
Targeting Natural Resource Corruption

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# Building Transparency and Accountability in Natural Resource Management (NRM):

## The Role of Social Accountability and Civic Participation in Addressing Corruption in the NRM Sector

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## Key takeaways

- The case study programs highlighted in this report in Nepal, Vietnam, and Uganda all indicate that meaningful citizen participation and multi-stakeholder collaboration can contribute to local and national NRM governance systems with the potential for sustainably reducing corruption.
- Access to information and strengthened community stewardship of resources (with a focus on women and marginalized groups) to monitor, feedback, and hold duty bearers to account were important for building equity and community resilience against corruption.
- Multi-stakeholder dialogue and trust building (a key dimension of social accountability) were critical for increasing state responsiveness to community needs and corrupt behaviors. Here the role of champions and intermediaries as facilitators was key.
- Tailored advocacy and behaviour change approaches were also valuable for building accountability loops and scaling the impact of community feedback at national level.
- However, project implementers need to assess the appropriate balance between collaborative engagement and more confrontational accountability approaches for achieving desired objectives.
- Different power holders will respond in specific ways to different social accountability approaches, based on local power dynamics, and social and governance norms around what constitutes corruption and how it is incentivized or sanctioned. All approaches need therefore to be tailored to the local context and specific advocacy, accountability, and behavior change objectives.

*The TNRC Practice Note series shares first-hand experience from conservation and NRM activities that illustrate corruption challenges and ways of addressing them.*

# Background: Context and Approach

Anti-corruption campaigners have long-documented legal approaches to fighting corruption using sanctions and rule-of-law reforms. Many social accountability (SA) efforts have also focused on penalization and confrontation. But in CARE's experience, these approaches have often been less successful, causing backlash or having little effect, particularly in more politically fragile or contested environments. More collaborative approaches to SA, including dialogue, action co-planning, joint monitoring and inclusive advocacy, can increase trust and discourage corruption (Grandvoinnet, Aslam, and Raha 2015). This trust is key to delivering practical and sustainable solutions for improving local natural resource governance (Otto et al. 2019).

Social accountability is an approach that relies on civic engagement to exact accountability. The aim is to strengthen citizens' mobilization and voice, support the generation of citizen-generated information, and provide spaces for organized citizens to engage with power-holders to influence decision making and hold them accountable. Integrating SA with participatory planning and inclusive advocacy approaches can also be useful for building more transparent and accountable governance systems that can reduce the likelihood of corruption that undermine conservation and natural resource management (NRM) goals (Hart 2022). This is the logic of CARE's Inclusive Governance Programming Framework.[1]

Using three case studies from CARE's NRM projects in **Uganda**, **Vietnam**, and **Nepal**, this paper examines the policies, social norms, tools, and approaches that created an enabling environment for effective governance and, by extension, might have contributed to the prevention and reduction of corruption in NRM. The three case studies seek to analyze the following:[2]

1. Which elements of corruption were addressed in these cases studies, within their specific political and economic contexts?
2. What tools and approaches were used in these contexts to promote dialogue and citizen participation for improved transparency and accountability of government officials, and with what impact?

**Key Terms:**

**Natural resource users** are those who depend on natural resources for their survival and well-being. They may also be termed "natural resource service users."

In the context of natural resource management, **duty bearers** are those responsible for mediating how natural resources are managed for the public good. They include formal power-holders – such as elected officials, bureaucrats or government-approved private sector companies and Community Forest User Groups, local structures that act as service providers in resource-related services – and informal powerholders, such as community elders who mediate customary laws' application.

In the context of NRM, **services** might include environmental and livelihood services, such as forest and water management, agricultural extension and climate forecasting, or formal law enforcement and conflict mediation services regarding contested or illegal use of land, forests, or waterways.

[1] This Framework consists of three interrelated domains of change which are required to achieve equitable and sustainable development: 1) empowerment of marginalized citizens, 2) accountability of public authorities and other power holders to marginalized citizens, and 3) inclusive spaces for negotiation between public authorities/other powerholders and marginalized citizens. In the context of NRM, we posit that CARE's approach leads to creating the relevant capacities and enabling environment for equitable sharing of conservation benefits.

[2] For the development of case studies, the lead researcher conducted literature reviews and interviewed staff and partners who had implemented the projects.

3. What were the necessary conditions and enabling environments to use these tools effectively in these contexts?

4. How did inclusion of different genders and other marginalized groups influence the efficacy and sustainability of SA approaches?

This paper does not seek to rigorously evaluate how effective SA approaches are for addressing corruption in NRM processes; anti-corruption was not an explicit goal of any of the three projects profiled. Instead, it focuses on **how and why**, in these case studies, community empowerment and participation **changed relationships between natural resource users and duty-bearers**, and **with what potential impact**. In doing so, we sought to identify lessons and challenges for how a mixture of SA and participatory approaches can build more robust NRM systems that promote transparency and accountability in contexts where corruption is a key barrier to sustainable development.

# CASE STUDY – "FOREST": IMPROVING NATURAL RESOURCE SECTOR TRANSPARENCY IN UGANDA

**FOREST – UGANDA (2013–2017)**

**Consortium Lead:**
**CARE Uganda**

**Implementing Partners:**
**Joint Effort to Save the Environment, the Anti-Corruption Coalition of Uganda (ACCU), the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE), Joint Efforts to Save the Environment (JESE), PANOS Eastern Africa and Environmental Alert (EA), and the Community Development Resource Network (CDRN)**

**Government Partners:**
**National Forest Authority, Uganda Wildlife authority, Environmental Protection Force, UPDF Uganda People Defence Forces, Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE), Judiciary, Law enforcement and security agencies and local governments.**

## Context and Governance Challenges

In Uganda, forest cover declined from 24 percent in 1990 to nine percent in 2015, primarily due to poor governance of the forestry sector (Ministry of Water and Environment 2016). The 2001 Forest Policy in Uganda included legislative frameworks to govern the NRM sector and provide for regulated access to forest resources. However, despite attempts by the government to sustainably manage forest resources, corrupt practices continued to deny marginalized groups' access to forest resources and efforts to end corruption failed (Anti-corruption Coalition in Uganda, 2016).

Challenges included the impunity of powerful and politically connected perpetrators of forest crime due to corruption amongst some duty-bearers; a breakdown in community feedback mechanisms on NRM misuse; and where there was reporting, an unmatched response by National Forestry Authority officers at the district and sub-county level. This resulted in illegal possession of land titles in central forest reserves, movement of forest produce without permits, sale of timber for less than market-value, and illicit use of forest land for agriculture.

This lack of meaningful forest governance and secure livelihoods drove forest and natural resource degradation and prevented poverty reduction. In response, CARE Uganda and partners initiated the Forest Resource Sector Transparency (FOREST) Program (2013-2017) in biodiversity hotspots in Uganda's Albertine Rift Valley, which is surrounded by poor communities whose livelihoods depend on natural resources.

## Program Approach

The FOREST project supported poor and natural resource dependent citizens to participate in forest governance, to monitor the implementation of forest policies and laws, and to advocate for fairer and more appropriate forest laws and policies at local and national levels. FOREST worked with dozens of local partners in three main lines of action: 1) building citizens' capacity to use information and communications technology (ICT) for oversight; 2) using media to amplify citizens' voices; and 3) improving civil society organizations' (CSO) and networks' capacity to advocate for better forest laws in Uganda, via multi-stakeholder dialogues.

## Impact on Forest Governance

The impact of the FOREST Program in Uganda was significant. Overall, the project reduced the illegal extraction of protected forests by over 60 percent (from 90 percent in 2014 to 29 percent in 2017). It also reduced the number of illegal farms by

10 percent (from 14 percent to four percent) and resulted in a complete end to livestock grazing (from three to zero percent) in Central Forest Reserves (Janoch 2018). Furthermore, 4,338 individuals benefited from access to forest land for tree planting, 40 percent of whom were women.

Efforts to strengthen community-based monitoring systems increased their number from 112 in 2013 to 778 in 2017. Community members' awareness and knowledge of forest policies and laws also increased, from 35 percent to 93 percent. Partly as a result, over 1,000 ordinary citizens reported cases of irregular, corrupt, or illegal practices during the project period. The number of NRM issues raised increased from three at the district level and zero at national level in 2013, to 186 at the district level and 133 at the national level in 2017 (Balelwa 2018). Through all reporting channels, overall citizen monitoring contributed to the resolution of an estimated 625 reported cases by the NFA, indicating a resolution rate of 86 percent (Everse 2018).

The project dramatically increased media coverage on natural resource misuse from only 24 articles from nine journalists in 2013, to 329 newspaper articles, 322 radio debates, 147 Public Service Advertisements, 43 interviews, and 104 features as of 2017. Due in part to that media coverage, the government canceled 154 illegal land titles. Finally, the multi-stakeholder dialogues contributed to improved coordination and enhanced discussions between the Ministry of Water and Environment and the Ministry of Lands on the issuing of land titles in Central Forest Reserves (Everse 2018). They also contributed to the National Forestry Authorities (NFA) signing agreements with forest management groups, for those groups to be able to access forest resources legally.

# What Worked?

### Understanding the barriers and opportunities for change through political economy analysis and investing in relationship building

At its onset and throughout the project, program partners conducted political economy analyses (PEAs) to better understand underlying power dynamics and relationships between the key players and institutions of the sector. The PEA helped to identify how corruption was being facilitated in the NRM sector in Uganda, existing policy frameworks that were not properly implemented, gaps in community awareness and feedback mechanisms, and inaction by the NFA that was de-motivating civic monitoring and oversight. The PEA also helped to identify key champions within state institutions and the availability of existing multi-stakeholder platforms and CSO forums. Once these actors' relevant interests and capacities were understood, the project was then able to invest time to build awareness, trust, and ownership around project goals and ways of working.

### Increasing transparency by improving awareness and ICT-enabled community monitoring

FOREST used social media, community meetings and radio programs to improve awareness and educate local officials, private sector actors, and citizens about good forestry governance policy and practice. Topics included forest-related legislation, such as the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act of 2003, as well as information on the role of duty-bearers and resource users to combat corruption. The project also helped establish Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs), which appointed community-based monitors to track and report illegal forest activities via SMS and a toll-free phone line as part of an ICT Reporting Platform. This enabled users to instantly reach critical stakeholders, like law enforcement operatives and personnel in the NFA and Uganda Wildlife Authority, as well as CSO activists (Balelwa 2018).

### Increasing the responsiveness of the NFA and Uganda Wildlife Authority through multi-stakeholder dialogue and building trust

The FOREST Program worked to improve transparency and accountability by facilitating access to, and public participation in, multi-stakeholder public accountability forums, set up as safe spaces for dialogue with key government officials.[3] The community-based monitors used these forums to raise forest governance issues at the district and regional level, and the forums provided the space for duty-bearers to respond to the

[3] National Forest Authority, Uganda Wildlife Authority, Environmental Protection Force, UPDF Uganda People Defence Forces, the Judiciary, Law enforcement and security agencies, local governments, and Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE).

issues raised. For example, the Regional Forestry Governance Forum in Masindi recommended that the Forest Sector Support Department fast track the process of registration and declaration of community and private forests to halt their encroachments and illegal sale. Dialogues about illegal land titling in Central Forest Reserves led to the cancellation of 154 illegal land titles and contributed to improved coordination between ministries on land title issues (Everse 2017).

CSOs also supported meaningful dialogue between marginalized groups and the authorities by building their capacity to engage with officials and report illegal forest activities. The FOREST Program contributed to increased participation of women in these mechanisms, for example. The empowered communities and marginalized groups have continued to share their views with government officials after the program's closure.

### Building national level accountability through national media campaigns

Using the community-based monitoring data, CSOs amplified community voices on forest governance using advocacy tools such as investigative journalism, critical action research, and social and electronic media campaigns. As a result, the project dramatically increased media coverage on NRM mismanagement issues which contributed to securing commitments from duty bearers to fight corruption. The Ministry of Water and Land, for example, cancelled claims to land that had been irregularly issued in central forest reserves. The National Forest Authorities also became more transparent by making information about issued permits available to the Community Based Monitors and sub-county Chair-people, and invited CSOs to help verify tree harvesting licence applicants. To enable effective advocacy, the FOREST Program built good working relationships with the Ministry of Water and Environment and other state actors whereupon they acted as champions to, for example, help mobilize media coverage for activities during the Forest Week.[4]

This social accountability approach therefore helped improve stakeholders' abilities to report illegal forest activities, and incentivized duty-bearers to respond, as greater transparency made resource misuse more difficult to ignore (Albisu Ardigó 2019). It helped to provide checks and balances against corrupt officials who did not perform their duties, or those who were giving patronage to criminal elements, often because of weak implementation of existing laws (Anti-Corruption Resource Center 2008). Community feedback on forest misuse also helped local officials to identify solutions and informed decisions around illegal use of land and granting of titles. Evidence gathered using the feedback system also formed the basis for engagement between resource users and duty-bearers, and increased collaboration between government departments responsible for field operations (e.g., between District Forest Services and Police). The digitization of field data increased the scale of evidence and its availability for advocacy, for a wider set of CSOs.

[4] Ronald M.K. 2017. Annual Review of the Forest Resources Sector Transparency (FOREST) programme, CARE International Uganda.

## Implementation Challenges

One major challenge during implementation included the breakdown of the usefulness of the ICT platform. While it did elicit citizen feedback in useful ways, it also became used for issues not necessarily beneficial to forest governance. During the May 2016 elections, the Uganda Communications Commission also banned short code SMS communication, which impacted reporting of illegal activities. After the election period, a toll-free phone line replaced the SMS reporting system, and the data was then collected and responses made at the national, rather than the district, level. This change, and the SMS ban during the election, reduced the volume of resource crime cases reported by community-based monitors. This reflects some of the potential challenges of more visible, 'confrontational' open government techniques – which can be co-opted by certain interests and challenge others.

Shifting responsibility to the national level also affected government responsiveness at the district level. The NFA increased its responsiveness, recruiting three state prosecutors to facilitate prosecutions and signing a Collaborative Forest Management Agreement with Matiri Resource Users Association to develop benefit sharing guidelines for Central Forest Reserves. The Forest Sector Support Department also embarked on nation-wide consultations for revising forest fees, with support from CARE. However, the shift also resulted in a perceived reduction in district official responsiveness. This suggests that the closer the data source (or feedback loop) is to the duty bearer and point of service delivery, the more active the response. It also suggests that coordination between national and district level authorities on information management and sharing should be strengthened. Sustaining national reporting and feedback mechanisms requires government support and ownership.

A second major challenge was assessing the impact of the program on forest crimes. Engaging the judiciary has traditionally been difficult in Uganda, as most magistrates tend not to take forest crimes seriously and in some cases give lenient sentences (Everse 2017). The highest percentage of court cases resolved includes those related to encroachment, charcoal burning, and illegal timber harvesting (at 99, 95 and 59 percent respectively). However, court cases related to land titles, transportation of forest products, and corruption of court, police, and NFA and district forest service staff had the lowest resolution rates (at zero, ten and 50 percent respectively) (Everse 2017). In some cases, the program did successfully work with local magistrates to respond to forest crime, but without any figures on the number of perpetrators caught as a result of increased reporting, it is difficult to assess the impact from a penal or punitive perspective. This reflects the challenge of aligning collaborative, constructive engagement approaches through social accountability with more confrontational, punitive approaches to corruption through legal routes (i.e., the balance of the "carrot" and the "stick"). A careful, context-specific balance is therefore required to ensure that different approaches are coordinated and reinforce one another.

# CASE STUDY – USAID'S HARIYO BAN AND SAMARTHYA: INCLUSION OF WOMEN AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS IN FOREST GOVERNANCE IN NEPAL

**HARIYO BAN – NEPAL (2011–2021)**
**SAMARTHAYA – NEPAL (2018–2021)**

**Consortium Partners for Hariyo Ban:**
**WWF, CARE Nepal, NTNC, and FECOFUN**

**Government Partners for Hariyo Ban and SAMARTHYA Programs:**
**Several ministries and departments at national and sub-national level, with the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation; Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development; and Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation**

**Implementing partners for Hariyo Ban:**
**WOSCC, SSICDC, RCDC, Diyalo Pariwar, GONESA, NEEDS Nepal**

**Implementing partners for SAMARTHYA:**
**National Farmer Group's Federation, National Land Rights Forum, Community Self Reliance Centre, Local Initiative for Biodiversity Research and Development, Clean Energy Nepal**

**Funding Partner: USAID for Hariyo Ban Program and DANIDA for SAMARTHYA**

## Context and Governance Challenges

In 2015, Nepal had 45 percent forest and other wooded land cover, 24 percent of which were protected areas (Dept. of Forest Research and Survey 2015). Community-based forestry is practiced in 44 percent of Nepal's forests and is a critical source of livelihoods (Paudyal 2020). However, NRM governance has, in some cases, been hampered by poor practices and abuse of power among CFUGs. Some CFUG Executive Committees, for example, have failed to implement annual operational plans transparently, resulting in land encroachment and illegal logging for the executive members' own benefit (Gender Resource Development Koteshwor 2021). A lack of transparency and weak accountability among public officials have also been challenges in some places.

Land tenure, in particular, has historically suffered from corruption and a lack of inclusion. A formal mechanism called the Land Related Problem-Solving Commission worked at the district and local levels to distribute land certificates to landless people,[5] but corruption and nepotism meant many deserving people did not receive land certificates. Landless people have also been unrepresented in Land Facilitation Committees, set up by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land Management, and Cooperatives to support agriculture policy, including land tenure. As a result, the landless and other marginalized groups have not received the benefits to which they are entitled. Poor, disadvantaged women and marginalized groups, such as Dalit, Adibasi/Janajati, Madhesi, and Muslims, have often been excluded from NRM decision-making processes and benefit-sharing (Uprety et al. 2012), due to unequal gender power relations and harmful social and cultural barriers in communities.

In response to these challenges, the USAID Hariyo Ban and Promoting Inclusive Governance and Resilience for the Right to Food (SAMARTHYA) programs, using similar approaches implemented in different locations, worked to strengthen the

[5] This commission was dissolved in August 2021.

internal governance of NRM groups. In particular, they tried to improve the participation of communities in conservation and climate change adaptation, including poor, vulnerable, and socially excluded (PVSE) groups. Their work also included mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion provisions into NRM group policies.

## Program Approach

USAID's Hariyo Ban program had three core interwoven components: biodiversity conservation, sustainable landscapes, and climate change adaptation, with livelihoods, governance, and gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) as crosscutting themes. The program partnered with local communities to empower them to steward their forests effectively and worked to strengthen the internal governance of NRM groups to promote sound management of forests and natural resources, following national policies.

The SAMARTHYA project aimed to support local organizations to strengthen the capacity of, and spaces for, poor and marginalized women and men (mainly landless and small holder farmers) to build economically empowered and resilient communities. Through its integrated inclusive governance approach, the program aimed to strengthen institutional governance and the credibility and capacity of resource user groups to participate in decision making forums and engage with government at all levels. Both programs included ensuring representative leadership and participation in promoting equitable benefit sharing.

## Impact on Resource Governance

As a result of USAID's Hariyo Ban, "[g]overnance for forest management improved through capacity building and promotion of equitable and transparent processes in local community based NRM groups" (Gyawali et al. 2017). The program supported benefit sharing, reduced the risk of resource exploitation, and increased resilience to climate shocks through the development of more than 331 community adaptation plans of action, and 90 local adaptation plans of action, benefitting 288,499 vulnerable people. In doing so, the program improved the biophysical condition of soil, forest, and water resources, and increased access to natural resources for the marginalized communities in protected areas (Gyawali et al. 2017).

USAID's Hariyo Ban program also mainstreamed participatory governance and GESI approaches into biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation activities. It strengthened and mobilized 418 Community-Based Anti-Poaching Units with significant participation and leadership from women and marginalized groups (Gender Resource Development Koteshwor 2021). The Ministry of Forests and Environment, the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal, and Land Rights Forums have also institutionalized GESI guidelines in the governance of CFUGs (Hariyo Ban, 2020). Anecdotally, this increased participation of marginalized groups and also reduced some of the illegal operations of CFUGs Executive Committees members.

## What Worked?

### Tools to build CFUG capacity, internal governance, and community resource stewardship

A variety of tools helped accomplish the impacts above.

- The SAMARTHYA project applied a Representation, Inclusion, Legitimacy, Transparency, Accountability, and Synergy tool to improve NRM groups and CSOs' institutional governance. Through that tool, they strengthened their credibility and capacity to engage with government and to improve forest and agricultural land governance.
- USAID's Hariyo Ban used a Participatory Governance Assessment (PGA) tool to identify CFUG governance capacities through self-evaluation.

This helped CFUGs to prepare governance improvement and adaptation plans, one outcome of which was creating the Community-Based Anti-Poaching Units mentioned above.

- The project also improved CFUG capacities to undertake internal public hearings and public auditing. User group members (the rights holders) and user group executive committee members (the duty-bearers) mutually assessed management processes and outcomes in the hearings, and financial transactions in the audits. Process participants then agreed on a set of recommendations.
- In addition, CFUGs used Participatory Well-Being Ranking processes to identify poor households and individuals, in order to allocate resources on a more equitable basis. Poor households received access to group funds, which they used to support a range of income generating activities that helped reduce pressure on forest resources.

### Increasing participation to reduce corruption vulnerability of women and marginalized groups in land governance mechanisms

Sustainable management of natural resources with effective community stewardship hinges upon ensuring gender equality and social inclusion. In local communities in Nepal, women are responsible for managing many forest resources, and poor and marginalized people are often the most dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods and wellbeing. If these groups are not empowered to participate in decision making, benefit equitably, and eventually play leadership roles in management of their resources, that management will be more vulnerable to corruption, and forests and people both suffer.

To overcome these vulnerabilities, SAMARTHYA helped build the capacity of local land rights forums to ensure meaningful participation in the Land Facilitation Committee, and to elevate their collective voices to influence the Land Related Problem-Solving Commission. USAID's Hariyo Ban similarly sought to increase the participation of marginalized groups, especially women, in governance of NRM groups. The program did so by supporting the CFUGs to implement the Government of Nepal's Community Forestry Development Program Guidelines, which demands the inclusion of women and marginalized groups, and giving those groups leadership roles in CFUG institutional assessment and improvement plans.

### Informal learning platforms to support community mobilization

In USAID's Hariyo Ban project, Community Learning and Action Centres (CLACs) were established to support learning and development on how to strengthen inclusive leadership, good governance, and management practices of community forests and CFUGs. These informal platforms were safe spaces for participation and discussion of critical issues, and helped identify viable local solutions to NRM governance problems, as defined by marginalized groups themselves. USAID's Hariyo Ban used CARE's Underlying Causes of Poverty and Vulnerability Analysis tool with CLAC members to identify the underlying causes and impacts of their marginalization, as well as common pathways to influence key stakeholders through collective action. This enabled PSVEs to discuss issues and prepare and implement action plans with government agencies and development partners' support.

### Inclusive, evidence-based advocacy to scale impact

Both USAID's Hariyo Ban and SAMARTHYA projects supported CFUGs, the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal, Land Rights Forums, and other CSOs to conduct evidence-based advocacy on a range of issues. This included influencing the development of the National Policy on Payment for Ecosystem Services and fostering better coordination and collaboration between government agencies and development partners.

## Implementation Challenges

While "the representation of discriminated groups, particularly Janajati and Dalits, in decision making is increasing, although their actual influence in decision making is still limited" (Hariyo Ban Program Study Report 2021). While some change is evident, transforming discriminatory social norms and unequal power dynamics will take time. Lack of transparency and corruption within CFUG Executive Committees will therefore require an enhanced role by national agencies and FECOFUN to hold those responsible for corruption to account at the sub-national level, alongside and in partnership with continued investment in inclusive community stewardship of natural resources.

# CASE STUDY – 'LAND RIGHTS VIETNAM': RESPECTING LAND AND FOREST RIGHTS OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS IN VIETNAM

**LAND RIGHTS VIETNAM (2016–2018)**

**Implementing Partners:**
**CARE International and Culture, Identity and Resource Use Management (CIRUM)**

**Other CSO Partners:**
**LandNet/The Forest People Land Rights Network**

**Funding Partner: EU**

## Context and Governance Challenges

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country, in which more than two-thirds of people from ethnic minority groups depend overwhelmingly on forests for their livelihoods. Most ethnic minority communities also live below the poverty line, and many people participate in the illicit wildlife trade, employing bribery and other illegal methods to by-pass authorities (Giao 2021).

Despite the community significance of these forests, customary land governance practices have been largely misunderstood and overridden by the state (IWGIA 2018). Existing laws did not include clear guidance on communities' roles or customary land tenure rights (CIRUM and CARE 2017). Ethnic minorities lacked a formal mechanism to participate in and influence policy development. Discriminatory social norms against women and minorities, language barriers, limited capacity and community access to legal documents in their negotiations with local authorities and forest management boards were also very real barriers.

As a result of this discrimination and violation of customary land and forest tenure, communities and forests have been negatively affected in several ways. Private companies with counterfeit permits have been able to access and exploit natural resources and wildlife. Traders in timber and forest products have been able to under-declare the volume or value of goods to avoid restrictions and fees. Due in part to public officials' perceptions that ethnic minority people lacked the capacity and experience to manage the forests, there was also often a failure to act on forest- and wildlife-related violations (CIRUM and CARE 2017).

## Program Approach

The aim of the program was to ensure the fundamental right in law of ethnic minority people to manage ancestral forest land. By establishing an enabling policy environment with firmer rules in place, local communities would then be on stronger legal footing when reporting forest violations in their lands and for holding perpetrators to account through future judicial or social accountability approaches. In 2017, the Vietnamese government invited a local CSO, Culture, Identity and Resources Use Management (CIRUM), to contribute evidence and provide technical assistance to the drafting committee to update the 2004 Law on Forest Protection and Development. The Land Rights Vietnam project then set out to build the capacity of ethnic minority groups and civil society actors to advocate for recognition of ethnic minority rights in the 2017 amendment. They especially focused on communal leaders, women, and young people. The project facilitated CSO and state champion networks to garner support from policymakers for the legal changes necessary to improve forest land governance. To build awareness, trust, and ownership of the process between different actors, the project used a participatory learning and joint planning approach to advocacy.

# Impact on Forest Governance

Through the project's work, the Law on Forestry (2017) gave ethnic minorities full legal rights to access and control ancestral and customary forests. The project also directly contributed to securing ownership certificates for 100 Sedang poor families in Tu Mo Rong district, for more than 500 hectares of community forest land. After the community was given official ownership, they became more active in managing and protecting the forest (CARE and CIRUM 2018). In addition, the project contributed to improving the advocacy capacity of the Forest People Land Rights Network (FPLRN) members, including farmers representing ethnic minority groups and local commune and district leaders. Participation and engagement strategies strengthened trust and relationships between CSOs and other actors, including communities and local and central government.

With firmer rules in place and strengthened trust with duty-bearers, local communities will now be on stronger legal footing when reporting forest violations in their lands. This will strengthen their ability to report forest violations in their lands and to hold perpetrators to account through future judicial or social accountability approaches (CLEP and UNDP 2008). Understanding and promoting ethnic minority people's culture is a fundamental building block that enables a culturally sensitive approach to sustainable forest management. Similarly, incremental changes in legal frameworks can create pathways for a larger change for increased accountability in a complex context (Jackson 2020).

# What Worked?

### Insider advocacy and consensus-building through diverse stakeholder participation

PEA, stakeholder analysis, outcome mapping, and Participatory, Reflection, Learning and Planning (PRLP) helped inform, devise, and adapt community-led forest governance dialogues at the local level (Van Tu and Huong 2018). Policymakers and CSO representatives were taken on study tours to foster awareness and trust through participatory experiential learning. A wide range of stakeholders across ethnic minorities, government, and CSO partners helped build the evidence for informed advocacy. The research methodology also created an opportunity for actors to discuss critical issues faced by ethnic minority communities, which led to the establishment of a stronger network of organizations with increased understanding of those communities' needs.

This approach contributed to securing support from decision-makers and powerholders for including research findings in the draft amendment. This demonstrates that insider advocacy approaches based on consensus building – rather than confrontation – can yield better outcomes in certain contexts. It also highlights that taking advantage of opportunities and favorable conditions, such as when a government is reviewing or adopting new laws, can be convenient for effective advocacy in contexts with limited civic space.

### Addressing social norms and attitudes towards gender and minorities' cultures

The project used behavior change communication tools and a participatory policy advisory process. CIRUM was central to bridging the knowledge gap between ethnic minority people and the rest of the committee drafting the law by organizing inclusive and constructive dialogue between them. This non-confrontational approach built rapport and trust, and enabled women and men to discuss sensitive land rights issues and develop clear policy proposals (Van Tu and Huong 2018).

Supporting gender equality was also a key aspect of the project. Gender analysis at the start of the project found negative social norms and attitudes of men and local authorities towards women's participation in the monitoring of forests. The project therefore supported women to gain skills and confidence in public participation and advocacy. As a contributor to the technical drafting committee, CIRUM also worked with CARE to ensure ethnic minority people,

especially women leaders, took part in multi-level consultations and directly influenced key forest land management policy discussions.

## Implementation Challenges

Despite the efforts above, it is unclear whether and how the amended forest law strengthened the rights of ethnic minority women. Gender dimensions of exclusion intersect with and exacerbate exclusion for minority ethnic women. Organizations therefore need to identify and support women change agents from minority ethnic groups so that they can build their agency and voice.

In addition, the degree to which majority ethnic groups were included in project processes is not clear. As these groups may also contribute to the systemic exclusion of ethnic minorities, building their awareness and ownership of the process and its outcomes would have helped effective implementation and sustainability of impact.

# Recommendations and Lessons

The case study programs in Nepal, Vietnam, and Uganda all indicate that meaningful citizen participation and multi-stakeholder collaboration can contribute to local NRM governance and national NRM reform.

Few of the impacts highlighted directly include corruption. Rather, by taking a collaborative, people-centered, systems approach, they supported improvements in natural resource governance and an enabling environment with strong potential for sustainably reducing corruption.

## Seven recommendations for more effective NRM

### 1. Understand the political economy of NRM and invest in building relationships

Each of the case study programs used PEA to understand local power dynamics and barriers and incentives for change. This helped them ensure the right tools were adapted and applied, and that the necessary powerholders were engaged to enable meaningful civic participation in NRM monitoring, planning, advocacy, and accountability processes. Undertaking a PEA of the NRM sector at the start of programming in the FOREST Program in Uganda, for example, was critical for building the right relationships and enabled the program to work from the outset with sub-county authorities, facilitating local ownership of the program's results.

### 2. Increase awareness on the part of resource users and duty-bearers through information campaigns

Ensuring access to information about forest-related legislation, the role of duty-bearers and citizens to combat corruption, and the availability of mechanisms for engagement was critical for mobilizing action among resource users *and* duty-bearers. Especially in situations where capacity is limited, programs that provide duty-bearers with better information can help improve their performance (Grandvoinnet, Aslam, and Raha 2015). The FOREST Program in Uganda, for example, used social media, community meetings, and radio programs, which contributed to a 2.7-fold increase in knowledge about forest-related legislation and governance among communities, media representatives, and CSOs (Janoch 2018).

### 3. Build resilience against corruption through strengthening community-level stewardship and building their capacity to monitor illegal resource use

Strengthening CFUGs' internal governance was critical for reducing vulnerability to corruption at the local level. USAID's Hariyo Ban project, for example, helped CFUGs prepare governance improvement and adaptation plans. Together with Public Hearings and Public Audits, this enabled them to ensure their own internal transparency and accountability on an on-going basis. Building the capacity of local user groups to monitor and report resource misuse of others is another powerful tool for strengthening local level accountability. The FOREST Program in Uganda supported community-based monitors to use ICT to track and report illegal forest activities via SMS. This enabled users to instantly reach critical stakeholders and alert law enforcement operatives and personnel in agencies to problems. As a result, there was an increase in media reports on forest issues in print, on TV, and in social media.

### 4. Increase state responsiveness through multi-stakeholder dialogue and trust building

Corruption in the NRM sector is increasingly sophisticated and requires coordinated responses from law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, civil society, and local communities. Facilitated spaces for such multi-stakeholder coordination often result in improved governance (Murombedzi 2013). The FOREST Program in Uganda, for example, facilitated public participation in district-level public accountability forums, set up as safe spaces for dialogue with key government officials. This increased understanding and trust between resources users and duty-bearers, and also increased collaboration between government departments.

### 5. Identify and promote the role of champions and intermediaries in creating and holding open safe spaces

Often, safe spaces for dialogue are created and/or held open by the political will of champions inside the state (Gaventa 2020), and can be effective if trust exists or is built between participants (Aiyar 2010). Despite some initial challenges with trust, such as some Ugandan's disappointment with forestry officials' responsiveness, the program case studies were able to build trust, understanding, and confidence between stakeholders. Non-governmental intermediaries can also be vital to facilitate connections between natural resource users and providers. In Vietnam, where CSO activities are restricted, CSOs trusted by ethnic minorities and powerholders were critical to project success.

### 6. Scale the impact of community voices at the local and national level through tailored advocacy and behavior change approaches

Supporting CSOs to amplify community voices on forest governance can be an effective approach for building more conducive environments for inclusive NRM and anti-corruption. The more inclusive they are, the broader the ownership and sustainability of outcomes. However, as outlined above, these approaches must be tailored to the local context and specific advocacy and behavior change objective. Good working relationships with the ministry in Uganda were coupled with investigative journalism, while in Vietnam, the project relied on collaborative insider advocacy.

### 7. Increase participation of women and marginalized groups in land governance mechanisms and policy formulation

Sustainable management of natural resources with effective community stewardship and mobilization hinges upon ensuring gender equality and social inclusion. In many parts of the world, women are primary users of natural resources. Involving women can enlarge the pool of citizens committed to forest conservation, increase representation of landless community members in decision making, and may lead to better compliance with resource management rules (Agarwal et al. 2009, Leisher 2016). While women are not inherently less corrupt, shifting intersectional power dynamics within NRM could break predominantly male patronage-based patterns as new relationships and dynamics emerge (Kramer et al. 2020). Initial evidence from the three case studies supports these claims. In Nepal, women were able to incorporate their voice in adaptation plans, and resources for poor households were more equitably distributed, both of which will benefit conservation. In Vietnam, gender analysis helped identify negative social norms toward women as one of the underlying drivers of less effective forest monitoring.

## Four Takeaway Lessons

Finally, experience from the three cases highlights four lessons for projects seeking to build more robust and nuanced NRM governance systems with greater resilience to corruption. These lessons relate to key structural and social/cultural conditions for effective social accountability and civic participation in NRM governance, as well as to the adaptive nature of tactics (or pathways to change) required to address corruption in different contexts. As with any conclusions drawn from specific experience, these lessons may not apply to all SA work in all contexts, but they represent factors that helped these three cases succeed.

### 1. "Good enough" rules and regulations are an important part of the enabling environment for SA in NRM governance

The case studies demonstrate the need for "good enough" rules and regulations for civic engagement to create a more welcoming enabling environment for effective social accountability processes in NRM governance. In Nepal and Uganda, for example, the existing formal regulations recognized and provided safe places for marginalized groups' participation in NRM processes. Interventions therefore focused on investing resources to ensure existing frameworks were put into practice. In Vietnam, however, the policy and legal framework was not "sufficient." In response, the project focused on policy reform to address a root cause of poverty and natural resource

misuse: minorities' exclusion from policy and legal frameworks.

### 2. Social norms can be root causes of vulnerability to corruption in resource use

Social norms are the ideas members of a group have about the appropriate way to behave in certain situations. Even if a robust governance system is in place, negative behavior can endure if social norms about that behavior are not addressed. This is particularly true in fragile, uncertain contexts, where survival depends on social connections (Scharbatke-Church and Chigas 2021).

In other words, while formal policies and regulations for enabling inclusive and safe civic participation are an important condition, they (alone) may not be sufficient. Informal social and governance norms around what constitutes corruption and who has access to resources and negotiation spaces, also inform the "rules of engagement" around social accountability in every context. In Vietnam, for example, re-evaluation of traditional and ecological knowledge was a prerequisite to increasing ethnic minority peoples' participation in policy discourse. While changing the attitudes of key individual decision makers is not norms change in and of itself, leveraging their power and influence to make structural changes in policy is a key contributing factor.

### 3. "Collaborative engagement" (proactive) and "confrontational" (reactive) accountability techniques need to be balanced and assessed in each new context

The SA approaches in the cases described here prioritized building shared understanding, trust, and mutual accountability between resource users and duty-bearers. These approaches focused on collaboration and constructive engagement to promote an environment that can help reduce the likelihood of corruption. Especially in contested environments, where civic space is limited or where patronage and clientelist relationships are part of the political landscape, more constructive civic approaches may be more accepted or tolerated than confrontational approaches, which may be more likely to result in co-option, disengagement, or shut-down by duty-bearers. More confrontational approaches can also undermine longer-term constructive engagement approaches. In Vietnam, for example, civic space is more constrained. The successful program therefore took a more collaborative "insider advocacy" approach based on consensus building.

At the same time, the programs also included more confrontational accountability approaches. In Uganda, for example, civic space is more open. The FOREST Program therefore used more "confrontational" outsider advocacy tools, such as investigative journalism, as well as community-based reporting of resource crimes and using media campaigns to profile the cases. These approaches openly profile "bad behavior" and can challenge those in power, which may be needed. Without confrontation, constructive approaches can be toothless, allowing corruption and social injustice to persist.

This is the difficult challenge, to balance between the "carrot" and the "stick," or incentives for engagement and disincentives for not "playing by the (formal) rules." Any social accountability and citizen engagement approach therefore needs to navigate this balance based on the specific context in which they operate. That is why understanding the political economy of NRM, and wider political drivers such as elections, is so critical.

### 4. Accountability mechanisms at the local and national level are interdependent

In order to sustainably address corruption at a systemic level, accountability mechanisms at all levels need to coordinate effectively. In USAID's Hariyo Ban, the internal governance and inclusiveness of CFUGs was strengthened, but wider change has been slow. This suggests there is an opportunity for an increased oversight role by national agencies alongside and in partnership with continued investment in inclusive community stewardship of natural resources. Similarly, in the FOREST program in Uganda, the shift in responsibility for community feedback from the district to the national level resulted in increased responsiveness of

the NFA (a national-level agency). At the same time, the perceived responsiveness of district-level duty bearers was reduced. This suggests that the closer the data source (or feedback loop) is to the duty bearer and point of service delivery, the more active the response. This matches CARE's experience in other programs, such as the USAID's funded Ghana Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms (GSAM) program. There, government administrators were more responsive to bottom-up social accountability using community monitoring and community score card processes. Elected politicians, however, were more responsive to top-down approaches. Here publication of performance and financial reports by the Ghana Audit Office has lead to a reduction in the incidence of partisan manipulation of public resources by politicians. A combination of interdependent accountability approaches that address the specific incentives and drivers of 'good' or 'bad' practice at multiple levels therefore has greater potential for sustainably and systemically addressing NRM corruption.


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# Annex 1. CARE Inclusive Governance Tools and Approaches for NRM Programming

The table below highlights tools and approaches developed and used by CARE to strengthen local governance in NRM-related and other sector programs.

## Capacity strengthening of NRM groups

- » Participatory Governance Assessment (PGA)
- » Public Hearing and Public Audit (PHPA)
- » Participatory Well-Being Ranking (PWBR)
- » Model Community Forest
- » Representation, Inclusion, Legitimacy, Transparency, Accountability, and Synergy tool
- » Outcome Mapping

## Participatory Planning Tools

- » Community Action Plans
- » Gender-responsive National Action Plans
- » Community Adaptation Action Plans (CAAP)
- » Participatory Scenario Planning (PSP)

## Social Accountability Tools

- » Political Economy Analysis
- » Community Score Card (CSC)
- » Social Audits
- » Citizen Charters
- » Public Expenditure Tracking[6]
- » Feedback and Accountability Mechanisms

[6] Source: CIVICUS

**About Targeting Natural Resource Corruption**

The Targeting Natural Resource Corruption (TNRC) project is working to improve biodiversity outcomes by helping practitioners to address the threats posed by corruption to wildlife, fisheries and forests. TNRC harnesses existing knowledge, generates new evidence, and supports innovative policy and practice for more effective anti-corruption programming. Learn more at tnrcproject.org.

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