

USAID's Support to Capacity Building for Forest Governance and Law Enforcement

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Introduction

Presentations at this conference have described the challenges of forest law enforcement and governance, as well as the opportunities to confront these challenges. USAID, working with local partners, has found that there are opportunities. Opportunities that make a difference, that support effective governance, increase law enforcement and improve forest management. These opportunities can be found in community-based forest management.

This presentation will begin by setting up the context of USAID support, followed by examples of our programs in Indonesia, the Philippines and Nepal, and a description of possible future directions for USAID support.

Context

The origins of USAID interest lie with the United States public. They express their concerns for deforestation to their elected government representatives, who in turn respond to them, their constituents with funding for programs in the conservation of forests and biodiversity. USAID focuses upon communities because of their dependence on forests for their livelihood needs and environmental services. We aim to reduce poverty while conserving tropical forests. Because of their dependence on forests, communities have a great interest in sound forest management. We believe that working with communities, associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also builds a democratic civil society that advocates and implements good governance. Furthermore, local and national governments have expressed that their financial and human resources are limited to manage the vast areas of forests under their authority. In these cases, communities can have a role to play in forest management and vigilance. As noted in other presentations, a benefit in devolving forest management rights to communities has been an increase in law enforcement.

USAID Examples

Programs at USAID Field Offices in Indonesia, the Philippines and Nepal have supported recognition of community rights to forests. These programs have assisted in building capacity for the formulation of forest policies, and the implementation of sound forest management practices. Examples of capacity building for community forestry in Indonesia, the Philippines and Nepal are described here.

Indonesia

Much of USAID's support for community-based forest management has been implemented through NGOs. When they partnered with USAID, these NGOs demonstrated skills, knowledge and enthusiasm. USAID worked with them to build upon their existing skills by providing a series of trainings designed to assist in the formation of the organizations' oversight, vision, management, human resources and finances. These elements formed the Institutional Development Framework (IDF). Progress is followed as the organization proceeds through start-up, development, expansion, consolidation and sustainability. Improvements in an organization's management capacity enable it to seek and successfully obtain outside financial resources. Over forty organizations have participated. The IDF was also used to train Indonesian park managers to assist them in budget planning and in measuring improvements in the park over time. These experiences resulted in the development of an IDF users guide for 39 national parks.

USAID's NGO partners have been very successful in achieving local recognition of community forests. One of the tools used for this recognition was community mapping. In West Kalimantan, community mapping gained recognition from the local government of communities' rights to forests. These forests were actively protected from forest fires by the communities while an adjacent timber concession burned. Community mapping has also facilitated the adoption of community managed zones in Lore Lindu National Park. A formal decree awarded indigenous people their right to remain and to control their traditional lands located within the Park. They have been effective in keeping out illegal loggers and poachers.

Philippines

The USAID office in the Philippines provided assistance to develop an Executive Order by the President on community-based forest management and Departmental Orders issued by the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). We have supported the certification of the first forest in the Philippines. This forest is community run. Given the complexities associated with formal community management agreements and the implementation of regulations, USAID, through the Local Legal Support Initiative, is providing legal assistance to communities. Three NGOs provide direct legal advice and services to communities to help them secure and clearly define their rights and responsibilities with the DENR and other government units. Direct legal assistance includes: community consultations, letter or petition writing, alternative dispute processing, paralegal training, research, legal advice and filing of cases where appropriate. Legal backing enables communities to effectively manage and protect their forests including the ability to keep out illegal loggers.

Nepal

In Nepal, USAID has been involved for over 20 years in the formation of community forest user groups, and has provided training in organizational, technical and administrative aspects. USAID support alone has gone to 1,500 forestry groups managing over 130,000 ha. Other donors are also involved with community forestry with the total number of forest groups being over 9,000 with more than 700,000 members managing around 750,000 ha. A great contribution to governance is the realization of the group members that, yes, they have the ability to successfully manage forest lands and that the government should help, not hinder them. The 700,000 members of forest user groups nationwide have become a political voice.

Capacity building in community forestry evolves from advocating policies to assisting with forest management practices and community organization. The Nepal case has advanced to where USAID is now helping to improve forest users groups' organizational management, accounting skills and product marketing capabilities. It is also working to strengthen the democratic functioning of the groups in their decision-making and benefit-sharing. Communities have even addressed the difference between equality and equity.

In summary, USAID experience has found that when communities are empowered to manage natural resources like forests, they have the incentive to limit access by outsiders, reduce illegal logging, stop forest fires and prevent forest conversion. Communities cannot do this alone, but there needs to be a balanced relationship with government.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Pending funding, USAID will proceed in promoting effective governance of forest resources, for example, by assisting in decentralization processes through the promotion of transparent, accountable and inclusive local management of forests. This presentation has mainly discussed governance in the form of community rights as a means of stopping illegal logging. USAID is also aware and concerned about other forest law enforcement issues and is discussing possible actions that could be taken.