

Forest governance: What it is and what it looks like



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Forest governance is subject to topical debate with key developments such as the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD). This infosheet, based on research carried out by researchers from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and the University of Amsterdam (UvA), sheds light on what forest governance is and the challenges ahead.

Definition

Forest governance can be defined as the whole of public and private interactions which design, implement and oversee policies, laws and regulations relating to the allocation, use and trade of forest resources. This process includes a lot of actors from statutory and customary government, the private sector and civil society, which are operating at different levels of scale. It is also referred to as interactive governance.

Modes of governance

There are different styles or modes of governance, with the most important ones in Ghana being:

Hierarchical governance – a top-down style of interaction between the State and its citizens. The key concepts involved are steering, planning and control, as expressed in laws and policies. This mode, a legacy of British colonial rule, is widespread, with the Forestry Commission (FC) being the main responsible agency for forest management.

Co-governance – a collaborative way of governing in which responsibilities are shared between the State and societal parties with a common purpose in mind. It is characterised by horizontal relationships, with no actor being solely in control.

Several co-governance arrangements are embedded in the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Policy and its legislative instruments, especially the provisions and guiding principles relating to community forestry and collaborative resource management (CRM):

The Modified Taungya System (MTS) - The allocation of cropping rights to local people living near the degraded portion of forest reserves where reforestation schemes are being carried out, which allow them to interplant food crops between the trees. In addition to the food crops, they receive a 40% share of the proceeds of the harvestable timber trees in return for planting, weeding and thinning.

Boundary cleaning – An agreement between the FC and members of Community Forestry Committees and Community Biodiversity Advisory Groups about the cleaning of forest reserve boundaries in exchange for wages.

The National Forestry Forum (NFF) – a forum created to bridge the gap between policymakers and resource owners and users made up of representatives from the customary, state and market governing structures, including communities and timber operators. The Forestry Forum functions at national and at some regional and district levels in Ghana.



Challenges to the forest governance process

In a survey conducted in February 2010 to determine challenges that forest governors and experts face in the forest governance process, they enumerated the following:

- The pervasiveness of conflicts over forest and tree resources without adequate conflict management strategies being in place to minimise them;
- A lack of political and administrative will (as a result of influence of politicians and powerful loggers) to address societal problems emanating from resource management;
- The complicated implementation of decisions taken under co-governance arrangements as none of the actors has sole decision power;
- Insufficiently differentiated forest laws for forest reserves and off-reserve areas while contexts and actors are different;
- The top-down governance style which exists in the Forestry Commission conflicts with the decentralised structures in the various districts;
- A difficulty to reconcile statutory and customary conflict management systems constructively because resource ownership and management reside in different actors - traditional authorities and governments - with the former having no role to support conflict management.

How can these challenges be overcome?

The forest governors and experts interviewed expressed the following as a way forward to the challenges:

- A decentralised and interactive forest governance approach with feedback loops during implementation;
- Differentiated laws and regulations adapted to the specific conditions in reserves and off-reserve areas;
- A long-term strategic plan for the FC that ensures cooperation and clarifies the division of responsibilities, benefits and power among key actors, especially forest fringe communities, traditional authorities and the private sector;
- Sufficient funding for the FC to undertake its activities, through the mobilisation of international support and revised internal mechanisms for collecting funds from trees and other forest products and services;
- The integration of capacity building in conflict management into training courses for natural resource managers and academic curricula;
- The integration of conflict management strategies into the programmes and policies of the FC;
- A clearly defined position for customary laws within the statutory forest laws, including conflict management roles for traditional authorities.



This infosheet is an output of the 'Governance for Sustainable Forest-related Livelihoods' project, carried out under the Tropenbos International Ghana programme by researchers from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and the University of Amsterdam (UvA).