Developing Capacity, Confidence and Voice: Experiences from a five-year Capacity Building for Improving Forest Governance Model

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to share lessons learnt from the Centre for International Development and Training's (CIDT) five-year capacity building (CB) model for improving forest governance (FG). The model develops individual, organisational, and institutional capacities and creates "venues of accountability" that facilitate cross-country learning. The model operates at three levels: international, regional and national. The first component is a UK-based programme of training and mentoring that targets mid-level FG champions from government, private sector and civil society in 20+ countries/3 continents. This is complemented by a series of high-level regional Forest Governance Forums (FGFs) facilitated in selected countries (Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana and Liberia) and tailored national CB events co-delivered with local partners. Data is drawn from online surveys of international alumni, regional FGF participants and 80 face-to-face interviews with various stakeholders from 15 countries. Results show significant improvements in knowledge, skills, attitudes and confidence of course participants, with evidence of effective application of learning and multiplier effects on the ground. Additionally, the value of north-south and south-south exchanges is evidenced by the creation of networks and alliances of FG champions. The findings also demonstrate the innovativeness of FGFs as spaces of accountability and cross-country learning, notably because they ensure momentum on FG reforms is maintained at national, regional and international levels. The implications of this work to policy and practice are discussed.

Introduction

This paper is based on part of a larger lesson learning study undertaken by the Centre for International Development & Training (CIDT), University of Wolverhampton, looking at the outcomes of its capacity development and strengthening programmes in the area of forest governance. The first programme is the Improving Forest Governance (IFG) course which is funded by the UK Department for International Development through the Forest Governance, Markets and Climate (DfID FGMC) programme. This 6-week intensive course, aimed at frontline practitioners of forest governance in timber-producing countries, strengthens the capacity of key national stakeholders in forest governance processes, notably those engaging with the FLEGT Action Plan. The second programme , the Forest Governance Forums are part of a European Union (EU) project part financed though the DfID FGMC programme. These are in-country events designed to bring a range of stakeholders together to promote participatory, progressive national dialogue on forest governance issues. Together, these two programmes are part of a comprehensive effort to establish, strengthen and

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expand communities of practice within target countries. This paper aims to draw out lessons from these two programmes to inform future approaches to building national capacity across stakeholder groups. The next sections are organized as follows; the first section describes the methodology used in the study, followed by presentation of results and findings. The last section concludes the study draws of the lessons learnt from the CIDT led programmes.

Methodology

As mentioned in the introduction, this paper is based on part of a larger study carried out to evaluate the outcomes of two capacity building programmes. Data relating to a further component, the national capacity building activities co-delivered with national programme partners is not presented here. The paper focusses on the outcomes of the UK-based IFG training course and the regionally delivered Forest Governance Forums.

Data collection was done through a mix of online surveys and face-to-face and telephone interviews. Participants in the IFG study were IFG course alumni, course directors and facilitators while respondents from the FGFs study were participants drawn from the attendance lists of four FGFs organised in Liberia, Cameroon, Ghana and Democratic Republic of Congo. The data sources are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Data sources for paper

	Improving Forest Governance Course	Forest Governance Forums
Survey/ Questionnaire	69	27
Interviews with participants	41	57
Interviews with facilitators	15	

The limited interaction afforded by a survey necessitated follow-up interviews in order to learn meaningful lessons about the achievement or not of course objectives[2]. Where surveys had attempted to evaluate participant perceptions of the effectiveness and usefulness of the training, follow-up interviews focussed in more depth on investigating outcomes and impact. Interviews with other course stakeholders (ie, facilitators, tutors, funders) helped to paint a fuller picture of course objectives and anticipated outcomes, and provided context to the responses given in interviews with course alumni. This context would allow comparison between anticipated outcomes and those actually experienced in practice.

With regards to the outcomes and learning from the FGFs, the methodology relied on triangulation across project documents, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The main target for both the surveys and the semi – structured interviews were FGF participants, employing a combination of both stratified random sampling and snowball sampling.

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[2] It is important to note that course objectives here are not synonymous with learning objectives, although there is a degree of overlap. Course objectives correspond to the changes that result from the training.

Results and Discussion

Outcomes of the IFG Course

From the surveys, 88% of alumni assessed the contribution of the IFG course to better knowledge about forest governance issues as high to very high for all criteria. This high percentage of positive response is mirrored in perceptions of enhanced skills (75%) and a change in attitude (69%), although some nuances do emerge. The IFG course contributing to better knowledge drops to 36% for the development of trade incentives, for example. However, the rate of respondents partly agreeing is still high even for this criterion (39%) while 13% partly or fully disagreed.

The survey testified that the course had been an overwhelmingly positive learning experience and had been perceived as highly beneficial to improvements in knowledge, enhancement of skills and to a positive change in attitude. However, the question arises as to what specific outcomes happened as a result; the interviews aimed to explore and answer this question. Course outcomes are divided into two categories below depended more heavily on individual context to be applicable and would be an indirect outcome of the course. For example, the emergence of an effective in-country network of forest governance professionals would not be a priority in countries from which only one participant had been sent. The division of outcomes is listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Division of IFG Course Outcomes

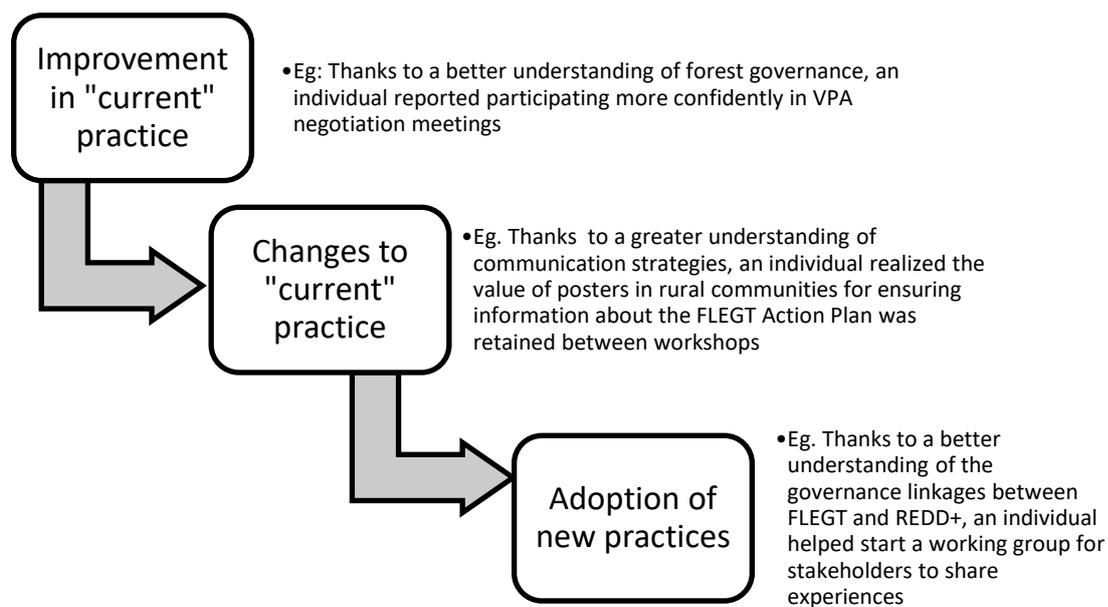| Primary Outcomes	Secondary Outcomes
- Improvement in Knowledge and Understanding of Forest Governance Issues - Better understanding of the Different Roles in a Multi-stakeholder Process - Sustained engagement in forest governance processes - Positive Influence on Career Trajectory - Improved Communication Skills	- Sharing of learning upon return to country - Greater success in acquisition of funding for projects - More effective trainers - Better Presentation Skills - Development of a network of forest governance experts (amongst alumni)

Interviews with course alumni suggested that the Primary Outcomes had been achieved in the vast majority of cases. Describing in detail a number of outputs through which elements on the course had helped them, it was clear that the course has enabled participants to work in ways which promote or are complementary to better forest governance. In one example, which was echoed in similar ways by a number of other interviewees, a participant from a government forestry department explained how a better understanding of the roles in multi-stakeholder processes had encouraged him to spend more time in the communities impacted by his work. Although this was implicit in his work prior to the course, by attending he was more conscious of the value of developing relationships with a broader range of stakeholders.

Secondary outcomes emerged less frequently in interviews with participants. This is due, in part, to the fact that they relate to course elements not relevant to all participants. However, the sharing of learning upon return to country was unanimously reported, albeit to varying extents. In some cases, this sharing was incidental through their daily interactions with colleagues, through to bespoke

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training courses developed using tailored versions of IFG materials. The other outcome of particular interest was the development of a "network" of forest governance experts amongst alumni. Whilst some effort was made during the course to help facilitate this outcome, through the creation of an active facebook group, for example, this was not something that could be controlled *ex-post*. The relationships developed on the course would likely underpin any sustained interaction after the course. An important point to note on this topic is that professional collaboration occurred more between participants from the same country or from countries of close geographical proximity. Conversely, whilst participants valued learning from countries from other continents on the course, there had been less opportunities, and perhaps less reason, to stay in close professional contact.

Levels of Outcomes

A further distinction can be made between outcomes which relate to an improvement in "current" practices (ie, the participant is better able to do the activities they were doing before) and those which relate to changes in practice or the adoption of new practices. The most substantial outcomes from the course, and the most notable impact, arises from those outcomes which demonstrate a change in practice or the adoption of new practices. The distinctions between levels of outcome are shown in Figure 1 below.

Improvement in "current" practice
- Eg: Thanks to a better understanding of forest governance, an individual reported participating more confidently in VPA negotiation meetings

Changes to "current" practice
- Eg. Thanks to a greater understanding of communication strategies, an individual realized the value of posters in rural communities for ensuring information about the FLEGT Action Plan was retained between workshops

Adoption of new practices
- Eg. Thanks to a better understanding of the governance linkages between FLEGT and REDD+, an individual helped start a working group for stakeholders to share experiences

Figure 1: Levels of Outcomes

The question that logically follows, is *"What enables some individuals to utilize the training to a greater extent than others?"* The most substantial outcomes occurred when one or more of the following factors were present: a particular individual capacity for leadership, a high level of institutional investment and support, or an already active community of practice into which an individual can integrate. The first two factors can be controlled, to some extent, through the course selection process. Indeed, the selection process is quite rigorous in attempting to find potential champions through substantial interaction with partner organisations on the ground. Furthermore, a management support letter is required to demonstrate the investment, or lack thereof, in their employee attending the course. Ultimately, however, controlling for these factors can only do so

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much, but an expansion of mentoring-type activities after the course could help mitigate a lack of resources or lack of in-country support.

It is the third factor which appears to offer the most sustainable route for securing greater impact after the course. In countries from which many participants have attended the course, there has been greater interaction between course alumni. In Cameroon, for example, which has more course alumni than any other country, many people were able to describe frequent interactions with other forest governance practitioners with both formal and informal opportunities for collaboration. As such, whether or not their job provides them with the space and resources to pursue new forest governance activities, there are more external opportunities here than in other countries. Of particular note then, are the Forest Governance Forums which have seen involvement by IFG alumni in both participation and facilitation of the workshops, helping to broaden a community of practice and securing a space in which they can communicate.

Outcomes of the Forest Governance Forums

Creating 'Venues of Accountability'

FGFs have successfully created and enhanced existing 'venues of accountability' in the project countries and beyond. Respondents stressed how the FGFs' format, in terms of providing a safe and secure space, was conducive to promoting openness and giving participants opportunities to voice their concerns. This builds their capacity to participate in stakeholder negotiations and reforms. Importantly, community stakeholders pointed out the open nature of the forums have allowed them be a credible and effective independent grievance mechanism; one community participant voiced how the FGFs gave them space to *'talk about how illegal logging is affecting my community and to bring more attention to this matter.'* Given the weak rule of law and limited judicial resolution mechanisms in these project countries, the FGFs have the potential to act as a grievance resolution mechanism allowing participants to voice *'complaints'* and *'concerns.'* Importantly, it provides critical space for participants who lack resources to be legally represented to present their case (indigenous communities, for example). On a broader level, the presence and the increasing engagement and dialogue between CSOs, industry and government at the FGFs, testify that such platforms are crucial to alleviating conflict between sectors and building trust.

In light of the above, vertical accountability was identified by many respondents as a significant outcome of the FGFs. Vertical accountability essentially refers to citizen power over the state. FGFs have strengthened citizen power in several ways: one Global Witness campaigner argued that the FGFs were a useful tool in building the confidence of local stakeholders, citing an example of where Global Witness sponsored six CSOs members from other countries to participate at the Ghana FGF in 2011. Working with these participants, Global Witness helped to build their capacity, so that they *'could stand up, ask direct and difficult questions, and challenge officials, logging sector donor community at the forum – to push them in public, to make commitments, to make statements and to reassert that they are committed to reforming forest governance and not just tinkering with the easy bits.'* Thus, FGFs have given participants a platform to demand answers, rectification, and officials the opportunity to respond.

Integral to this outcome is the promotion of social accountability mechanisms – the process by which citizens, CSOs and public bodies exact accountability. By providing a 'venue' of accountability, FGFs

support social accountability strategies. On a number of occasions respondents noted that the FGFs have helped to empower CSOs and individuals, as the *'participation of civil society in [the] forest sector process has improved significantly at a national level.'* This is particularly true in the case of Ghana; respondents suggested that the increasing presence of CSOs and involvement in FGFs has allowed *'them to serve on forest governance platforms and get involved with high-level actors.'* This also suggests a certain level of prestige attached to attending FGFs as by challenging government in the FGFs it *'gives [CSOs] recognition.'* By bringing stakeholders together the forums lay the foundation for collective action and build capacity of both individuals and CSOs to demand accountability. Respondents also noted that the presence of different agencies and departments can encourage a *'system of monitoring'*: this suggests FGFs can potentially contribute to horizontal accountability – the capacity of the state to check abuse of powers by public bodies and departments within the government. In other words, branches of government monitor each other to ensure a mechanism of checks and balances within internal structures. For this reason, a key lesson to emerge was to ensure the presence of as many public bodies/departments beyond the forest sector at future forums.

Strengthening Capacity

Central to the FGF process is the subject of capacity building in knowledge: empowering individuals by 'filling in gaps in knowledge' to make informed choices. In one example, a CSO participant from DRC asserted that, *'the information obtained on the community forest management especially in royalties challenged us to propose management mechanisms that would help communities living [near timber logging sites] and bring development in communities' environments.'* Respondents spoke of how they felt empowered because of access to information, especially regarding timber legality and legal reforms; one Cameroon post graduate student remarked, *'I used all this information to complete my thesis, for which I gained a top mark, as well as in my work since completing my Masters*.' Similarly, a Ghanaian participant stated, '*I even wrote two articles on FLEGT-VPA after this workshop.'*

Such findings strongly highlight that the FGFs have not only successfully achieved an enabling learning environment but have promoted research outputs, feeding into the VPA process for greater awareness. DRC participants have also expressed that FGFs have helped to keep the momentum for VPA processes going in their country: one participant stated that, *'I can take ideas away from the forums and meet with stakeholders back in my country, [DRC], to pressure them to move forward with the VPA.'* Subsequently, this has led to what we have identified as a 'multiplier effect': equipped with new knowledge and confidence, participant's engagement in forestry debates and forums has increased. In consequence, the FGFs have increased the ability of individuals and groups to influence positively issues that affect them and their communities. In this process, it allows participants to become true architects of their future.

Conclusion

The results from this paper paint a complex picture of the factors involved in establishing a "critical mass" of engaged forest governance practitioners. The need of trainees to be integrated into a receptive environment highlights the need for events like the FGFs. The FGFs, meanwhile, point to the need for well-qualified, national experts on forest governance to be at the forefront of efforts to bring a community together.

From an internal perspective, there is strength to the model which has occurred organically and which, in the future, could be further integrated to achieve even greater results. For example, the greater transaction costs in facilitating international exchange on the IFG course could be mitigated through the value that an IFG participant can bring to an event like the FGFs. The FGFs, meanwhile, provide fertile ground for cooperation and collaboration between compatriots and neighbours, without requiring the 6-week investment of attending the UK IFG course.

Externally, there are clear lessons to be learned about the value of capacity building and the value of event facilitation as independent activities. Although both can be effective interventions, they work far better when integrated with one another to create more sustainable, nationally owned forest governance processes. For donors, this might once again highlight the need for greater attention and appropriate resources being committed to promoting synergies between and within programmes. Communication is clearly a central part of this, and should receive appropriate recognition in programme resources and within project resources.