulos and Guido Broekhoven** introduce this *arborvitae* special on the lessons and experiences of Strengthening Voices for Better Choices (SVBC), IUCN's recently concluded global forest governance project

The articles in this special issue illustrate the changes catalysed by SVBC from its inception in 2005 to its conclusion in July 2009. Working in six tropical forest countries—Brazil, Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Vietnam—and internationally, SVBC sought to test and promote improved governance arrangements engendering sustainable and equitable forest conservation and management.

Any large project necessarily requires an intensive collaborative effort. SVBC was no different, drawing on IUCN's Secretariat, networks of experts and, most importantly, its members and partners around the world. The European Commission supplied the core project financing; additional funds were leveraged from other IUCN initiatives and partners (principally the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its core funding to LLS, the Livelihoods and Landscapes Strategy).

Reading through these articles, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the scope and variety of interventions under SVBC. The project was sensitive to the importance of context, tailoring activities to locally defined needs and taking advantage of the opportunities offered by ongoing processes of forest governance reform. Yet, despite this richness, a common thread runs through the past four-and-a-half years. This is a keen appreciation of the need to open decision making on forests to a wider range of stakeholders—to connect people to the processes and institutions of forest governance.

From the sectoral dialogues aimed at setting governance action agendas in Acre, Brazil, to the public consultations for Ghana's Voluntary Partnership Agreement with the European Union, to the local management forum for the Knuckles Conservation Forest in Sri Lanka, SVBC consistently sought to bring different

stakeholders together to identify, discuss and negotiate solutions to their forest problems. As IUCN has found in other contexts, such multi-stakeholder processes can have many values. These range from the intrinsic, such as providing a space for bargaining rather than confrontation and giving a voice to weaker interests, to the instrumental, such as deepening the pool of knowledge and capacity for tackling a problem and so increasing the odds of finding a practical solution.

Of course, multi-stakeholder processes are no panacea. They face important challenges in ensuring meaningful participation, balancing power relations and facilitating an open and informed exchange of views. Yet, through SVBC, we have gained a clearer, finer-grained understanding of these challenges and how to forestall or tackle them. It is never easy, but, with careful design and facilitation, adequate political commitment and strong local ownership, people can engage effectively in decision-making processes.

As IUCN's first major forest governance initiative, bringing together various earlier experiences, SVBC also had a transformative effect on the Union's forest conservation programme. The article by Carole Saint-Laurent and Guido Broekhoven in this special issue discusses IUCN's current approach to forest governance reform processes—an approach developed largely through the lessons and experience of SVBC. This has already proved of value in addressing such important emerging issues as REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation). And it is the network of professional staff established through SVBC across various countries and regions which now ensures the credibility and cohesion of IUCN's ongoing forest governance work. SVBC may have finished, but it has left its mark on IUCN. ❁

## AUTHORS



**Stewart Maginnis** is Director of IUCN's Environment and Development Group. He also heads IUCN's Forest Conservation Programme, a position he has held since 2001.

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Photos © Li Jia (left); J. Kiyulu (centre); S. Hennayake (right)



# IUCN's approach to forest governance reform

**Carole Saint-Laurent** and **Guido Broekhoven** discuss what IUCN has to offer in support of forest law enforcement, governance and trade initiatives

**S**trengthening Voices for Better Choices was IUCN's first large multi-country forest governance project. As such, it was the backbone of much of our later work in this field, and a proving ground for the approaches we now bring to forest governance reform processes worldwide (including national processes, the FLEG ministerial meetings and the European Union's FLEGT Action Plan).

The role we play in any particular setting is based on thorough consultation with stakeholders and tailored to the circumstances of each country and process, including local needs, the range of stakeholders, and their interactions. We also respond to the goals and interests of our local members.

## AUTHORS



**Carole Saint-Laurent** is IUCN's Senior Advisor on Forest Policy and Partnerships, and coordinator of the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration. She has 20 years of experience in environmental policy and programme development. **Guido Broekhoven** was the global coordinator of SVBC from 2005 to 2009. Before taking up his current position as Senior Forest Governance Officer in IUCN's Forest Conservation Programme, he worked extensively in South America, Eastern and Central Africa and Southeast Asia, primarily with IUCN.

- 1 **Transparency & empowered stakeholders** aware of the means by which their interests can be furthered.
- 2 **Space for building trust and common cause** to identify and jointly implement priority actions while bridging long-term conflicts.
- 3 **High-quality advice** based on practical experience and sound technical inputs which provide a solid basis for decision making and action.
- 4 **Practical models of legal and sustainable forest livelihoods** which have been field tested with partners and IUCN members, and which can be included in reform agreements and plans.

## An informed societal choice

We believe that the management and conservation of a country's forests are a matter of informed societal choice. Without the active support of the people they affect, forest governance reforms have little chance of success. So it is crucial that these people see each other, and see themselves, as partners in setting and implementing any agenda of reform.

Our experiences have highlighted an often diverse range of interests within the three broad stakeholder groups of government, civil society and the private sector. No process of results-driven consultation can be based on the few individuals who participate in one event—it must reach out to and engage every constituency.

IUCN's forest governance reform work is directed at delivering:

Where there is a need and support for us to do so, we work with governments and other stakeholders to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues for national or regional processes of forest governance reform. Depending on the situation, this role can be as narrow as facilitating one or more events, or as broad as designing and implementing a full programme of stakeholder engagement and dialogue. We may also help our members to deliver an agreed programme of work.

Whatever role we play, we seek to keep it distinct and transparent to participants. Our experience has taught us the importance of constantly explaining our role and assessing how others perceive it. Also vital is keeping watch on and adapting as necessary to the dynamics of an unfolding process of reform, including changing stakeholder interactions and any emerging obstacles.

## Menu of options

Where appropriate, IUCN plays one or more of the following roles in collaboration with governments and other stakeholders (as illustrated by some examples from our past and present work):

### 1 Transparency & empowered stakeholders

- ▶ *Improve information sharing:* We create or strengthen mechanisms for different groups to access the information they need to support their participation in reform processes. As far as possible, we seek to build a shared understanding of participants' roles and responsibilities in supplying this information.

*In Vietnam and China, IUCN has translated and distributed key documents such as the European Union's FLEGT Briefing Notes. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), IUCN has provided information to communities about the new Forest Law and their associated rights and obligations.*

- ▶ *Support capacity building:* Where necessary, we facilitate capacity building for different groups. This includes capacity in running effective multi-stakeholder processes or credible legality verification schemes, or capacity in participating effectively by weaker groups.

*In Tanzania, IUCN developed a training manual and conducted training for communities on legal issues relating to community management of natural resources.*

### 2 Space for building trust and common cause

- ▶ *Design and advise on multi-stakeholder processes:* This role includes mapping stakeholders and their relations, analysing local needs and capacities, and organising meetings and media coverage. It can also cover advising on such issues as removing obstacles and ensuring stakeholders' advice is taken into account by decision makers.

*In Ghana, IUCN designed and presented a series of options for conducting the multi-stakeholder consultations in support of a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA). In the Brazilian state of Acre, IUCN facilitated a process for different groups to set their own sectoral agendas for contributing to a campaign to reduce illegal logging.*

- ▶ *Facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue sessions:* Using recognised tools and methods, and drawing on the expertise of IUCN's Commission on Education and Communication, we facilitate meetings and other events as part of a broader multi-stakeholder process.

*In DRC and Vietnam, IUCN has organised and facilitated various meetings with different stakeholder groups in anticipation of negotiations on FLEGT-related actions. In the Republic of Congo, IUCN organised a meeting for timber companies to inform them about the VPA process and to help them identify and articulate their interests.*

### 3 High-quality advice

- ▶ *Catalyse or develop technical inputs:* We support groups to collate, synthesise and present field-based policy lessons, or to produce new and additional information where doing so will improve the quality of dialogue.

*In Lao PDR, IUCN is helping the new Department of Forestry Inspection to gather information on the scale of illegal logging and cross-border timber trade.*

### 4 Practical models of legal and sustainable forest livelihoods

- ▶ *Support the identification and testing of specific pilot actions:* Together with local partners, we field test new governance arrangements identified through a multi-stakeholder dialogue, in particular arrangements involving state and non-state actors.

*In Sri Lanka, IUCN has piloted models for local and national multi-stakeholder dialogue linked to new economic opportunities from sustainable non-timber goods and services. In Ghana, IUCN supported a community to develop a pilot harvesting and mobile saw milling project in its forest.*

## Facilitating learning exchanges

Besides the roles outlined above, our partners have encouraged us, in light of our experiences, to put greater emphasis on facilitating learning exchanges between our state and non-state members working on forest governance. They have also suggested we organise and convene learning networks on best practices in forest governance reform. These will become an increasingly important aspect of our work in the years to come. ❁

*In July 2009, we brought together 17 people involved in convening or facilitating multi-stakeholder processes for forest governance reform to share and document their experiences, and to agree on future steps to develop tools and build capacity for stakeholders to engage in reform.*

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**Voting on REDD: Why and how should we invest in forest governance?** IUCN, 2009.

**IUCN's role as facilitator in Cameroon's multi-stakeholder consultations for a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA).** Jody Erikson, IUCN, 2009.



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# Freeing Acre of illegal logging

**Doris Cordero, Frederico Soares and Liliana Pires** examine SVBC's wide-ranging efforts to strengthen forest governance in western Amazonia

## AUTHORS



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Photos courtesy of authors

In the Brazilian state of Acre, SVBC worked to remove the incentives for unsustainable and illegal activities, so driving up their opportunity costs and increasing the attractiveness of sustainable alternatives.

The project's approach followed the principle that illegal logging is essentially a problem of governance, not law enforcement. Further, conserving forests and promoting sustainable uses must go beyond illegality *per se*, as some technically illegal activities may be sustainable and some legal activities unsustainable.

These considerations led SVBC, together with its main partner, WWF Brazil, to develop a three-pronged strategy under the banner "Free Acre of Illegal Logging", focusing on promoting best practices, creating responsible markets and improving forest governance.

### Promoting best practices

Together with WWF Brazil and members of WWF's Global Forest and Trade Network, SBVC supported the establishment of the SIM programme in Acre. SIM, or the Modular Implementation and Verification System for Forest Certification, is a stepwise approach to achieving forest certification for logging companies. Participants commit to improving

their management practices and obtaining FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification within four years. The programme also supports improved forest governance, knowledge generation and capacity building.

The SIM programme not only targets forest producers. It also works with industrial wood consumers to develop control methodologies, improve supply capacities and deploy the SIM chain of custody system as a mechanism to control wood sources and create pressure for change among suppliers.

### Creating responsible markets

The second arm of SVBC's strategy in Acre aimed to reduce unfair price competition from illegal timber and improve market access for legal products. These two goals were pursued through responsible public and private procurement policies.

Acre has for a number of years encouraged the use of certified wood and supported local forest producers and associations. Yet there are still no federal or state legal mechanisms requiring authorities in Acre (or elsewhere in Brazil) to procure legal or sustainable timber. SVBC worked to establish such a mechanism in Acre through "Friends of the Amazon", a

responsible purchasing programme operated by the Getúlio Vargas Foundation. Both Acre's state government and the municipality of Rio Branco are members of the programme.

The project made an intensive effort at state level to raise awareness of the need for new public purchasing procedures and a reform of the bidding laws. Official estimates suggest that about 40% of the timber harvested in Acre is consumed within the state, and that the public sector accounts for 70% of this consumption. Any change in procurement policy to favour good forest management would have a large impact on Acre's forests, so it is encouraging that both the state government and Rio Branco have now made a commitment to purchase only legal wood.

In the corporate sector, SVBC and WWF Brazil promoted responsible purchasing policies amongst the participants in the SIM programme. These policies were based on best practices from *Seja Legal*, the Portuguese version of the Global Forest and Trade Network's manual *Keep It Legal* (adapted to Brazilian conditions and published in 2009 with SVBC's support).

### Improving forest governance

To improve governance, SVBC focused on: 1) strengthening civil society participation in the discussion, definition and monitoring of public forest policies; and 2) participatory development of governance action agendas for Acre's private sector and its social movement organisations, preceded by a phase of generating knowledge.

In a series of meetings and consultations, stakeholders were helped to clarify their governance needs and demands, to better understand the concerns of other groups and, ultimately, to come up with innovative ideas for public policy reforms leading to improved forest governance.

The private sector's governance agenda was launched in May 2009. It is a multi-stakeholder product which aims to support cross-sectoral efforts to promote sustainable forest management across eight themes: licensing, laws, land tenure, development and research, wood supply, labour relations, credit, and financing.

The social movement's governance agenda has yet to be finalised, partly because the local NGOs who should have taken the lead lack resources and are concentrating on their role as service providers rather than as participants in a multi-stakeholder dialogue. Nevertheless the process to date and SVBC's overall efforts to strengthen the movement's role in public

policy making have contributed to some notable successes, for example:

- ▶ Restructuring of Acre's State Forest Council to improve civil society participation.
- ▶ The launch of a new state law on forest production licensing.
- ▶ Proposed state laws on public bidding and responsible public procurement.
- ▶ Inclusion of the SIM Programme in Acre's State Forest Sector Quality Programme.

SVBC's experience shows how strong private sector and civil society participation can move the forest policy agenda forwards, balancing law enforcement with strategic actions aimed at better forest governance. Now, as before, the actions being taken by Acre offer a hopeful alternative to the current dynamics of forest exploitation in the Amazon. 🌳

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**Strengthening Voices for Better Choices in Brazil.** IUCN, 2009.

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Land cover map of Acre, Brazil. Based on the Vegetation Map of South America, prepared under the Global Land Cover 2000 Project (bioval.jrc.ec.europa.eu/products/glc2000/glc2000.php).



LEGEND			
	International boundary		Closed evergreen tropical forest
	State boundary		Bamboo-dominated forest
	River		Semi-deciduous transition forest
	State/Provincial capital		Freshwater flooded forest
	City/Town		Intensive agriculture
			Mosaic of agriculture and degraded forest
			Shrub savannah

Map © IUCN

Photo © S. Hemmayake



# Linking dialogue with opportunity in Knuckles

**Nimal Karunarathne** and **Anoja Wickramasinghe** review the changes catalysed by SVBC in one of Sri Lanka’s key forest landscapes

## AUTHORS



**Nimal S. Karunarathne** was the national coordinator of SVBC in Sri Lanka from 2007 to 2009. A forester by profession, he worked in both the public and the private sectors before his first assignment with IUCN Sri Lanka in 1998. **Anoja Wickramasinghe** is an Emeritus Professor of Geography at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. She is coordinating the livelihood development component of a joint project between Peradeniya and the University of Aberdeen, UK, to restore and develop the buffer zone of the Knuckles forest.

Photos courtesy of authors

Unabated deforestation, worsening social and economic conditions in forest-fringe communities, and the Forest Department’s exclusive jurisdiction have triggered a vigorous debate about how Sri Lanka should manage its forests. Those who favour State authority and the existing institutional framework argue that only government can guarantee adequate management. Their critics, meanwhile, argue that conserving forests successfully requires commitment from a wide range of stakeholders and mechanisms to share power and responsibility. Yet any progress in this debate is hindered by an outdated regulatory system which fails to recognize stakeholder participation in forest governance.

In the absence of formal consultative mechanisms, IUCN Sri Lanka launched SVBC to engage multiple stakeholders in piloting new forest governance arrangements. The site chosen for this purpose was the Knuckles forest, a mountainous area of 160 km<sup>2</sup> in central Sri Lanka. An important watershed and source of biodiversity, Knuckles has attracted close attention since 2000 when it was declared a Conservation Forest. With this change in status, traditional forest uses were prohibited, most large-scale cardamom cultivation ceased, and the government took steps to acquire privately held land within the forest.

Though rightly seen as a victory for conservation, the declaration of the Knuckles forest involved little consultation with the local people who would be most affected. The restrictions on forest use, for example, reduced some villagers’ incomes by as much as 40%. Many private landowners also had no choice but to sell their land to the government at predetermined prices. With no outlet to express local concerns, tensions grew among villagers, landowners and the government, threatening the long-term future of the forest.

## Dialogue and development

SVBC adopted a three-pronged strategy to strengthen the voices of Knuckles stakeholders in planning and decision making: 1) create channels for local people to interact and communicate with decision makers; 2) build relationships with the private sector to mobilise support for developing alternative livelihoods; and 3) create space and capacity in official policy processes for meaningful participation by other groups.

Starting in three villages in the Knuckles buffer zone—later extended to eleven—SVBC supported local village organisations to assess their development needs and identify collaborative activities with private landowners and



the government. Originally formed in 1991 and called the *Dumbara Surakinno*, or “Protectors of Knuckles”, these organisations had been inactive since the late 1990s. SVBC’s support was instrumental in reviving and strengthening them, and in training a new generation of their leaders.

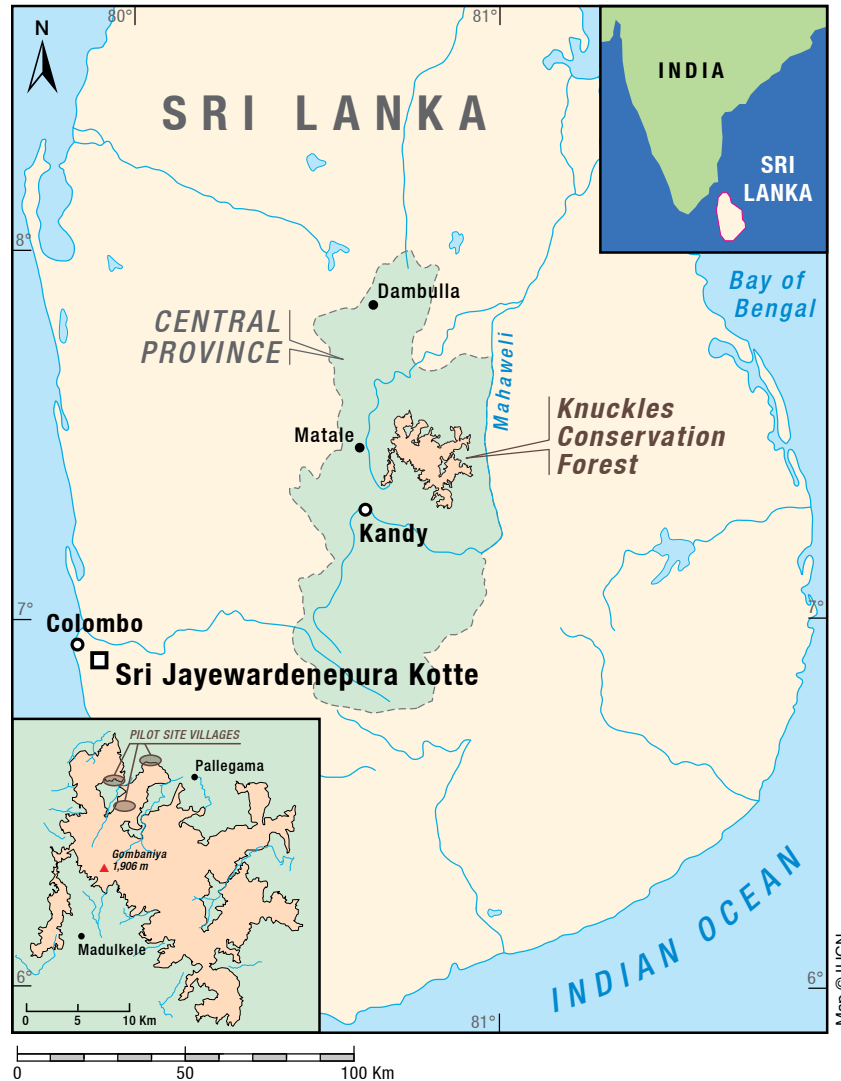
The revitalised *Dumbara Surakinno* are playing a growing role in conserving Knuckles. Two initiatives, both supported by SVBC, illustrate their new-found confidence. First is an ecotourism promotion project, in which they are working with the Forest Department to run an information centre and track tourist arrivals. Second is a forest protection action plan, aimed at curbing forest offences through joint monitoring and enforcement by the *Dumbara Surakinno* and Forest Department staff. Offences in Knuckles have declined over the past three years, and joint action is expected to reduce them still further.

Perhaps SVBC’s main contribution to promoting dialogue has been its creation of a local multi-stakeholder forum to discuss and comment on management proposals for Knuckles. Held each year since 2007, the Knuckles Forum brings together the *Dumbara Surakinno*, Forest Department and other major stakeholders to air their views and concerns. Crucially from the viewpoint of sustainability, the Forum is now a permanent feature of the institutional landscape at Knuckles. Under a government gazette of 2007, all management decisions must now go through a multi-stakeholder committee. This is the first instance in Sri Lanka of community-based organisations being incorporated into the formal decision-making structure for a protected forest.

SVBC’s efforts to promote dialogue and cooperation have been based on a clear appreciation of the need to restore local livelihoods. Improving governance must be linked with opportunity. To this end, SVBC has used IUCN Sri Lanka’s wider network to mobilise support from business for livelihood activities. For example, the Merrill J. Fernando Foundation, the charitable arm of Dilmah Tea, has supported village cooperative marketing societies. These “Tomato Societies” have helped to eliminate the middlemen who controlled vegetable prices, so increasing villagers’ incomes and bargaining power.

**An enabling framework**

Decision making at the national level, where policy for Knuckles and other forests is determined, has begun a modest transformation under SVBC’s influence. Space for inputs and



The Knuckles forest is a dominant feature of Sri Lanka’s central highlands. Despite covering only 0.3% of Sri Lanka’s land area, it harbours over a third of the country’s flowering plants. The communities who participated in SVBC are on the northern side of the forest, close to the important agricultural town of Matale.

participation by other stakeholders has started to open up, largely through the efforts of the project steering committee. Originally envisaged as an advisory body, the committee made a more substantive contribution to the project through its live link with the pilot site.

Given the success of the committee, SVBC has put forward the idea of transforming it into a national forest governance working group. Although much work has to be done before this idea can become reality, SVBC has provided ample time and space for Sri Lanka’s Forest Department to appreciate the benefits of a national multi-stakeholder process to promote collaborative forest management.

The voices emerging from Knuckles are increasingly clear, coherent and strategic. If they can reach a national audience and catalyse wider change, a better future awaits Sri Lanka’s forests and their dependents. 🌿

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**Strengthening Voices for Better Choices in Sri Lanka.** IUCN, 2009.

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Photo © J. Kiyulu

# People can change forest governance

Joël Kiyulu is optimistic that the multi-stakeholder platforms established by SVBC will have a lasting impact on how forests are governed in Equator province, Democratic Republic of Congo

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**Strengthening Voices for Better Choices in the Democratic Republic of Congo.** IUCN, 2009.

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**Seeing the Wood for the Trees: Forestry governance in the DRC.** Mari-Lise du Preez & Kathryn Sturman, SAIIA, 2009.

## AUTHOR



**Joël Kiyulu** was the national coordinator of SVBC in DRC from 2006 to 2009. Based at IUCN's Project

Photo © M. Markopoulos

Office in Kinshasa, DRC, he has worked for many years on issues of forest governance, civil society organising, land tenure and indigenous knowledge.

As peace and development replace war and mismanagement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), so the value of its forests is growing and the risk of unchecked industrial logging rising. Conflicts over the sharing of timber benefits are frequent between communities and logging companies. The causes of these and other governance problems include a patchy and ineffective regulatory system, institutional weaknesses and a lack of accountability and respect for the rule of law.

In recent years DRC has taken two big steps towards clarifying and strengthening forest rights and returns. First was the adoption of a new Forest Law in 2002, calling for decentralised forest management and greater community involvement. Second was a moratorium on, and review of, all concession contracts.

Though vital, these efforts have been undermined by a lack of capacity, low levels of awareness and irregularities such as the award of concessions in breach of the moratorium. For all the good intentions behind the Forest Law, the reality is that local power imbalances continue to drive conflict, poverty and forest degradation. So it is at the grassroots level that efforts to improve governance must aim, starting with empowering communities to shape decisions that affect their lives.

## A new governance deal

SVBC pursued its goal of improved forest governance arrangements in DRC in Bikoro territory, Equator province. Bikoro is a sparsely

populated, heavily forested region only slightly smaller than the US state of Connecticut. Though its forests have a high commercial potential, they also protect important biodiversity such as the endangered bonobo (*Pan paniscus*).

Despite the presence of several forest concessions, most households in Bikoro live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than a dollar a day and unable to access basic securities.

It was in this context that SVBC worked to establish three new multi-stakeholder platforms to address local forest governance needs and issues. At the community level, the project helped to form village committees to monitor forest exploitation, build links with logging companies and take part in local development planning. At the territorial level, a consultative committee was set up to engage civil society, business and local government in a constructive dialogue on forest governance. This committee acts as a bridge to a provincial network on good forest governance, a forum for the main stakeholder groups in Equator province to exchange their views and information.

## Dialogue, vigilance, information

A lack of resources, illiteracy and low levels of education mean that DRC has a two-speed system of governance: decisions are made and disseminated in the major urban centres, leaving rural areas with a trickle of information controlled by urban elites. This lack of information tends to infantilise people, making them pliant and biddable.



Photo © J. Kiyulu

The 32 village committees established by SVBC—known as *dialogue and vigilance committees*—are small interactive groups committed to changing this system by:

- ▶ Promoting collaboration by all stakeholders: village chiefs, clan representatives, teachers, health workers, the Church, women, pygmies and other forest users.
- ▶ Discussing and solving day-to-day problems of forest management. No issue is off limits: non-timber products, charcoal making, conflicts with concessionaires, artisanal logging, poaching, biofuels and anything else standing in the way of good management is discussed and local solutions proposed.
- ▶ Raising awareness of the ongoing dialogue between the village and the territory.

Three other initiatives of SVBC have improved the flow of information to local communities: 1) a forest governance information centre in Bikoro; 2) a community environmental radio station; and 3) awareness-raising campaigns using the national media, video and other sources of information.

### Signs of progress

SVBC's efforts to mobilise collaborative grassroots action have begun to bear fruit. The community radio station, for example, was built after Bikoro's consultative committee obtained part of the harbour taxes paid by a logging company to the territorial authorities. This company has promised to contribute to the running and upkeep of the station. It has also agreed to use its boat to transport furniture and other supplies for local schools.

Nine out of ten people living in Kinshasa and Equator's capital of Mbandaka depend on fuelwood for their energy needs. The resurfacing

of the Mbandaka–Bikoro road in 2007 with European Union funds led to a sharp increase in uncontrolled tree cutting to make charcoal. The dialogue and vigilance committees see charcoal as the greatest threat to their forests, and have strongly supported a new regulation on its production. Twelve committees in key charcoal-making areas are now raising awareness of this regulation and helping to control and monitor charcoal makers in their villages.

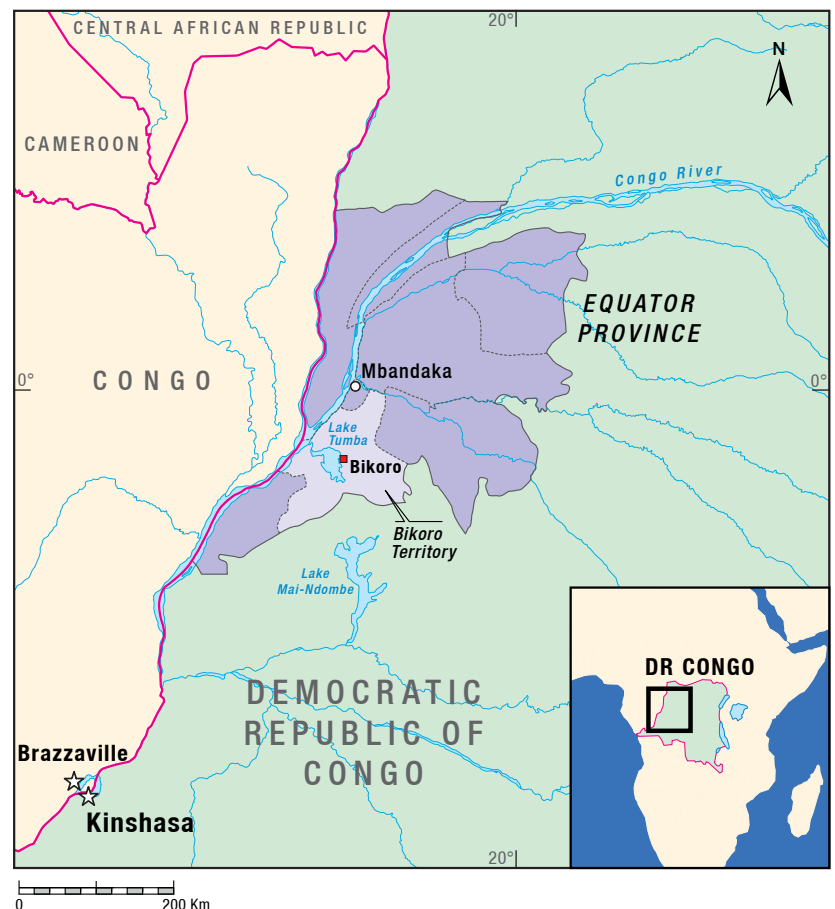
### From little acorns...

The multi-stakeholder platforms established in Equator province have developed steadily over the past four years, but need strengthening if they are to prosper. Their long-term growth and sustainability will depend on the transfer of decision-making powers to lower levels of governance under DRC's ongoing process of decentralisation.

Closing the gap between dialogue and action will be another key step towards empowering and building the capacity of local communities to make their forests a source of wealth. This means overcoming two challenges:

- ▶ Ensuring that communities have the means to try out any solutions they develop, so they can start to consolidate their gains under SVBC.
- ▶ Applying laws and regulations in the absence of good information or a dialogue to resolve conflicts between local practices and the letter of the law.

DRC is on a long and difficult transition to a unified, democratic state. In typically Congolese fashion, it is its people, not its governments, who are the main source and drivers of change. People can change governance, and with their perseverance the seeds sown in Bikoro will grow into a genuinely popular system of forest governance. 🌱



Map of Bikoro territory, Equator province. Bikoro's population of about 245,000 is spread across an area of 13,842 km<sup>2</sup>. Besides its majority Bantu population, the territory is home to a minority Batwa pygmy population (pictured above).

# Realising the promise of participatory dialogue

**Abdalla Said Shah** discusses the importance of an enabling environment for bringing stakeholders together in Tanzania



Photos © Y. Mkwizu

**L**ike other countries of Eastern and Southern Africa, Tanzania has in recent years built a progressive policy framework for decentralising forest management, encouraging participation by communities and ensuring forests contribute to reducing poverty. Its Forest Policy of 1998 and Forest Act of 2002 both explicitly recognise the need to bring the country's unreserved and unprotected forests under the control of communities as village forests, managed by various community-based regimes known collectively as Participatory Forest Management (PFM).

By giving greater powers to communities and local governments, Tanzania hopes to reduce one of the highest rates of deforestation in the region. Yet whether it will do so is still uncertain. As SVBC found, empowerment by itself is not enough. A suitable enabling environment is also needed, one with adequate levels of awareness, capacity, transparency, accountability and respect for the rule of law. Though improving, Tanzania is still some way from this goal.

## Joint forest management

SVBC based its field programme in Tanzania in the coastal district of Rufiji, an area noted for its extensive, though heavily degraded, forests. The project worked with nine villages lying north of the Rufiji River, eight of which surround the 135 km<sup>2</sup> Ngumburuni Forest Reserve. This has long been exploited for its valuable iroko (*Milicia excelsa*) trees, now classed as near-threatened in the IUCN Red List.

In these villages, SVBC worked to implement village natural resource management plans, improve awareness and understanding of forest and land laws, and revise and strengthen village by-laws on natural resource use. At Ngumburuni the project helped villagers develop a joint forest management system for the Reserve. One of the PFM regimes adopted in Tanzania, joint forest management is a collaborative approach which divides the responsibilities and benefits of a reserved forest between the surrounding communities and

government (either central or local depending on the status of the reserve).

## The promise of dialogue

An important element of SVBC's work was bringing villagers, district officials and other stakeholders together to discuss ways of improving the governance of their forest resources. These discussions were held locally within Rufiji and outside the district.

The participating communities were also helped to join *Mtandao wa Jamii wa Usimamizi wa Misitu Tanzania* (MJUMITA), the Federation of Community Forest Conservation Networks in Tanzania. This allowed them to broaden their contacts and learning about community participation in forest management and governance. Participation in MJUMITA also gave them a forum in which they could collectively voice their concerns. Importantly, they now know that others share their struggle to ensure that Tanzania's forests are sustainably managed.

The communities' engagement with local government and national actors has strengthened their confidence to speak up and take action on forest governance. Unfortunately, it has made it no easier for them to secure their forest use rights. The process of approving joint forest management agreements and community forest management plans in the pilot area has proved to be slow and difficult.

In the village of Mtanza Msona, efforts to establish a PFM regime have been frustrated by delays in approving the village forest management plan and communicating district council decisions to the community. In Ngumburuni, the main obstacle has been continued illegal logging in the Reserve. Though the surrounding communities could stop this, their efforts are undermined by local forest officers who collude with the loggers. Yet this only strengthens people's conviction that sustainable forest management cannot be the role of government alone, and their resolve to exercise their forest rights. As one prominent community member stated in a meeting with district councillors:

### AUTHOR



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Map of Rufiji district, Tanzania. Rufiji is one of six districts in Tanzania's Pwani, or Coast, region. It takes its name from the Rufiji River, the largest in Tanzania, which flows through the district into the Indian Ocean. Forests cover more than 40% of Rufiji and support an important timber industry.

*This process has taken a long time. We were here a year ago discussing this same issue. It is important that the council makes a decision on whether it wants to give us the forest or not. But how can you give us the forest, with all our efforts, when we have today witnessed a district forest officer driven to this very meeting by a log trader who we know has illegal undertakings in our forest? This is frustrating. Were it not for the fact that we have hope that we will succeed, we would have given up.*

—Muharram Kwangaya, Secretary, Ngumburuni Forest Management Association

### The way forward

In sum, SVBC's support was instrumental in educating pilot communities about their rights and responsibilities in forest management. The skills they have acquired in bargaining and negotiating are still developing, and will need nurturing. Equally importantly, continued dialogue and capacity building are

needed to overturn opposition to, or obstruction of, PFM and to ensure that existing laws are fully enforced.

The forest dialogue established in Rufiji must and will continue beyond SVBC. Communities, local government and other stakeholders should keep talking to each other, though whether they will interact at a similar intensity and frequency is uncertain. Nevertheless a relationship and some degree of mutual trust have been established, and these are an important foundation.

IUCN has learned that multi-stakeholder processes of dialogue and negotiation need long-term support and guidance. It has also learned that opening a space for participation does not by itself guarantee a successful outcome. People still have to be persuaded of the relevance and benefits of participation. Even then, some groups may take advantage of weaknesses in the institutional environment to undermine the process. So tackling these weaknesses is crucial to creating the enabling conditions for an effective dialogue. 🌱



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# The FLEGT Action Plan and the role of multi-stakeholder dialogue

**John Bazill** and **Guido Broekhoven** discuss the potential and challenges of using multi-stakeholder dialogue to combat illegal logging

## AUTHORS



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In 2003, the European Union (EU) adopted an Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) to meet growing international concern about the impact of illegal logging and associated trade. The Plan combines demand-side and supply-side measures to promote trade in legal timber and prevent illegal timber being sold in the European market.

Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) between the EU and countries that produce or export timber are a key part of the Plan. Under these agreements, any exports of timber products from partner countries must be accompanied by a licence demonstrating that the timber has been legally harvested. This licence is backed by an independently monitored legality assurance scheme.

We believe that successful forest governance reform, including reform through VPAs, depends on credible multi-stakeholder participation. Certain aspects of VPAs appear to favour coordinated inputs from different stakeholders:

- ▶ The private sector, civil society and government all have a keen interest in governance, albeit for often different reasons. The trade and market aspects of a VPA are particularly interesting to business and may serve as a new entry point for forest governance.

- ▶ The negotiations for a VPA are quite focused and detailed, allowing more intensive involvement than some broader national planning processes.
- ▶ The process of negotiating a bilateral agreement encourages stakeholders to set aside their own interests in the pursuit of a national consensus which the government can use to strengthen its negotiating position. Several governments have included stakeholder representatives in their VPA negotiating teams, further encouraging participatory dialogue.

## Challenges of participation

The multi-stakeholder dialogues launched under VPAs and other processes to tackle illegal logging have enjoyed several successes, as described in this special issue. Yet, at the same time, they have faced various challenges to their mandate, legitimacy and ability to address deep-seated power imbalances. Obviously dialogue alone will never be able to resolve some of the fundamental problems of forest governance—political will, leadership, capacity and other resources will always be needed.

Nevertheless, the dialogues supported by SVBC and others have generated useful experiences and lessons, including lessons on

IUCN's role. These are discussed further in the article by Carole Saint-Laurent and Guido Broekhoven in this special issue. Here we want to highlight two important lessons from IUCN's recent experiences:

- ▶ First, it is vital that the dialogue strikes a balance between process and outputs. The bodies who convene the dialogue expect certain results, and may be under pressure from their constituencies to deliver these sooner rather than later. Without concrete outputs, stakeholders may lose interest. Yet the process of dialogue takes time. Weaker stakeholders in particular need time and support to get up to speed. So it is important to keep the process adaptable, yet within the confines of a clearly defined boundary for dialogue, a clear time frame with concrete milestones and a clear strategic goal.
- ▶ Second, consultation means more than just having a representative at the table. Building on the ideas in this special issue, we can identify several approaches to improving the quality of stakeholder inputs and addressing power imbalances:
  - ▷ Ensuring that all stakeholders have equal access to information.
  - ▷ Enabling and building the capacity of stakeholders to identify and articulate their interests.
  - ▷ Creating conditions for established interests to make common cause with and recognise communities as partners (the private sector and local communities, for example, will both benefit from simple and coherent laws and procedures).
  - ▷ Encouraging representatives to interact frequently with their constituencies.
  - ▷ Strengthening self-selection processes. Representatives should be selected by the constituencies they speak for. This can be difficult for groups who are not formally organised or who lack mechanisms to designate their representatives, such as chainsaw operators and small forest enterprises. There is no easy solution to this problem, but one approach may be a study or survey of the group in question. This will at least help to share their perspectives more widely.

### Beyond illegal logging

The debate over the legality of timber which forms part of any VPA negotiations often provokes a debate on how to strengthen forest governance and streamline administrative procedures. Indeed, actions to combat illegal



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logging offer an entry point for addressing many of the forest sector's key governance failings, including limited transparency, accountability and participation. In particular, multi-stakeholder dialogues on illegal logging contribute to the structures, processes and capacities needed by countries to engage meaningfully in forest governance reform. Perhaps most importantly, they set a precedent for focused dialogue and consultation between government and other stakeholders. For all its flaws, such engagement is generally valued by most participants.

Forces outside the forest sector which hamper good forest management and contribute to forest loss, such as agricultural expansion, fall outside the scope of such actions. Yet, despite the challenges ahead, a genuine opportunity exists to build on the existing achievements of participatory forest governance reforms, to address such issues as the design and implementation of REDD mechanisms, land use, biofuels and agro-industry. 🌱



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# Winning hearts and minds through dialogue

**Emelia Arthur and Adewale Adeleke** assess the impacts of Ghana's successful consultations for a Voluntary Partnership Agreement

## AUTHORS



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Compared with many other West African countries, Ghana has a relatively peaceful population, secure environment and healthy democracy. Yet every developing country has its problems, and a large one for Ghana is managing its natural resource base for sustained economic growth. Ghana's forests have shrunk at an alarming rate under the pressure of illegal logging, social exclusion and other forces. Ghana's component of SVBC, therefore, aimed to promote forest governance arrangements that would facilitate sustainable and equitable forest conservation at both national and community levels.

## The right window of opportunity

Nationally the entry point for SVBC was Ghana's Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA). The government of Ghana and the European Union began discussing the possibility of negotiating a VPA in 2006. As part of this process, the European Union asks countries to consult with different sectors of society to agree their negotiating position. To meet this requirement, Ghana had to demonstrate that every issue raised under the VPA had been *discussed* and *negotiated* with all stakeholder groups before reaching a country position.

Recognition of SVBC's early achievements gave IUCN entry to the multi-stakeholder VPA steering committee established by Ghana's Ministry of Lands, Forestry and Mines. In its role as advisor, IUCN began by commissioning a study on the design of a multi-stakeholder consultation process from a member of its Commission on Education and Communication. That study provided the basis for IUCN to design and facilitate a broad multi-stakeholder dialogue in support of the VPA negotiations.

## A transformative dialogue

Ghana's multi-stakeholder dialogue drew on the presence of different public and private representatives on the VPA steering committee, and four working groups who carried on an extended consultative process. The members of the steering committee and working groups were able to supply first-hand information to their constituencies. This exchange was greatly facilitated by the existence of umbrella organizations representing industry, NGOs and other interest groups, who had the necessary convening power to allow representatives to consult efficiently with their constituents.

The multi-stakeholder process gave stakeholder groups an opportunity to meet, network



and even discuss issues beyond the scope of the VPA. This helped to build social capital in the forestry sector. It also helped to increase the interest of all stakeholder groups in issues related to forest governance and illegal logging.

The consultations also allowed many parties to build their capacity. Civil society groups in particular were able to improve their skills in organizing and facilitating meetings, communicating their needs and concerns, and training communities. This increase in capacity is having benefits beyond the VPA itself; indeed, the experience can be seen as transformative for civil society in Ghana.

Engaging a broad spectrum of groups in the discussion strengthened support for the VPA. It also helped to strengthen its credibility, because different stakeholders felt that their voices were being heard. This was especially true of Ghana's forest industry, which had some initial reservations about the VPA. As it learned more, however, it realised that curbing illegal logging was in its interests and began explicitly to support the process.

**No bed of roses**

As with any new and ambitious venture, the dialogue had a number of weaknesses which future processes could improve on. Among the main ones were a lack of common understanding amongst participants of the scope and aims of consultation, frequent changes in schedules and deadlines which sometimes required people to contribute at very short notice, and variations in knowledge and capacity among the members of different stakeholder groups. SVBC tried as far as possible to minimise these problems through communication, training and other support, with some notable improvements over time.



Besides its role in the VPA consultations, SVBC also boosted the forest governance capacity of communities at three field sites: Assin Akropong (Assin North district, Central region), Offinso (Offinso district, Ashanti region) and Sefwi-Wiawso (Sefwi-Wiawso district, Western region). Here SVBC worked with community forest committees to raise awareness, provide information and pilot new livelihood activities.

**So what?**

The consultations in support of the VPA have inspired Ghana's Forestry Commission and other organisations to use a similar approach to gain input and support from a wide range of stakeholders. The Forestry Commission, for example, is using a multi-stakeholder approach to support the development of Ghana's Readiness Plan for REDD. Tropenbos International in Ghana has adopted the approach for a project to find alternatives to illegal chainsaw lumbering.

In the years to come, the VPA consultative process will be seen as a positive step towards institutionalising the concept and practice of multi-stakeholder dialogue and decision making in Ghanaian society. 🌿

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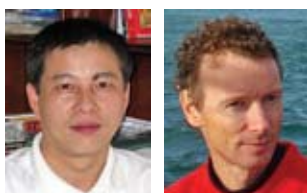
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# Negotiating Vietnam's passage to sustainability

Tran Manh Hung, Jake Brunner and Tran Kim Long review SVBC's support to community forestry and FLEGT dialogues in Vietnam

## AUTHORS



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In recent years Vietnam's efforts to develop its forest sector have produced encouraging results. Extensive tree planting and forest restoration have increased forest cover to 39% in 2008 from 26% in 1994. Meanwhile its forest-based industry, and the wooden furniture export industry in particular, has grown rapidly, becoming Vietnam's sixth-largest export earner.

An important reason behind this progress has been greater funding and support from the government for new investment and legal and administrative reforms. Yet, despite the scale of these interventions, deeper problems remain. The laws on forests are complex, inconsistent and poorly enforced. Government agencies do little to coordinate their activities, contributing to an inefficient and fragmented institutional response. Insecure tenure and the poor quality of much of the forest allocated to local people undermine efforts to decentralise and "socialise" forest management.

Vietnam's component of SVBC focused on national policy processes, aiming to provide information and build capacity for a constructive multi-stakeholder dialogue on the solutions to

these problems. This article details two such processes: community forest management (CFM) and FLEGT.

## Making community forestry work

Communities manage forests in Vietnam under a variety of traditional and modern arrangements. A basic legal framework has been built to support these, though it still lacks clarity on community rights, responsibilities and returns. On the ground, efforts to develop CFM have tended to emphasise technical aspects at the expense of social and economic needs. A recent review of the government's CFM pilot programme—the precursor to a formal national programme—found that its procedures were too complex and prescriptive, and overlooked local interests such as increasing incomes.

Through SVBC's work on customary and statutory forest law in Vietnam, it became clear that though successful CFM models exist, their salient aspects have not been evaluated for inclusion in the government's pilot programme. The project sought to remedy this by supporting research on CFM regimes in Bac Kan and

Thua Thien Hue provinces in collaboration with IUCN's Landscapes and Livelihoods Strategy (LLS) programme.

This research produced various recommendations for improving the procedures being developed by government, including recognising the legal status of communities as a management unit (currently they are not a legal entity), and allowing them to harvest timber for sale (commercial timber harvesting is banned). These recommendations were reviewed at a multi-stakeholder workshop in June 2009, and the government will use the results as it revises its CFM procedures.

### Better governance through trade

Moves to filter out illegal or suspicious imports from wood markets in Europe, the United States, Japan and other consuming countries pose a challenge to the growth and reputation of Vietnam's US\$2.8 billion furniture export industry. Already beset by problems of inefficiency, low productivity and an unsupportive financial environment, the industry now faces demands for assurances of the legality and sustainability of its raw material supply. Four-fifths of this supply is imported, some of it from countries with weak forest controls such as Lao PDR. Failure to give the necessary assurances will mean lost market access and share.

Although these market changes have not gone unnoticed in Vietnam, the response has been slow to unfold. But that is changing. Some furniture manufacturers and exporters are developing the systems and capacity to verify their wood sources. Several private and state forest enterprises are implementing certified forest management regimes. And Vietnam's government has launched initiatives to strengthen the processing industry and develop sustainable domestic sources of timber.

One element of the government's response has been to explore participation in the European Union's FLEGT Action Plan (see article by Bazill and Broekhoven in this issue). Preliminary discussions between the

government and the European Commission led in 2008 to the creation of a bilateral technical working group to examine ways of collaborating. This group has recently undertaken an assessment of the options for cooperation and their likely impacts.

In parallel with this official bilateral process, IUCN and others have been providing information and raising awareness of the changes in markets, the objectives of the FLEGT Action Plan, and the options for action. At the request of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam's FLEGT focal point, SVBC provided support including two national multi-stakeholder seminars in 2008, translation and distribution of relevant documents, and training for key stakeholders. The project also launched a FLEGT stakeholder analysis in 2009 to support the fledgling national process and guide IUCN's future support strategy.

### Looking ahead

Over the next two years, IUCN will continue to support Vietnam's community forestry and FLEGT dialogues through the LLS project. Ultimately the two dialogues must be linked to ensure that any future FLEGT agreement reflects local people's needs and interests.

Reaching a durable FLEGT agreement in Vietnam faces several challenges. One is a lack of awareness and understanding of basic concepts, terms and processes. Another is identifying and ensuring the participation of all stakeholders, even at this early stage in the dialogue. Involving civil society is crucial, for example, but defining civil society in Vietnam is still problematic. Also essential is extending the dialogue beyond the centre to the local and provincial stakeholders who strongly influence forest management and enterprise.

Meeting these challenges will take time, resources and a collaborative effort. Yet the potential benefits are high, as a successful FLEGT process would go far towards realising Vietnam's objective of an equitable and sustainable forest sector. 🌱

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Workers at Truong Thanh Furniture Corporation's new factory in Binh Duong province, southeast Vietnam. One of Vietnam's top five furniture manufacturers, Truong Thanh is investing heavily in sustainable sourcing and supply chain management.



## arborvitae special

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# Strengthening voices: lessons and directions

**SVBC's Coordination Team\*** looks back at the lessons of the past four-and-a-half years—and ahead to future directions in IUCN's work

It is difficult to do justice to a large project in a brief newsletter, and the scope and variety of results from SVBC do not make the task any easier. This special issue of **arborvitae** has surveyed some of the project's main impacts, both from a governance perspective and from a programmatic perspective—that is, the impacts on IUCN's own role and approach. In both respects, a central theme has been the benefits to be had from bringing stakeholders together in multi-partite processes of dialogue and negotiation.

Ranged against these benefits, however, are a number of challenges to effective multi-stakeholder participation. As the experience in Tanzania shows, simply opening a space for dialogue will not guarantee success. Different groups still have to be persuaded of the relevance and benefits of engaging in dialogue, and even then some may take advantage of weaknesses in the institutional environment to undermine the process. So tackling these weaknesses is crucial if there is to be an enabling environment for dialogue.

Poor, forest-dependent people may be more willing to join a dialogue if they can see immediate material benefits from doing so. In Ghana and Sri Lanka, for example, SVBC worked hard to identify and pilot alternative economic activities in local communities. In Sri Lanka, these included ecotourism and growing vegetables in the rice off-season. In Ghana, they included bee keeping, cultivating mushrooms, rearing edible rodents and mobile saw milling in community forests.

Whatever their motives for participating, stakeholders need the information and capacity to make the most of their involvement. This is particularly true of smaller or weaker groups. Much of SVBC's effort was spent on ensuring that communities, small forest entrepreneurs and other groups had access to timely and accurate information in their own language. This was backed with training to consolidate learning and regular, targeted communications. In DRC the project used radio, video and newspapers to communicate—one of its most visible achievements is the environmental radio station built with forest taxes in Bikoro.

Multi-stakeholder processes take time to bear fruit. In Vietnam, despite SVBC's efforts to organise meetings and disseminate information, many stakeholders in the emerging FLEGT dialogue still do not fully understand the relevant concepts and processes. This is partly because the issues are complex and technical, and partly because the dialogue is still in its early stages. But it also reflects an imbalance of power—a traditional concentration of information and expertise in government which is only slowly diffusing to other stakeholders.

Where close to multi-stakeholder processes, SVBC sometimes faced questions about its role and interests. Answering these has given rise to an internal process of reflection and analysis in IUCN which will continue into the future. Organisations like IUCN can play various roles in a multi-stakeholder process—convenor, facilitator, advisor, even participant. In practice, SVBC mainly facilitated or advised such processes. In countries like DRC, though, it convened and actively drove them. Knowing what role to play, and how to play it, is an inexact science, but SVBC has given us a much better understanding of the possibilities and pitfalls.

Looking ahead, IUCN will continue to support people's participation in forest governance reform processes through the multi-country approach forged by SVBC. This added value by allowing us to share lessons and experiences, and a common approach, across countries.

We will also continue building our understanding and capacity, and that of others, through the development of collaborative tools, learning networks and other measures related to multi-stakeholder processes. And we will seek to use the experiences and precedents of our work on forest governance to address the drivers of deforestation. Though relevant to REDD schemes, this work will look more comprehensively at competing land uses and their trade-offs. 🌱

\* Guido Broekhoven, Matthew Markopoulos, Liliana Pires, Adewale Adeleke, Joël Kiyulu, Abdalla Said Shah, Nimal Karunaratne and Tran Manh Hung.