



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**

**A subregional strategy for enhancing
the participation of the civil society
in forestry planning and policy making
process in West Africa**

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Required citation:

FAO. 2015. A Sub-regional strategy for enhancing the participation of the Civil Society in forestry planning and policy making process in West Africa. Accra, FAO.

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ISBN 978-92-5-108947-7

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List of tables, figures and boxes	iv
Tables	iv
Figures	iv
Boxes	iv
Acronyms and abbreviations	v
Acknowledgment	vi

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1	The need for pluralism in forest sector development in West Africa	8
1.2	The structure of civil society	9
1.3	Linking the strategy to ECOWAS's goals and FAO's organizational work	9

CHAPTER 2: FORESTS AND FOREST PLANNING AND POLICY PROCESSES IN WEST AFRICA

2.1	Brief review of forests and forest resources in West Africa	11
2.2	Forest planning and policy development in West Africa	11
2.2.1	The concept of policy cycles	12
2.2.2	Trend in forest planning and policy processes in West Africa	13
2.2.3	Challenges in CSOs' engagement with governments	13
2.2.4	Owner of the strategy and driver of its implementation	15
2.3	Stakeholder analysis in the forest sector—the crucial role of CSOs	16

CHAPTER 3: THE SUB-REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING PARTICIPATION OF CSOs IN FOREST POLICY PROCESSES

3.1	Vision of the strategy	21
3.2	Objective	22
3.3	Guiding principles for implementation	22
3.4	Strategic areas of intervention	23

3.4.1	Strategic area 1: Paradigm shift in attitudes	23
3.4.2	Strategic area 2: Human and institutional capacity development	23
3.4.3	Strategic area 3: Sustainable financing for effective civil society action	26
3.4.4	Strategic area 4: Communication and programme information sharing	28
3.4.5	Strategic area 5: Coordination and partnership	29
3.4.6	Strategic area 6: Promoting legal backing/mandate for CSOs intervention	31

CHAPTER 4: IMPLEMENTATION MODALITIES

4.1	Key methodological elements for implementation	33
4.2	Institutional setting and arrangement for implementation	33

BIBLIOGRAPHY	36
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LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES AND BOXES

TABLES

Table 1: Some of the mutual benefits from State-NGO collaboration

Table 2: Some of the mutual benefits from FAO-CSO collaboration

FIGURES

Figure 1: The Policy-making process

Figure 2: Woodfuel production and consumption in Africa by sub-regions

BOXES

Box 1: Some FAO tools for promoting FAO-CSO Partnerships

Box 2: Missed opportunities for non-participation of NGOs in policy formulation

Box 3: Level of NGO's participation in forestry policy decision-making: Views from NGOs in selected West African countries.

Box 4: Major constraints highlighted by NGOs to their effective participation and performance..

Box 5: Improvement in the NFP Process in Africa through multi-stakeholder participation: Examples from selected countries

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CBOs	Community-Based Organizations
CS	Civil Society
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DPs	Development Partners
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
EC/FLEGT/VPA	European Commission/Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade/ Voluntary Partnership Agreement
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EC-INCO	European Commission-International Cooperation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FAORAF	FAO Regional Office for Africa
FAO-SFW	FAO Sub-Regional Office for West Africa
FAO-UN	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FORIG	Forestry Research Institute of Ghana
FRA	Forest Resource Assessment
GGAOF	Governor General for Francophone West Africa
ITTO	International Tropical Timber Organization
MNSC	Multi-Stakeholder National Steering Committee
NFP	National Forest Programme
NFPF	National Forest Programmes Facility
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NTFP	Non Timber Forest Product
REDD+	Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) and Conservation, Sustainable Management of Forests and Enhancement of Forest Carbon Stocks.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This document was prepared collaboratively within the FAORAF West Africa Team with a focus on the forestry sector. It is the product of a series of sub-regional consultations with forest-related civil society organizations in a selected number of countries in West Africa (Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal).

The lead author, Atse M. Yapi, Consultant on Forestry and Natural Resources Policies, within the FAORAF West Africa Team, is responsible for the publication in its present form. We would like to thank all the civil society organizations which participated in the consultations and graciously shared their views and perspectives which greatly contributed to this Sub Regional Strategy for Enhancing the Participation of the Civil Society in Forest Planning and Policy Making Process in West Africa.

A Special acknowledgment goes to Mr. Fernando Salinas, Senior Forestry Officer, and Leader of the FAORAF West Africa Team, for his able supervision and technical advice at each and every steps of the process that led to the development of the document.

A special acknowledgment also goes to Mr. Fred Kafeero, Forestry Officer (Forest Economy, Policies and Products Division) from the FAO Forestry Department in Rome, Italy, for reviewing the text and providing valuable comments and suggestions that brought much clarity and fluidity in the document; and (ii) colleagues at the Office for Partnership, Advocacy and Capacity Development (OPC), for providing key information on FAO tools for promoting FAO-CSO partnerships.

To all those, whose contributions we missed mentioning here, our sincere apology.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 The need for pluralism in forest sector development in West Africa

Forest planning and policy making process in West Africa – and elsewhere in Africa for that matter – has largely been dominated by the State, with very little room for a meaningful participation of civil society. This state of affairs led to a management of forests and forest resources which failed to produce sustainable outcomes. There has been poor governance of forests, alarming deforestation and land degradation, exacerbated by increasing rural poverty and large foreign debts.

As these and other environmental problems strain the West African sub-region, the need for pluralism in forest sector development is gaining momentum. The need to accommodate multiple interests in charting the future of forests is indeed gaining wide recognition, as evidenced by the declarations in favor of sustainable forest management in Agenda 21 and by the many international conventions on forests in which African countries are participating. How to accommodate multiple interests in the forest sector however is the real issue facing Africa's forestry authorities today.

Although there is a growing set of tools and methodologies to reinforce participation of stakeholders in national forest programmes and similar processes, there is a need to approach the issue strategically, thinking regionally and acting nationally and locally. It is in this context that the present study has been commissioned by FAO Sub-regional Office for Africa to prepare a sub-regional strategy for enhancing the participation of civil society actors in forestry planning and policy making processes in West Africa.

1.2 The Structure of Civil Society in West Africa

Civil society in West Africa as elsewhere in the world is perhaps the most diverse stakeholder group. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has a long history of collaboration with Civil Society actors at the local, regional and global levels. As part of its partnership strategy, FAO works closely with a variety of civil society actors, including federations, associations and groups representing farmers, fishers, forest users, herders, indigenous peoples, women and youth to help ensure that the aspirations of the poor, marginalized and hungry are voiced and taken into account in rural development policies and planning processes.

These civil society actors can be grouped in two major categories: Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), which are most often informally constituted but represent the interests of major beneficiaries of FAO's work; and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), which tend to be more formally constituted, non-profit oriented, but provide services or sensitize public opinion and conduct advocacy in areas often of interest to the UN agencies.

1.3 Linking the Sub-regional Strategy to ECOWAS and FAO Goals

This Sub-regional Strategy is a contribution not only to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO/UN) but also to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), since "improving forest planning and policy processes" has been high on the work agenda of both organizations. Nevertheless, the ownership of the Strategy and the driving force for its implementation are laid on ECOWAS and its Forestry Commission.

CHAPTER 2: FORESTS AND FORESTRY PLANNING AND POLICY PROCESSES IN WEST AFRICA

2.1 Brief Review of Forests and Forest Resources in West Africa

According to FAO Global Forest Resource Assessment 2010 (FRA 210) definition and classification of “forest”, Africa has 674.4 million ha of forests, representing 17% of the world’s forests and 23% of Africa’s total land area. Central Africa accounts for 37% of Africa’s forests, while West Africa’s share represents 12%. Looking specifically at West Africa, the sub-region of concern in this study, one sees a striking disparity in forest cover between countries. For example, Guinea Bissau has 60% of its land area under forests, and stands as the most forested country of West Africa; while Niger with only 1% is the least forested. It is estimated that about 1.2 million ha of forests are lost annually in the sub-region, with Nigeria, Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire contributing an immense 62% of this loss.

West Africa’s forests and forest resources contribute tremendously to food security, human nutrition and health of the bulk of its populations. In addition to protecting fragile ecosystems, watersheds, soils, freshwater resources, and agricultural production systems, West Africa’s forests and tree resources constitute the main source of energy, building materials and a safety-net for millions of rural folks.

2.2 Forest Planning and Policy Development in West Africa

Drawing on Tsoai (2009), a conceptual model of policy cycles was presented showing the different policy development phases. The conceptual model of policy cycles was used to analyze the forestry policy-making process in West, highlighting trends from both the colonial and post-independence periods. The main observation is that the planning and policy processes have not changed much in terms of participation.

The process in colonial time was centralized and absolutely under the control of the colonial administration; so was the post-independence process with the colonial master being replaced by the new local administration. It was the obvious failure of that command-and-control system which precipitated the search for accommodating multiple interests in the forest planning and policy processes. Despite of the many declarations and efforts towards decentralization and devolution, the CSOs’ engagement with governments has been challenging in the West African sub-region. Civil society actors continue to be sidelined in forest planning and policymaking processes, creating thus a real missed opportunity for the forest sector in the sub-region.

As indicated earlier, ECOWAS, through its Commission on Forests, is expected to be not only the owner of this sub-regional strategy but also the driver of its implementation.

2.3 Stakeholder Analysis in the Forest Sector—the Crucial Role of CSOs

A simple stakeholder analysis was conducted in the West African forest sector, highlighting the major actors, the possible alliances and oppositional tendencies between the stakeholder groups, their different positions with regard to policy decision center as well as the effects of the policy measures on them.

The crucial role civil society actors ought to play in the forest planning and policy making processes as opposed to their actual level of participation were also discussed. The result of the analysis was a missed opportunity in West Africa for sustainable forest management and good governance through improved policy environment and smooth implementation of policy decisions.

CHAPTER 3: THE SUB-REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING PARTICIPATION OF CSOs IN FOREST PLANNING AND POLICY PROCESSES

3.1 Vision of the Strategy

How to accommodate multiple interests and visions in forestry is perhaps the key challenging task facing Africa today. One possible path to achieving this outcome is through increased participation of civil society actors in the planning and policy making process. The following vision is therefore set for the sub-regional strategy: A West African sub-region where forest governance is improved through accommodation of multiple interests in forest planning and policy development; and where civil society plays a key role in sustainable management of forest and wildlife resources.

3.2 Objectives of the Strategy

The objective of the sub-regional strategy is twofold:

- (i) sustainable management and good governance of West Africa's forests and forest resources through effective participation of civil society in forest sector planning and policy development processes; and
- (ii) Serve as an instrument in the hands of ECOWAS member states for the effective implementation of the decentralization and democratization processes in natural resources management for the benefit of the people and the preservation of the environment in the sub-region as envisioned by the year 2025.

3.3 Strategic Areas of Interventions

The strategy includes six strategic areas of intervention, each of which introduced with a set of specific objectives and identified activities.

Strategic area 1: A need for a paradigm shift in attitudes of key actors in the forest sector:

A change in attitude is required on the part of both government forestry officers, especially district-level decentralized officers; and Civil Society, especially NGOs playing a watchdog role. Members of both groups need to leave their prejudices at the door, suspending thus their critical biases for a more constructive engagement and collaboration. This is a crucial first step in accommodating multiple interests and views in the sustainable development of the forest sector in West Africa. Two specific objectives are considered in this regard:

Promote an environment which encourages fruitful discussions between the State and Civil Society actors:

The following two activities are identified to achieve this objective:

- (i) Create a consultative platform for regular and open discussions between the State, its agencies on the one hand and civil society actors on the other; and
- (ii) Establish National Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committees for major forest planning and/or policy review/formulation exercises in the country. Improve the institutional and legal framework of the decentralization and devolution processes for natural resources management: Activities identified to achieve this objective include:

- (i) Review the legal and institutional frameworks in ECOWAS member countries regarding decentralized management of forests and forest resources, including wildlife resources;
- (ii) Establish a system of check-and-balance in the devolution process whereby transferred responsibilities are clarified and adequately resourced; and
- (iii) Information development and sharing.

Strategic area 2: *Human and institutional*

Capacity Development:

Civil society actors consulted in the course of the present study indicated that their contributions to sustainable forest management and forest planning and policy processes are oftentimes constrained by technical and, most importantly, organizational limitations. Two specific objectives are therefore considered here to bridge the human and institutional capacity gaps:

Improving the human capacity of CBOs, NGOs and local people and communities: The following two activities are identified to achieve this objective:

- (i) Conduct needs assessment for civil society actors in the forest sector; and
- (ii) On the basis of the assessed needs, design a training programme for civil society actors.

Improving the institutional capacity of CBOs, NGOs and village-level associations: Here also need assessment will be conducted on the basis of which relevant institutional capacity development programme will be drafted and followed up on topics such as sound fund-raising strategies, compliance with administrative and programmatic requirements of donor agencies, and dealing judiciously with political pressure without losing independence and integrity.

Strategic area 3: *Sustainable financing for effective participation of civil society*

Sustainable financing is the single factor most commonly identified as constraint to effective participation of Civil Society Actors in forest planning and policy processes. Two specific objectives are pursued in this area:

- ***Resource mobilization strategy development:*** The following activities are identified to achieve this objective:
 - (i) Prepare, in a participatory manner, Civil Society-led draft terms of reference (TORs) for producing national resource mobilization strategies;
 - (ii) Document, analyze and process existing and potential opportunities for internal and external resource mobilizations locally, nationally, sub-regionally and regionally;
 - (iii) Train civil society actors and organizations on resource mobilization strategies, including proposal writing targeting funding opportunities available internally and externally;

- (iv) Develop information and communication strategies for engaging civil society actors and organizations in the international debate on forests with specific attention to resource mobilization opportunities/sources;
- **Advocacy and lobbying for donors and national governments to offer enabling grants to promote civil society participation:** The following activities are identified to achieve this objective:
 - (i) Match Civil Society actors' programme interests and philosophy with that of a potential donor;
 - (ii) Develop programmes and project proposals that address issues and development concerns of the rural poor; and submit them to targeted partners;
 - (iii) Rethink the funding of Civil Society actors through public budget allocation; Funding sources information sharing strategy: The following activities are identified to achieve this objective:
 - (i) Create interest-specific databases on internal and external funding sources for Civil Society actors in ECOWAS member countries;
 - (ii) Produce targeted briefing notes from the database on funding for Civil Society actors;
 - (iii) Forge a networking mode among like-minded Civil Society actors for sharing insights, pooling resources where applicable and cooperating in resource mobilization activities;

Strategic area 4: Communication and programme information sharing:

A key factor in solving informational communication issues for good governance of forests and forest resources is the ability of Civil Society actors to interact within the non-profit sphere and also with relevant government and donor agencies, and other relevant stakeholder groups, including local people and their organizations. The following specific objectives are pursued in this regard:

Promoting communication among key stakeholder groups: Activities identified for this are:

- (i) Establish communication platforms such as forest forums and national steering committees;
- (ii) Establish special platform for Civil Society-Government communication and collaboration.
- **Civil Society-Government joint communication strategy development:** The following key activities could be envisaged in developing this joint communication strategy:
 - (i) Promote the participation of Civil Society actors in government-led forest policy processes;
 - (ii) Package participatory forest policy messages that needs to be communicated;
 - (iii) Strengthen the communication and financial capacities of Civil Society actors;
 - (iv) Organize workshops on dialoguing and communication.

Strategic area 5: Coordination and partnership:

Sustainable forest management requires strict coordinated actions and interventions in partnership between stakeholders, especially government and civil society organizations (CSOs). Yet in most West African countries, the current state of affairs is that the State and CSOs largely keep their distance from each other and typically organize and run their projects and programmes in parallel. A meaningful coordination and collaboration between the two could be more productive and mutually beneficial. This could be organized around the objective of institutionalizing state-CSO collaboration:

- ***Institutionalizing State-CSO Partnership:*** Two activities are identified to drive this home:

The following activities are identified to drive this objective home:

- (i) Establish a CSO Coordinating Body to serve as a focal point in the state-CSO collaboration;
 - (ii) Foster a policy environment conducive to fruitful collaboration;
 - (iii) Establish a common framework for monitoring, reporting and verification of the effectiveness of the operation of the partnership; and the quality and usefulness of the CSOs' contributions;
 - (iv) Address CSOs' long-term funding issue either through government budget allocations or donor/development partners' sustainable contributions;
 - (v) Promote CSO-Development Partners' collaborations.
- Strategic area 6: Provision of official mandate and legal backing for the action of CSOs Lack of official mandate—that is the informal manner in which provision for CSOs and community participation in forest planning, governance and policy decision-making is done—is a key obstacle to civil society involvement in policy development process alongside local people and their organizations.

The following activities could be useful in promoting legal backing/mandate for CSOs interventions in ECOWAS member countries:

- (i) CSOs must make efforts to show goodwill in participating in official development programmes;
- (ii) Improve government's commitment to poverty reduction and participatory development;
- (iii) Take measures to curb the rapid ascension of "bogus" CSOs; and
- (iv) Entering into Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and agreements to legitimize the roles played by CSOs clarifying expectations, dos and don'ts.

CHAPTER 4: MODALITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The modalities for implementing the Strategy were set in line with the working modalities of ECOWAS and include key methodological elements as well as institutional settings.

4.1 Key methodological elements for implementation

The methodological elements include: integration, participatory approach, locally-centered development, and sustainability of actions and available resources.

4.2 Institutional setting and arrangements for implementation

As for the institutional setting and arrangements proposed, they do not require the establishment of new institutions, but only a redistribution of responsibilities over the existing institutions at local, national and sub-regional levels.

The exception may be the CSOs Coordinating Body, which may need to be created in countries where such body does not exist.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Need for Pluralism in Forest Sector Development in West Africa

Forestry in general and in particular the analysis, formulation and implementation of forest policies and planning in West Africa – and in most parts of Africa for that matter – has largely been dominated by the State, with very little room for a meaningful participation of civil society. Indeed in most West African countries, forests are said to belong de facto to the State; and even in cases where people's ownership is increasingly recognized, forests and forest resources are still held in trust by the State and kept exclusively under state management, with only use-fruit right accorded to local people and communities most dependent on forest resources and most affected by forest policy and planning decisions and legislative measures.

This state of affairs in the management of forests and forest resources failed to produce sustainable outcomes. For example, in the 1960s, the newly independent nations of Africa thought they could rely on the many backward and forward linkages of forestry for a vibrant forest-based industrialization, which would help to build domestically solid capital bases for economic development. Logging activities were intensified through incentive-compatible forest concession fees and fiscal policies which largely laid focus on timber in managing the forest; and many forest-based industries were established mostly in the humid zone of the sub-region.

By the 1980s, however, the great hope started fading away. Today, it is evident that the forest industrialization efforts failed to produce the expected capital base, and there have been alarming deforestation and land degradation exacerbated by increasing rural poverty and large foreign debts. As these and other environmental problems strain the West African sub-region, society is increasingly looking at civil society actors' participation in forest planning and policy making processes as a viable option for improved forest governance and stewardship.

The need to accommodate multiple interests in charting the future of forests is now widely recognized, as evidenced by the declarations in favor of sustainable forest management in Agenda 21 and by the many international conventions on forests in which African countries are participating. The real issue facing Africa's forestry today is therefore not whether multiple interests need to be accommodated in forestry, but how. Indeed accommodating multiple interests in forestry and rural development is a complex issue defying simple, one-size-for-all solutions.

Although there is a growing set of tools and methodologies to reinforce participation of stakeholders in national forest programmes and similar processes, there is a need to approach the issue strategically, thinking regionally and acting nationally and locally.

It is in this context that the FAO Sub-regional Office for West Africa (FAO-SFW) commissioned this report to prepare a sub-regional strategy for enhancing the participation of civil society actors in forestry planning and policy making processes in West Africa. Enhancing the participation of civil society is more likely to enhance the participation of local communities and marginalized groups in rural areas; this idea is increasingly shared by development partners, the donors' community, as well as national and local governments.

Section 1.3 below will specify the institutional arrangement for the use of the Strategy in the West African sub-region.

¹ The next section will characterize Civil Society in relation to FAO's long history of collaborating with Civil Society actors at the local, regional and global levels.

1.2 The Structure of Civil Society

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has a long history of collaboration with Civil Society actors at the local, regional and global levels. As part of its partnership strategy, FAO works closely with a variety of civil society actors, including federations, associations and groups representing farmers, fishers, forest users, herders, indigenous peoples, women and youth to help ensure that the aspirations of the poor, marginalized and hungry are voiced and taken into account in rural development policies and planning processes. These civil society actors can be grouped in two major categories:

Community-based organizations (CBOs): These organizations group people of a specific sector of the population who share common interests and come together to strengthen their capacity to make their voices heard at institutional/national/international levels. CBOs are most often informally constituted and include farmers' associations and cooperatives, fishers, forest dwellers and users, indigenous peoples, youth and women's groups and their organizations, among others. They however represent the interests of major beneficiaries of FAO's work.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs): Non-governmental organizations are formally constituted, not-for-profit organizations that provide services or sensitize public opinion and conduct advocacy in areas often of immediate relevance to the UN system. NGOs are well known for providing technical support to community-based/national/international projects as well as mobilizing resources.

Although it is impossible to describe completely the great variety of civil society actors and their organizational models, FAO makes some general categorization of its different partner NGOs and CSOs by distinguishing them based on technical areas of interest and competence (e.g. sustainable agriculture, gender, environment), functional areas of activities (e.g. policy-making, advocacy) and/or organizational mechanisms (e.g. membership based, international/regional/local, rural/urban). Constituencies nevertheless very often overlap among the different groups. Members of a women association for instance, may also belong to a farmers' group. NGOs often focus on specific themes and run powerful advocacy activities. These NGOs and CBOs partner with FAO for a variety of purposes; and this must be taken into consideration when planning a meaningful collaboration with civil society.

1.3 Linking the Strategy to ECOWAS's Goals and FAO's Organizational Work

Improving the forest planning and policy environment has been high on the work agenda of both the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO-UN). To this end, ECOWAS in collaboration with FAO spearheaded a long participatory process which involved the fifteen West African countries and led to the development of the Convergence Plan for the Sustainable Management and Utilization of Forest Ecosystems in West Africa. This plan was scheduled and adopted by the ECOWAS Ministers in charge of forests and wildlife during a meeting in Abidjan in mid-September 2013.

The overall objective of the Convergence Plan is to curtail the continuing trend of forest and forest resources loss in West Africa by strengthening intra sub-regional cooperation in the area of forestry and wildlife and mobilizing political, institutional, financial and technical resources to support implementation. Also highlighted prominently in the Plan are: (i) the need to harness the potential of forests to improve food security; (ii) poverty reduction based on forest resources judicious utilization; (iii) the appropriate commercialization and integration of forests resources into the sub-regional economic development; (iv) private sector involvement in forest management; (v) the promotion of agriculture in the degraded woodlands; (vi) the protection of the environment and its rich bio-diversity; (vii) drought and desertification control through soil and water conservation; and (viii) animal grazing and forests fire control for the protection of the Sahel forest ecosystem.

The Plan also offers a variety of implementation strategies such as the harmonization of forest and fiscal policies, forest resource assessment, governance sustainable management of forests and their bio-diversity, combating desertification and soil degradation, integration of forestry and land use planning with watershed management, forest industry and trade, forest research training and extension, mechanism for financing forestry and regional cooperation and partnerships.

Enhancing civil society participation in forest planning and policy making processes will contribute not only to the smooth implementation of the ECOWAS Convergence Plan; but also to the achievement of FAO's strategic objectives, particularly SO2 (Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner) and SO4 (Enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national and international levels). CSO participation and partnership is paramount in FAO programme of actions. Box 1 below highlights some of the tools within FAO to enrich its engagement with CSO. The overall institutional arrangement for the utilization of the Strategy however is expected to be channeled through ECOWAS as part of the implementation of the Forestry Convergence Plan of West Africa

Box 1:

Some FAO Tools for Promoting FAO-CSO Partnerships

FAO takes very seriously the importance of CSO participation and partnership in development. To enable this, FAO adopted a strategy that includes the establishment of a Civil Society Team within its Office for Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity Development. The following are few of the numerous tools developed but FAO to guide and promote its FAO-CSO Participation Strategy:

1. FAO Strategy for partnerships with CSO
2. Handbook for FAO staff on how to develop partnerships between FAO and CSO – this provides information on criteria for cross-cutting selection of CSO, on policy dialogue, on normative activities, knowledge sharing and capacity development and on joint use of resources.
3. Guidelines for ensuring balanced representation of CSO in FAO meetings and processes
4. Technical guidance for involving non-state actors in the country programming frame work (CPF).
5. Guidelines for CSO participation in FAO Regional Conferences.

The above documents are available and could be downloaded from the FAO web site: <http://www.fao.org/partnerships/civil-society/useful/en/>

CHAPTER 2: FORESTS AND FOREST PLANNING AND POLICY PROCESSES IN WEST AFRICA

2.1 Brief Review of Forests and Forest Resources in West Africa

Africa is well endowed with both variety and abundance of biodiversity, and its forests and trees resources play important roles socially, economically, and ecologically. Indeed using FAO FRA 2010 definition of “forests”, Africa has 674.4 million ha of forests, representing 17% of the world’s forests and 23% of Africa’s total land area. Central Africa accounts for 37% of Africa’s forests, followed by Southern Africa (29%), West Africa (12%); while East and North Africa have 11% each.

It has been extensively documented that in addition to protecting fragile ecosystems, watersheds, soils, freshwater resources, and agricultural production systems, Africa’s forests and tree resources constitute the main source of energy, important foreign exchange and livelihood earnings, building materials and a safety-net for millions of rural folks. Africa’s forests and forest resources also contribute tremendously to food security, human nutrition and health of the bulk of Africa’s populations. However, deforestation and forest degradation occur in the continent at an alarming rate. For example, between 2000 and 2010, Africa experienced an annual loss of nearly 3.4 million hectares of its forest area (i.e. about 0.49 %) (FAO, 2011).

Looking specifically at West Africa, which is the sub-region of concern in this study, the disparity in forest cover between countries is quite striking. For example, Guinea Bissau has 60% of its land area under forests, and stands as the most forested country of West Africa; while Niger with only 1% is the least forested. It is estimated that about 1.2 million ha of forests are lost annually in the sub-region, with Nigeria, Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire contributing an immense 62% of this loss (FAO, 2011). The dry-land forests of West Africa are depleted at an annual average rate of 0.7% while that of the humid zone stands at 2.0%.

Loss of biodiversity, increase in erosion rates, reduction of water quality and quantity, loss of wildlife and livelihoods have been identified as the key negative impacts of deforestation in the sub-region (FAO, 2011). Key drivers of forests depletion in the sub-region include: rapidly growing urban demand for fuelwood and increasing demand for agricultural land; quite different from main drivers in other sub-regions. Other factors often mentioned to be fuelling deforestation in West Africa — and Africa for that matter— include: population pressures; internal social and political forces; access to markets, requiring roads and capital; the recent “land grab” factor linked to the globalization phenomenon; and inequitable distribution of wealth and power, as well as corruption in the management of natural resources.

In West Africa, a sub-region where the bulk of the population derives its livelihoods from forests and forest resources, deforestation and forest degradation constitute a worrisome phenomenon. Governments have identified poor governance and illegal practices in the forest sector as the issues to be addressed in dealing with the forest loss and degradation problem. Forest policies and regulatory measures have been taken to deal with the problem, but with limited degrees of success in the sub-region. Enhancing civil society organizations’ participation has been emphasized in recent years as a viable option for improving forest governance and achieving sustainable forest management; but the outcomes so far fall short of the expected results. The problem may not be with the participatory option; but with its application in the forest planning and policy making processes. There is a need to look into the issue more critically and identify ways and means for promoting better participation of Civil Society Organizations in the sustainable development of the forest sector in the West African sub-region.

² The FAO Global Forest Resource Assessment 2010 (FRA 2010) defines “forest” as “land, panning more than 0.5 hectares, with trees higher than 5 meters and a canopy cover of more than 10 percent, or trees able to reach these thresholds in situ. It does not include land that is predominantly under agricultural or urban land use”.

³In Central Africa, with low population densities, forest loss is mainly due to improved accessibility, marketability of hitherto low-commercial-value forest products and clearance for commercial agriculture; in Southern Africa, deforestation is driven mainly by the profit to be gained from legal and illegal conversion of forests to alternative land uses. In Tanzania, Namibia and Botswana, for example, most cleared forest has been converted to pastureland to satisfy an increasing demand for meat and dairy products; while in East Africa deforestation and land degradation drivers as similar to those in West Africa.

2.2 Forest Planning and Policy Development in West Africa

2.2.1 The Concept of Policy Cycles

The concept of policy cycles offers a useful approach in determining the way development and implementation of forest plans, policies and laws are organized. The concept helps identify the critical paths of intervention in solving particular political problems through new or improved plans, policies and legislation (Howlett and Ramesh, 1995). It is based on the understanding that policy development process follows defined stages, with specific outputs at each stage, and strong forward and backward linkages between the stages. Figure 1 below illustrates the public policy-making process involving six typical policy stages based on a conceptual model of the public policy process suggested by Tsoai (2009).

These stages include: (i) the problem identification stage; (ii) the agenda setting stage; (iii) the policy formulation stage; (iv) the decision-making or policy adoption stage; (v) the policy implementation stage: and (vi) the policy monitoring and evaluation stage.

These stages are described below:

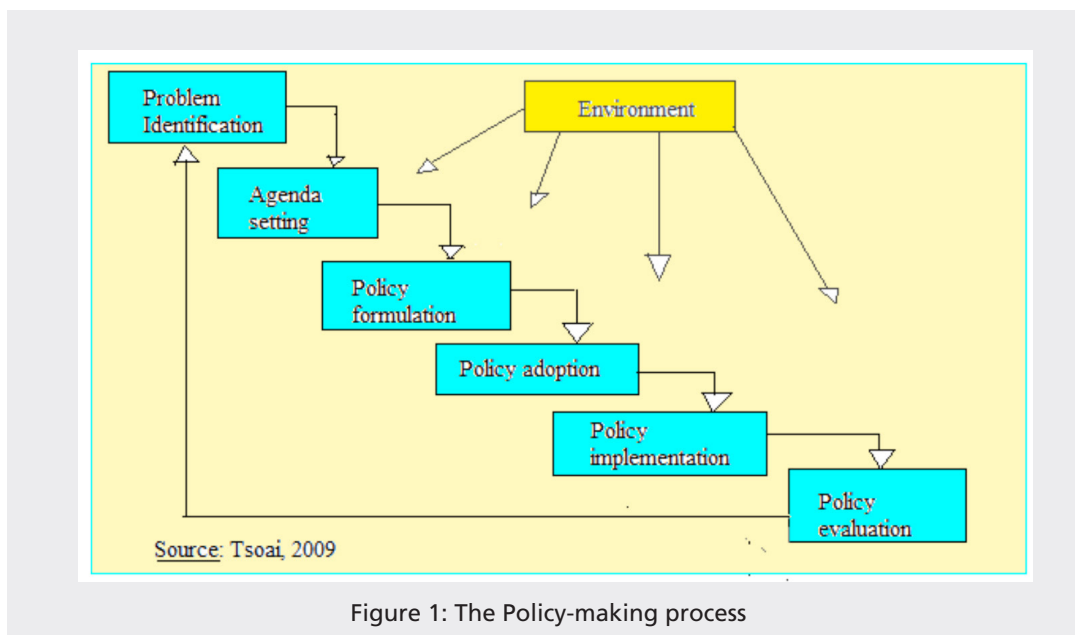


Figure 1: The Policy-making process

The *problem identification stage* is the starting stage, where the intention of the government is made known in terms of the identification of problems of public interest which need to be brought into the national agenda of government. The *agenda setting stage* is the second stage where the identified problems are analyzed and goals and objectives to be achieved declared. The third policy stage is the *policy formulation stage* where proposals for acceptable political solutions to the problems are developed and means for achieving the set agenda goals are stated based on a compilation of information, formal and informal discussions between stakeholders and interest groups, and negotiations that seek consensus leading to draft legislation, plans and programmes. The fourth policy development stage is the decision-making or policy adoption stage where the choice among proposed feasible solutions to the identified problems is made to be formally approved by parliaments, governments, and public administrations. It is at this stage that instruments in the form of laws, budgets or international treaties adopted by parliament; parliamentary and governmental decrees and regulations; and administrative decisions, rules and procedures, are made firm to set the stage for implementation of the policy. The *Policy implementation stage* is the fifth stage in the policy development process. This is the stage, where

the adopted plans, programmes, laws, and regulations are put into effect. The implementation process requires individual decisions, as well as procedural rules and regulations (outputs) from implementing public agencies. The actual policy result (outcome), i.e. the real outputs and effects of the changes, depends on the willingness or resistance of target groups to modify their behavior. Of interest are, for instance, the outcomes of forest and other public policies that have impacts on the state and development of forests. Important effects to be observed are, for instance, the change in the size and distribution of forest land, the variety of flora and fauna, and the economic and social sustainability of forestry practices. The sixth and final stage is *monitoring and evaluation stage* that allows for the assessment of the impacts of public policies and laws and the contributions that they have made in order to solve existing societal problems. Depending on positive and negative effects and on the nature of a given political problem, a policy programme may be terminated. New or additional political initiatives and incremental steps for revised and new legislation will lead to *new sequences of policy stages*.

The policy-making process in which these policy development stages evolve displays a cyclic nature, such that in case the final outcome is not consistent with set goals, the cycle begins again at the problem identification stage. The policy-making process is influenced by the policy environment, including the prevailing social bargaining environment, economic and ecological factors, and cultural, religious and international norms. Effective policy-making therefore is presented in the literature to be understood as one which is (i) properly anchored in a prevailing socio-economic bargaining environment; (ii) democratically arrived at and in which the leading players in society are involved; and (iii) able to deliver a stable and internally coherent political-administrative framework that would enable elected officials and managerial officers of the state and concerned leading players in society to pursue the broad objectives that it is designed to tackle (Olukoshi, 2000; ECA, 2003).

Policy failure therefore may come from ignoring/minimizing some important elements of the policy environment within which the policy-making process takes place. For example, policies may fail (and they do quite often) not because they get the wrong solution to the right problems but because they target the wrong problems due to wrongly reading the policy environment. For this reason therefore, Oluba (2010) suggests that the evaluation of the appropriateness of policy should be based on the following three “environmental” criteria: (a) An underlying theoretical soundness and logical consistency that will demonstrate how the policy will on a sustainable basis prevent “public bads” and provide “public goods” as well as correct emerging negative externalities, (b) Contextual relevance of the policy, and (c) Policy design process that is clearly supported by law which in a way determines what is good or bad for the public.

2.2.2 Trend in forest planning and policy processes in West Africa

In West Africa, as elsewhere in Africa, Governments have, and rightfully so, played the lead role in public policy making processes, including forestry planning and policy development. Historically, forest sector planning and policy development processes in the sub-region have been top-down exercises, completely dominated by governments and external funding partners, with little solicitation or tolerance of input from civil society. The trend has evolved quite significantly over the years from the colonial to the post-colonial periods, with the democratization process taking roots in West Africa and also as a result of recommendations from the international debate on forests and conventions on the environment and sustainable forest management. Following independence around the 1960s, the top-down approach in forest-planning and policy making processes continued, with governments of the newly independent states replacing the colonial administration. A century of centralized forestry policies making inherited from the colonial administration was so strongly established that it could not be changed overnight. The 1935 forestry code in most Francophone West African countries remained in force until the 1980s (Ribot, 2001); so was the 1948 forest policy in most Anglophone West Africa (Teye, 2011).

Ribot (2001) noted that in most Sahelian French West Africa, local (communities) input into forest management plans is only through advisory bodies that have no decision-making powers. In other Sahelian countries, ‘participatory committees’ that do not represent the community or local authorities speak on behalf of the local populations (Agrawal and Ribot 1999). Like the councils of the colonial period, the role of these bodies is just to inform a planning process over which they have no determining control.

In the humid zone of West Africa, forest laws and policies in the 60s and 70s were not only centralized but highly in favor of timber production and export, with timid provisions for some domestic transformations of timber. Indeed the newly independent timber-rich countries thought they could in so doing develop internally their capital bases for economic development. By the early 80s, however, signs of disillusion began to show as the expected capital bases failed to materialize, but instead a rampant deforestation and environmental degradation set in.

From the late 1980s onwards, dissatisfied with the state of their forests, many of these countries rewrote their forestry laws, relabeling their approach as “participatory” and “community-based”, but barely changing the fundamental concentration of power in the hands of the states. In recent years however, decentralization of forest management has become a favored policy initiative in the sub-region, with the belief that the participation of CSOs and local people in the forest planning and policy making processes will improve forest use and management efficiency; reduce conflicts and illegal activities around forest resources; and propel the forest sector onto the path of sustainability with equity and rural livelihood improvement. Today however, the assessment of the impact of this new trend is not encouraging because of a number of key constraints which stubbornly stand on the way.

2.2.3 Challenges in CSOs’ engagement with governments

Despite of the declarations and efforts towards decentralization and devolution of some key responsibilities to local people and communities, deforestation and illegal practices in the West African forestry sector are still standing as a major challenge for sustainable forest management. The participatory initiatives, projects and laws undertaken in the countries in most cases have not lived up to expectations, civil society actors continue to be sidelined in the major stages of the policy making process. The CSOs interviewed in the course of this study unanimously indicated that their participation into the policy making process has been very minimal throughout all the stages of the process. They indicated that they have never been associated with problems identification exercise, or any exercise related to policy agenda setting, formulation or adoption. The only stage of the policy development process where CSOs are increasingly called upon to participate is the implementation stage. Even at this level they highlighted the following two critical challenges to their performance: (i) they feel they are called to help implement policy measures which were developed without their knowledge and contribution. They complain that they are unfairly charged with disseminating policy measures which they themselves weren’t familiar with; and (ii) they stated that important tasks have been handed over to them without adequately transferring also the means for satisfactory and timely implementation. They feel like they are being used without any adequate compensation, thus pushing many of them to exit the CSO sphere for lack of incentive to survive and keep up contributing voluntarily.

Regarding the missed opportunities linked to the improper participation of CSOs in the policy development process, NGOs participating in this study revealed a number of important concerns, which are presented in Box 2 below.

Box 2: Inadequate participation of CSOs in forest policy making processes — A missed opportunity

CSOs stated that management systems of today are rooted in a paternalistic and technocratic attitude. Villagers and their associations are all too often seen as land-hungry peasants, lacking the 'capacity' to make technical decisions over the use of forests, which forestry agents believe would be destroyed if not constrained by rules and regulations. CSOs also question some of the scientific bases for forest management.

They argue for example that management plans and tight controls on subsistence forest uses are, for the most part, not necessary for environmental maintenance. This seems to be supported by many studies which show that natural regeneration even in the Sahel is remarkably robust; that the scientific rotation of plots for cutting on 20-year cycles – required in most management plans – is not needed in an environment where natural regeneration takes place on its own. Certainly applying some management techniques can foster regeneration in rural areas, but in an environment where the forest has been cut and grown back many times over the centuries, cutting for wood-fuel does not lead to permanent deforestation. Ribot (1999) agreed and stated that "Systematic management can augment production, but is not needed to 'save' the forest from local use".

Another area of inconsistency in forest policy and planning is the design of elaborated plans for managing local forest use (wood-fuel production for example); plans which simultaneously spell out the use rights of local populations and new labor obligations if they exercise these rights. Rural populations are allowed to participate in production under such plans, but they must manage burdensome forest rotations and regeneration-protection schemes in much of French West Africa. This is based on the argument that such management is a 'scientific' necessity (Ribot).

Enhancing CSOs' participation in problem identification and agenda setting could thus help include in the national agenda, the research needs of rural people and their communities (Yapi, 1999)

2.2.4 Owner of the strategy and driver of its implementation

The ownership of the strategy and the institutional arrangement for driving its implementation are expected to rest on ECOWAS Commission on Forests. The sub-regional strategy should be viewed as an enabling instrument at the disposal of ECOWAS that contribute not only to widening the on-going dialogue on forests in the ECOWAS region, but also to smooth out the implementation of ECOWAS' newly adopted forests convergence plan. The methodological elements and institutional modalities for implementation of the sub-regional strategy are set in the final chapter, including the responsibilities at local/community, national and sub-regional levels.

2.3 Stakeholder Analysis in the Forest Sector—the Crucial Role of CSOs

The visualization of actors involved in the question of access to forest benefits (directly or indirectly) reveals, from one geographical area to another in the West African sub-region, a number of key stakeholder groups connected by a set of strategic, social, financial and political stakes. These stakeholders include: the state/government agencies; municipalities; logging companies/private sector; village/local communities; Civil Society/environmental NGOs; forest scientists (academia and research Institutes) and development partners. These groups are by no means homogeneous entities within themselves; nevertheless, for the sake of analysis, we will assume they are; and focus on their different general interests, objectives and roles in the forest policy making processes; as well as the degrees of association between groups.

The state/government and its administrative and technical agents: As indicated earlier, governments rightly have the lead role in natural resource planning and policy making process in West Africa as elsewhere in Africa. From problem identification, agenda setting, policy formulation, adoption, implementation to monitoring and evaluation,

governments have played the lead role historically and today. Forest policies and laws have put all forests and tree resources under the control of the State, with use rights given to local people. Timber took the central stage in forest exploitation for export. Governments have largely treated forests and forest resources as important assets for building internally capital bases for economic development. This has been more pronounced in the early years after independence in the 1960's when the forest resources were abundant, and the need for economic development was so urgent.

In a continent where economic development is a driving force in state actions; where poverty is a defining characteristic, and where the bulk of the populations derives their livelihoods from natural resources, the role of the government, as the lead policy decision-maker, is not only important and difficult, but also crucial for the welfare of millions of people in the rural areas. Governments are most influential in forest planning and policy making processes but in most cases they are least affected by the negative effects of these policy decisions.

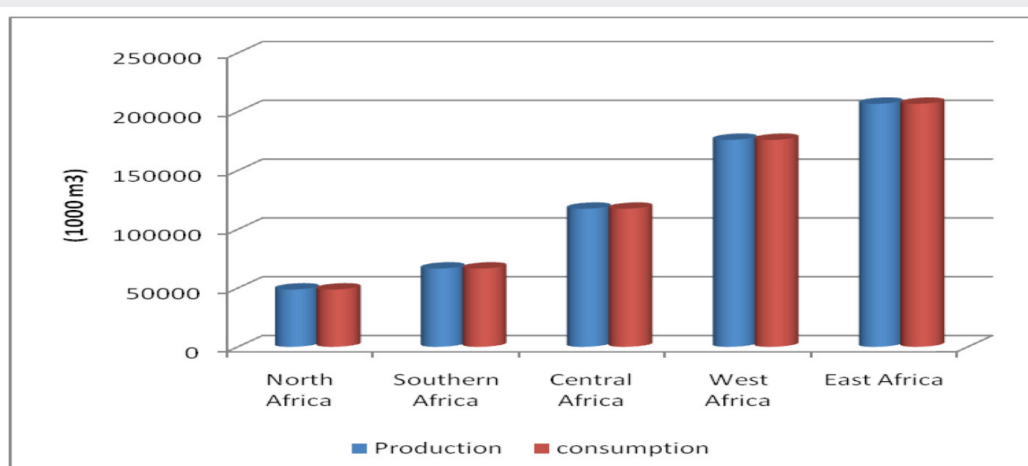
With the increasing loss of forests and the dwindling of forest resources in West Africa, due mainly to the rapidly growing urban demand for wood-energy and the increasing demand for agricultural land, governments are finding it extremely difficult to single-handedly arrest deforestation, land degradation, and all the associated woes (e.g., soil erosion, desertification, climate change, diminishing agricultural productivity and loss of rural livelihoods opportunities). They are therefore more and more willing to embrace pluralism and build partnerships with private sector and civil society actors in natural resource management and policy making processes. This requires a fundamental paradigm shift from a century of centralized forestry policy making process to a more collaborative, participatory approach. How to successfully make this transition is perhaps the greatest challenge facing West Africa's national forestry authorities today.

Private sector actors: Private sector actors constitute an important stakeholder group in the forest sector. This group is quite diverse and includes logging companies; firewood and charcoal producers and traders; non-timber forest products producers and traders; commercial tree growers; and all those involved in value-addition to forest products.

The importance of these components of the private sector stakeholder group depends on the forest ecosystem they operate in. For example, in the Upper Guinean Forest Ecosystem extending from Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, to Nigeria, logging and wood processing companies seem to be highly valued and given direct access to forest benefits through forest concession allocations than the other private sector stakeholders. This is because of their capacity to finance forest exploitation and pay taxes and fees to the State. They are therefore natural associates to the government. With this association, logging companies tend to have little accountability towards local people and communities who in turn do not trust them or the government who provides the legal backing to logging activities. In the Sahelian zone, fuelwood producers and traders as well as non-timber forest products producers and traders seem to be more important in terms of access to forest benefits.

Their activities however fall mostly in the informal sector, making it hard for the government to collect related revenues and taxes. Unlike loggers, the activities of wood-fuel producers do not involve removal of big industrial trees; but constitute a key factor of deforestation and forest degradation in West Africa (See figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Wood-fuel production and consumption in Africa by sub-regions



Source: produced using data from FAO publication "The state of world's forests 2011".

Forest Scientists (Academia and Research Institutes): Forest scientists have developed a science of forest exploitation and conservation; and have provided a stream of forestry professionals to both government and forest industry. Applying these forestry and wood processing technologies, forest industries generate jobs, capital and products which are highly valued in government development agenda. Therefore, a high degree of association exists between government, industry and forest scientists. Indeed, in most West African countries, forest scientists and their institutions receive funding mainly from governments, Development Partners, and international research or development organizations (e.g., ITTO, FAO, UNDP, CIFOR, etc.). Consequently, the research agendas of forest research institutions in most West African countries are highly oriented toward industrial wood planting and processing technologies, with little regard to the research needs of local farmers and forest dwellers (Yapi, 1999). More recently, however, as concerns over democratization, pluralism and the need to accommodate multiple interests and visions in forestry governance intensified, a new and more accommodating approach to research agenda setting started to emerge in the West Africa sub-region. The Forestry Research Institute of Ghana (FORIG) for example has adopted a yearly research agenda development consultative platform which welcomes active participation of civil society organizations, including farmers' organizations. This positive trend is to be encouraged and promoted throughout the sub-region.

Municipalities: Municipalities, as decentralized government extension entities, are least affected by forest policy decisions but influential in making forest decisions and laws. They are also high on the list of those stakeholder groups benefiting from forest resources exploitation. They play the dual role of serving as a vector for disseminating public policy decisions and legislative measures; and also as a defender of the interests of local people and their communities. They oftentimes initiate forest gate taxes which legitimate a certain over-exploitation of forests for the provision of wood energy, especially charcoal destined to urban dwellers.

Like the State, municipalities are also faced with the challenge of finding appropriate ways to accommodate multiple interests and visions in forestry. Their likely associations are government, Logging companies, and local communities.

Village/local communities: The "Village/local communities" is the stakeholder group most affected by forest policy decisions but least influential in the policy making process. The century of centralized forest governance has

driven this stakeholder group into mistrust toward Government (and its most associated stakeholder groups such as municipalities, and logging companies) that have limited their access to forest benefits only to use rights and non-timber forest products (NTFP). The degree of association of the “Village/local communities” is naturally high with Civil Society Organizations/non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which they tend to look at as partner and trusted allied given the NGOs’ reputation as non-profit organizations working for the promotion of the livelihoods of the poor rural people and communities. The vision of the “Village/local communities” stakeholder group could be summarized as follows: Forests undisturbed by intensive logging activities and which will continue to provide them with non-timber forests products and services to their generation and the generations to come. With the democratization process that is gaining momentum in the sub-region, and the push from Development Partners (DPs) for governments to adopt pluralism and accommodate multiple interests and visions in forestry, governments will likely have no choice but to find appropriate ways to promote the participation of “Village/local communities” in forestry planning and policy making processes. Reinforcing CSOs’ institutional capacity and promoting their effective participation into the forestry planning and policy making processes could be a good entry point for promoting sustainably the participation of the “Village/local communities” stakeholder group.

Development partners: Development partners (DPs), including international aid agencies and multilateral banks, are external key actors which have important direct and indirect impacts and interests in the forestry sector. Their interests in the forestry sector could be best looked at as that of the international community, interested in (i) the improvement of the livelihoods of the poor and marginalized people or communities in rural areas, most affected by forest planning and policy decisions and the depletion of forest resources; and (ii) the value of the forests as crucial sink for carbon sequestration for climate change regulation for the benefit of planet earth as a whole. In this context, the degree of association of DPs tends to favor Civil Society’s /Environmental NGOs’ participation in the forestry planning and policy processes in order to accommodate multiple interests and visions in forestry. They also encourage, through technical and financial supports, governments to take this route. In most West African countries, DPs have organized themselves into thematic donors groups, with a lead agency for each group. This provides an opportunity that could be useful in resource mobilization strategies.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): This group of stakeholders is the most heterogeneous group in the forest sector; and their diversity makes the analysis of their relationships with other stakeholder groups complex. Nevertheless, CSOs can roughly be grouped into two categories: Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) on one hand and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) on the other. Generally NGOs are the most formally organized form of CSO and are non-profit and voluntary in nature. They also generally share a common zeal for addressing developmental issues —touching the livelihoods of the poor and marginalized in rural areas— that have not been adequately addressed by other societal institutions. This makes them potentially creative contributors to the search for solutions to important problems in the forest sector (Brown and Korten, 1991). Analyzing the increasingly important role of CSOs in general, and NGOs in particular, in shaping forestry policies and programmes, Korten (1992) states: *“The issues that NGOs highlight—people and wildlife, soil and water, sustainability and justice—have taken on a greater urgency as the world comes to realize that human demands have filled our planet’s ecological space and that the continuation of careless exploitation will have devastating consequences for us all. As environmental and social issues related to forests and forestry hit the headlines, the growing crisis is spurring NGOs, influencing public opinion and strengthening the hand of innovative thinkers within the traditional forestry sector. These forces have enabled CSOs in general and NGOs in particular to gradually win a respected place at the forestry sector’s table”.*

This statement does not fully apply to CSOs in the West African forest sector; they indeed highlight important issues, but are still far from making these forces their own and gradually win a respected place at the forestry sector’s table. Box 3 below presents views from some NGOs in West Africa regarding the level of participation of CSOs in forestry development processes.

Box 3: Level of CSOs' participation in forestry policy development: Views from NGOs in selected West African countries

Participation can be viewed as a negotiated relationship between stakeholders. In West Africa, the key forestry sector stakeholder groups include: the government and public forest services; Municipalities, Private forest enterprises; Scientists from research and academia; Woodfuels producers and traders, village/local communities; NGOs, and Development Partners (DPs). For the assessment of the level of the participation of NGOs in the forestry planning and policy decision-making, the negotiation is first and foremost between government and public forest services. Below is a summary of the assessment by NGOs from Benin, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, participating in this study.

"Our participation is sought mostly at the stage of implementation of plans, projects and programmes from policy decisions made without us" said unanimously the participating NGOs from Benin and Nigeria. As shown in the discussions above, implementation is the last but one stage in the policy decision-making process. "Therefore, we feel that we are being called to make a policy measure work at the village/community level; a policy measure we and the local communities knew nothing about till delivered to us for implementation. This adds an additional stress and inefficiency in our performance on the ground" the Beninese and Nigerian NGOs added;

In Ghana and Senegal, the situation has evolved quite positively, even though there is still a long way to go to reach full and meaningful participation throughout the forestry planning and policy decision-making processes. Ghana, through the establishment of a working national forest forum, has been able to see real input from NGOs in forestry planning and policy decision-making processes. Senegalese NGOs attributed this progress to the pro-activeness of progressive public officers within the Direction des Eaux, Forêts, Chasses et de la Conservation des Sols. They nevertheless indicated that much more need to be done to mitigate some severe constraints to their effective participation

For their potentially important roles, CSOs in West Africa tend to have a higher degree of association with development Partners, because of their effectiveness on the ground where the actions that make a difference in the lives of local people take place.

Nevertheless, CSOs' involvement in the forest sector should not be considered as "the solution" to all the challenges facing forestry in the West African sub-region. There is indeed no panacea or easy answer to natural resource conservation, management and development challenges. But in a rapidly changing environment, with more democratic political and social systems being increasingly called for, the perspective and potential contribution of these civil society organizations merit full consideration by natural resource management decision-makers at both national and regional levels. Box 4 below presents some of the major constraints to the full participation of CSOs in forestry planning and policy making processes.

Box 4: Major constraints to effective participation of CSOs in forest planning and policy processes

- Weak association of Civil Society (CS) actors in the early stages of the forest policy making process. As it stands now, CS actors feel they are called into the implementation of strategies that have been handed down to them from a controlled top-down policy making process.
- Lack of an official mandate and inadequate institutional and financial capacities of CS actors to function autonomously and independently from external projects and programmes. They thus can't go beyond their traditional advocacy role and participate fully in the monitoring and evaluation of forestry interventions;
- CSOs and State Forest Authorities work in an environment of mistrust, where they treat each others as adversaries rather than partners in rural development; despite of the rhetoric of participatory approaches in use, there is a latent sentiment of no trust between government and CSOs. This does not promote effective and fruitful collaboration for progress;
- Another limiting constraint is the existence of the so-called "ONG filles du terroir", a phenomenon taking place in Francophone countries with the creation of circumstantial NGOs by Mayors and senior government officers just for the implementation of the decentralization laws and measures. This phenomenon does not auger well with the independence of the CSO/NGO function as well as its non-profit organization quality, as the "law and policy makers" become implementers and evaluators at the same time;
- Lack of a platform for exchange of ideas and information among stakeholders in the environment sector in general and the forest sector in particular. A sub-regional strategy which could advocate such a platform for communication and information exchange among forestry actors within and across countries is timely and should be encouraged;
- Governments have operated devolution of responsibilities to local communities without transferring the means and capacities for their realization on the ground. Furthermore, despite of this devolution, governments still maintain a strong hold of leadership in action. Consequently, governments raise a blockage against initiatives from the populations and Civil Society actors; this is not helpful since sustainable forest management is first and foremost a day-to-day proximity management which is well handled by populations nearest to the forests with the help of NGOs their traditional partners.

CHAPTER 3: THE SUB-REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING PARTICIPATION OF CSOs IN FOREST POLICY PROCESSES

3.1 Vision of the Strategy

The need to accommodate multiple interests in charting the sustainable development of forests is widely recognized. Increasingly it is believed that meaningful local participation is essential for the success of development programmes focusing on rural forest, water and soil resources (Maniates, 1992; Clark, 1995). How to accommodate multiple interests and visions in forestry is one of the key challenges facing Africa today. One possible path to achieving this comes in the form of increased collaboration/partnership between government agencies and non-state stakeholder groups such as Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and NGOs. On the basis of this, therefore, the following vision is set and boxed below for the sub-regional strategy:

The vision of the Strategy is that of a West African sub-region, where civil society actors participate effectively in the sustainable management of forest and wildlife resources.

The effective participation of civil society actors in forestry planning and policy making processes is of course not a panacea to resolve all the inefficiencies in forest sector, but it has the advantage of promoting higher involvement and commitment on the part of civil society in general and in particular local communities most directly concerned with the day-to-day management of the forest and wildlife resources. The growing interest among donors and national governments in strengthening the development roles of institutions outside the public sector, coupled with the sharp decline in public development resources, necessitating a search by government for more cost effective alternatives to conventional public services and development programs, are but few of the new developments in support of the strategy to enhance popular participation. Furthermore, this vision is in line with ECOWAS environmental policy framework adopted by the Heads of States and governments of member countries in December 2008 which aims at *“reversing the degradation of natural resources, improving the quality of livelihoods environment, preserving biological diversity for the benefits of well-being of the populations and the natural environment”*. This sub-regional strategy for enhancing the participation of civil society in forest planning and policy making processes in West Africa is therefore a contribution to the achievement of the ECOWAS vision for the environment and people of its sub-region.

3.2 Objective

The overall objective of the sub-regional strategy is to promote sustainable management and good governance of West Africa's forests and forest resources through effective participation of non-state actors, local people and their communities in forest sector planning and policy development processes.

More specifically, the strategy seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Improving coordination and partnership with NGOS, local forest and farm producer organizations in order to achieve inclusive forest-based green growth in West Africa;
- Strengthening capacities (institutional, technical and financial) of civil society and public institutions to effectively work hand-in-hand to achieve forest-based inclusive green growth in the west Africa sub-region; and
- Improving communication, and information sharing for inclusive, evidence-based forest planning and policy decisions in West Africa.

The Strategy therefore will serve as an instrument in the hands of ECOWAS member states for the effective implementation of the decentralization and democratization processes in natural resources management for the benefit of the people and the preservation of the environment in the West Africa sub-region by the year 2025 as envisioned by ECOWAS.

3.3 Guiding Principles for Implementation

The implementation of the strategy must adhere to the working principles of ECOWAS operations, of which the following must be considered:

- The principle of subsidiarity: This is the principle that states that ECOWAS and its specialized departments can intervene directly in a member state to resolve transnational or trans-boundary problems if and only if the structures and specialized agencies of the member country concerned are not able to solve the problems without the intervention of the sub-regional body;
- The principle of equity and equality in Sub-regional Interventions: This principle imposes to any sub-regional intervention, with possible impact on the forestry sector of a country, to submit to regulations and laws of the country concerned.
- The principle of precaution in interventions: This principle advises that any implementation of ecosystems control and protection measures which may not prevent problems with negative consequences for forests should take precautionary action by developing related environmental information and education and by defining the norms.
- The principle of responsibility in participation: This principle requires responsible participation on the part of all concerned actors in the conception and implementation of actions for protection, restoration and conservation of natural resources in partnership mode.
- The principle of compensation in cases of losses: Any loss due to the implementation of the sub-regional strategy should call for some compensation as ascribed in the ECOWAS principles.

3.4 Strategic Areas of Intervention

The strategy includes six strategic areas of intervention highlighted below. Each area of intervention is introduced with a set of specific objectives and associated activities. These strategic areas include: (i) a call for a paradigm shift in attitudes of key actors in the forest sector; (ii) Human and institutional capacity development; (iii) Sustainable financing of civil society's effective participation; (iv) Communication and programme information sharing; (v) Coordination and partnership; and (vi) promoting legal backing for NGOs' actions.

3.4.1 Strategic area 1: Paradigm shift in attitudes

A change in attitude is required on the part of both government forestry officers, especially district-level decentralized officers; and Civil Society, especially NGOs playing a watchdog role. Members of both groups need to leave their prejudices at the door, suspending thus their critical biases for a more constructive criticism and collaboration. As indicated by most of the Civil Society actors interviewed for the purpose of this study, one key impediment to their limited participation in forestry planning and policy decision-making processes is the attitude of mid-level government officials, unwilling to relinquish authority to local people and their organizations, despite the official transfer of responsibilities to the local actors. In Senegal for example, NGOs raised issue about the attitude of the decentralized officers serving as counselors at the decentralized committee on the environment at the decentralized district-level offices. This does not promote the devolution process launched by the government whereby major responsibilities for the sustainable management of forest resources are devolved to local people. There is also the command and control attitude of the forestry officers and guards when undertaking missions in districts or villages. Local people and communities resent this type of attitude, but fall short of voicing it out to the concerned offices and/or officers. Mistrust thus develops and real opportunity for effective participation of local communities is missed.

Government officers explain this sort of thing as growing from fears that local people and their organizations may destroy the resources if government controls were withdrawn; or that local people and their community-Based Organizations cannot be trusted with sustainable forest management (SFM), which they see first and foremost as technical and scientific in essence. Furthermore, despite of the positive results demonstrated quite convincingly in many cases by civil society actors, especially NGOs, in their participation in projects and programmes implementation, decentralized public officials often continue to perceive civil society actors as a threat to their interests or as an outside agency usurping government's responsibility.

Civil society actors, especially NGOs, in their watchdog role, also need to have a change of attitude in their tendency of making lots of noises, pointing constantly to the shortcomings of government and timber companies, without making constructive suggestions for solving the problems they raise. In so doing, they reinforce the perception of environmental NGOs as troublemakers in the eyes of government officers and wood industries. NGOs need to shift away from that tendency and show themselves as credible partners capable of making constructive contributions to moving sustainable forest management forwards in the right direction. Civil society actors will thus command consideration and respect from governments, timber companies and development partners. An outstanding example of this is from Ghana, where two years following the establishment of 10 regional forest forums in 2009, reports from the Brong Ahafo regional forest Forum indicate a 30% reduction in wildfire incidences in that fire-prone region of Ghana.

This and other important activities of the regional and national forest forums in Ghana have earned great recognition from the government and development partners in the country. As a result, the National Forest Forum of Ghana (NFF-Ghana) has been recognized as an integral part of the forestry institutional setting of the country; and as such, NFF-Ghana received annual financial support from public budget allocation for its activities. Furthermore, donor-led important initiatives such as REDD+, EC/FLEGT/VPA projects, the Growing Forest Partnerships (GFP), have all called upon the national and regional forest forums members in the formation of their steering committees and the consultation process in the implementation of their programmes of activities.

Without these positive changes in attitude on the part of all involved stakeholders, fruitful discussions to promote effective collaboration between government agencies and civil society actors become an impossible task.

Two specific objectives in this regard are considered here:

1) **Promoting an environment encouraging fruitful discussions between the State and civil society actors.**

The following two activities are identified to achieve this objective:

- Create a consultative platform for regular and open discussions between the State, its agencies on the one hand and civil society actors on the other. This can take many forms depending on the experience specific to each country. In Ghana for example, a national forest forum has been established to facilitate the communication of civil society actors' viewpoints and inputs in forest planning and policy review and policy making processes. This platform may as well be extended to private sector forest investors who may not be in good talking terms with civil society actors, especially environmental NGOs. The bottom line is the necessity to sensitize the different actors into an attitude change, based on the recognition that the real issue in sustainable forest management is not whether divergent interests should be accommodated but how to do it.
- Establish National Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committees (accommodating all relevant stakeholder groups, including civil society actors) for major forest planning and/or policy review/ formulation exercise in the country. This will bring together different stakeholder groups to work, argue, and learn how to agree to disagree in national consensus building over issues that may appear hard to agree on.

2) **Improve the institutional and legal framework of the decentralization and devolution processes for natural resources management.** The on-going decentralization and devolution processes in most West African countries often seem incomplete in the definition of roles and responsibilities in practical terms. Sometimes, competences are transferred to local level actors (NGOs, CBOs, local people and communities) without any adequate provision of means of implementation to enable local people and their communities to fully and autonomously carry out the devolved responsibilities. The following three activities are identified to achieve this objective:

- Review the legal and institutional frameworks in ECOWAS member countries regarding decentralized management of forests and forest resources, including wildlife resources.

These reviews should lead countries to clarify and harmonize the institutional and legal dispositions with the responsibilities transferred to local-level actors. This will help promoting a collaborative environment free from misunderstanding and negative attitudes which bring mistrust and missed opportunities;

- Establish a system of check-and-balance in the devolution process whereby transferred responsibilities are adequately resourced (financially, technically and institutionally) for an effective participation of local actors; and
- Information development and sharing. Whereby official information on decentralization and devolution processes are adequately packaged and shared with both decentralized government offices and officers and local level actors, including CBOs and NGOs.

3.4.2 Strategic area 2: Human and Institutional Capacity Development

There is no doubt that civil society actors play an important role in sustainable forestry and natural resource management; however in many cases the effectiveness of their contributions is constrained by technical and, most importantly, organizational limitations. The civil society actors contacted in Benin, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal in the process of this study have unanimously indicated that the extent to which their contributions would bring about participatory development depends on the extent to which they are able to reduce rural poverty, build the capacity of local people and their organizations, and find the proper instruments to organize the poor and promote their participation in natural resource planning and policy processes.

Furthermore, these civil society actors indicated that the human and institutional capacity constraint is indeed a major challenge in many areas of needs for rural social, economic and environmental development. In the area of community forestry, for example, the major challenges are in the areas of forest protection and management; procurement of improved variety of seeds; site selection for nurseries; conflict management in relation to land tenure and ownership; and equitable distribution of benefits.

With regard to institutional development needs, areas of challenge include: conducting proper needs assessment; establishing sound fund-raising strategies; ability to inventory and value resources; analyze, develop and review/modify policies that directly or indirectly affect forestry, forests and wildlife resources; recruiting and training staff, maintaining trainers' skills through refresher courses; resolving conflicts within the organizational structure; maintaining good working relationship with government departments and other resource groups; complying with the administrative and programmatic requirements of donor agencies; dealing with political pressures without losing independence and integrity; promoting new and expanded roles for CBOs and NGOs (e.g., going beyond the traditional advocacy role and play important role in monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes results). Two objectives are therefore pursued here:

- 1) Improving the human capacity of CBOs, NGOs and local people and communities: These civil society actors are oftentimes frustrated over the fact that they are rightly recognized as a credible solution to overburdened governments; yet very little is done to enhance their human capacity to perform better. The following two activities are therefore proposed here:
 - Conduct needs assessment for civil society actors in the forest sector: This assessment will highlight gaps in the capacities of CBOs and NGOs, thus prepare the way for designing a more relevant capacity development programme;
 - On the basis of the assessed needs, design a training programme for civil society actors. The training programme will be specific to each country and may cover topics such as the challenging points highlighted above, including many more such as the development of management information systems, annual and medium-term planning cycles, cost effectiveness, the development of resource mobilization strategies, and monitoring and evaluation schemes.
- 2) Improving the institutional capacity of CBOs, NGOs and village-level associations: Here also need assessment will be conducted on the basis of which relevant institutional capacity development programme will be drafted and followed up on topics such as institutional capacity to develop sound fund-raising strategies, comply with the administrative and programmatic requirements of donor agencies, and deal judiciously with political pressure without losing independence and integrity.

Expected results: To be effective in participating and facilitating the participation of the rural people and their organizations, in forestry planning and policy decision-making, Civil Society Organizations often require assistance in human resource potential enhancement, institutional strengthening, organizational management, leadership, group dynamics, and the like. Pursuing successfully the above two objectives will indeed enhance the human resource potential at local level by providing a broad range of training and technical assistance. It will also upgrade the institutional capacities of civil society actors, thus empowering them to effectively build public awareness at local level, and improve the participation of the poor in reforming unsustainable forestry planning and policies and propose new ones more applicable to their local environment and realities.

3.4.3 Strategic area 3: Sustainable Financing for Effective Civil Society Action

Sustainable financing is the single factor most commonly identified as constraint to effective participation of Civil Society Actors in forest planning and policy processes. In defining the issue, the NGO representatives we talked to used words such as “few financial resources”; “inadequate funding”; which they ascribe to internal as well as external factors. With regard to internal factors, the two most frequently cited causes are (i) lack of experience in attracting funding; and (ii) the very nature as non-profit organizations, which does not allow the purposeful pursuit of funds generated commercially or charged against clients (local people and their organizations) for services to them. Also highlighted is the poor accountability for funds received on the part of some Civil Society actors, thus creating suspicions between them and donors/development partners. On the external side, Civil Society actors ascribe the lack of financing to (i) the absence of sustainable sources of external funding; and (ii) the fact that most often donors and national governments offer inflexible and time-bound project-specific grants, which provide little or no real scope for modification within the existing project structure or for change in priorities when conditions and needs of local populations change. Furthermore, these short-term, inflexible financing schemes tend to prevent Civil Society actors from articulating long-term plans and dealing successfully with political pressures without losing independence and integrity.

A new source of funding for Civil Society actors is emerging from NGO-Business partnership for achieving sustainable forest management. This opportunity is however currently under debate among International NGOs as to which type of corporate funding arrangements affords them the greatest degree of autonomy. The debate at the moment is mostly among international NGOs with secure core funding and seeking to diversify financing sources. For the local CBOs and NGOs in view mostly in this study, the concern is more about survival than a search for greater autonomy. Indeed for local NGOs, discriminating about sources of funding for the sake of greater autonomy is not the main concern, but rather how to survive financially, administratively and institutionally from one year to the next. The following two objectives are therefore pursued and associated activities stated below:

- 1) **Resource mobilization strategy development: *the following activities are in view to achieve this objective:***
 - Hold a brainstorming workshop among relevant Civil Society actors to draft terms of reference (TORs) for producing strategies for mobilizing resources, drawing on both local and international opportunities; and strategizing for financial sustainability.
 - Analyze existing opportunities for internal and external resource mobilizations;
 - Hold training workshops on proposal writing targeting funding opportunities available internally and externally;
 - Produce simple and easy to access manuals/handbooks on relevant topics such as (i) the grant-seeking process; (ii) Characteristics grant-makers look for in their nonprofit partners; and (iii) how to make connections between your work as Civil Society actors and funders’ interests and

motivations. Indeed Civil Society actors seeking grants must determine how their programme interests and their “theories of change” match the funder that they are hoping to partner with.

2) **Advocate and lobby for donors and national governments to offer enabling grants** that are flexible enough to allow Civil Society actors real scope for modification within the existing project structure or for change in priorities when conditions and needs of local populations change; and with terms long enough to allow these non-profit actors to articulate long-term plans and be able to deal with political pressures without losing independence and integrity. The following two important activities are considered here:

- Match Civil Society actors’ programme interests and philosophy with that of a potential donor: These actors must at their individual groups-level, determine how their programme interests and their theories of change match that of the funder they are seeking to partner with;
- Develop programmes and project proposals that address issues and development concerns of the rural poor; and submit them to targeted partners;
- Rethink the funding of Civil Society actors through public budget allocation. The promotion of genuine and productive partnerships between the State and Civil Society depends on this.

3) Funding sources information sharing strategy: the following activities are in view here to achieve this specific objective:

- Create interest-specific databases on internal and external funding sources for Civil Society actors in ECOWAS member countries;
- Produce targeted briefing notes from the database on funding for easy and effective dissemination of up-to-date information on grant-giving organizations of interest to Civil Society actors;
- Forge a networking mode among like-minded Civil Society actors for sharing insights, pooling resources where applicable and cooperating in resource mobilization activities to enable greater access and utilization of lessons learned from past experiences on funding within and between ECOWAS member countries;

3.4.4 Strategic area 4: Communication and Programme Information Sharing

Informational-communication is essential in the institutional development of Civil Society actors and their organizations. A key factor in solving informational-communication issues is the Civil Society actors’ ability to interact, not only within the non-profit sphere, but also with government, donors and other relevant stakeholder groups, including local people and their organizations. The Internet is an extremely effective tool for dealing to a large degree with some of these challenges. Civil Society-Government partnership is another potentially effective means of addressing these informational-communication problems. Box 5 presents some outstanding illustrations of the power of bringing stakeholders together for effective communication through platforms such as forestry multi-stakeholder steering committees and forest forums.

Box 5: Improvement in the NFP Process in Africa: Examples from Selected Countries

Has the national forest programme (NFP) process in Africa been improved as a result of the NFP Facility (NFP-F) partnerships in the continent? In answering this question, an independent evaluation team in 2007 stated this: “Undeniably that is the case. One cannot overestimate the impact of bringing stakeholders around the table —through multi-stakeholder national steering committee (MNSC), a requirement of an NFP-F partnership agreement with countries.

In Zambia, timber companies are talking openly with other stakeholders about illegal logging for the first time. In Ghana, timber extraction companies and environmental NGOs were not on speaking terms two years ago.

Today, they have a constructive dialogue. Deep rooted conflicts between stakeholders are not fully resolved, but are being “addressed” through communication in the MNSC and forest forums. Rights of local villagers are being clarified for the first time in Ghana at the district forest forum. In Namibia forest-dependent communities are not just participating, they are co- developing forests with the department of forestry. The needs of the villagers in Northern Namibia are clearly being addressed. Not all is to be attributed to the NFP-F but the catalytic role of the Facility is quite conspicuous”.

The following two objectives are considered below together with some identified activities:

- 1) **Promoting communication among key stakeholder groups:** This objective is to be achieved through the following activities:
 - Establish communication platforms such as forest forums and national steering committees;
 - Establish special platform for Civil Society-Government communication and collaboration.
- 2) **Civil Society-Government joint communication strategy development:** Increased collaboration between government agencies and Civil Society Actors/Organizations is increasingly regarded as the key to meaningful local participation in sustainable natural resource management. The argument most often made in favor of this view is twofold: (i) large government agencies, while commanding significant resources and expertise, are often bureaucratic, inflexible, and overburdened; and (ii) local Civil Society actors and their organizations often lack the resources but understand local conditions better and can tailor more effectively government programmes to local needs. Moreover, they can serve as an effective organizing nucleus and channel for meaningful local participation. Combine the strengths of the public sector with that of the Civil Society sphere, and you get the best of both worlds: expertise and resources from the government and local participation and flexible implementation from NGOs. The following key activities could be envisaged in developing this joint communication strategy:
 - **Promote the participation of Civil Society actors in government-led forest policy formulation processes:** This will better prepare Civil Society actors to communicate the policy-decisions to the actors at local level where implementation must take place for impact to happen;
 - Package in a more participatory manner the policy message that needs to be communicated: This will avoid policy messages that are contradictory or oriented in different directions because produced from two sources that did not communicate and harmonize their views.
 - **Strengthen the communication and financial capacities of Civil Society actors** to allow them to deliver more effectively and efficiently the policy messages to the intended beneficiaries at the local level. This could call upon donors to contribute in providing long-term and flexible support both for Civil Society actors’ efforts to develop information systems that will permit the documentation of outcomes as well as the sharing of acquired knowledge on a wider basis and for the strengthening of the present institutional linkages among Civil Society actors and between them and other organizations;

- **Organize workshops on dialoguing and communication.** An outstanding example of this is the training of trainers' workshop on "enhancing stakeholder participation in national forest programmes", held in Dakar, Senegal in July 2011 and jointly organized by FAO, the NFP Facility and the Senegalese Ministry of the Environment. This workshop brought together 25 representatives of NGOs, government agencies in charge of forests and natural resources from West African countries, namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo. This workshop prepared trainers who need support to effectively train others for multiple effect and impact in the forest sector.

3.4.5 Strategic area 5: Coordination and Partnership

Sustainable forest management requires strict coordinated actions and interventions in partnership between stakeholders, especially government and civil society organizations (CSOs). Yet in most West African countries, the current state of affairs is that the State and CSOs largely keep their distance from each other and run their projects also in parallel. CSOs generally play an oppositional role and/or an advocacy role seeking to represent the voice of the weak and to help them organize in their communities to achieve a more powerful voice in forest decision-making and be recognized in the allocating/sharing of resources/benefits. The government on the other hand, observes the working of CSOs, and sets the forestry rules and procedures individuals and organizations in society must live by. Because of the non participatory nature of this process, the final outcome of this State-CSO coexistence is characterized more or less by tension and mistrust which do not produce the desirable outcome everybody wishes to see in the forest sector. A meaningful coordination and collaboration between the two could be more productive and mutually beneficial. This could be done around the objective of institutionalizing state-CSO collaboration:

Institutionalizing state-NGO partnership: There is a need not only to promote State-CSO collaboration, but also to institutionalize it for more efficiency and sustainability. This will require a change of attitude and belief on the part of government administrators. They need not believe that all that is needed is only create venues for Civil Society involvement in order to gain the benefits of collaboration with these organizations; they should not be complacent about the necessity to ensure rigorous monitoring and management of collaboration systems. CSOs also must not believe that all they need to do in this partnership is to keep only to their oppositional role, where negative criticism is the rule rather than the exception. They of course will continue to expose government to a grassroots perspective which might otherwise be neglected; however, they should also endeavor to do more by making themselves relevant and credible through positive contributions in order to keep the partnership vibrant and sustainable. They should also avoid the possibility of increased risk of corruption, reduced independence, and financial dependency. When these risks are carefully addressed, the partnership is potentially beneficial to both parties as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Some of the mutual benefits from State-CSO collaboration:

Benefits for the State	Benefits for CSOs
<p>Help government (and donors) fashion a more effective development strategy through inclusion in discussions of isolated and vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Better local development policies of national and international institutions, including decentralization and municipal reforms.</p> <p>Increased advocacy and mobilization capacity.</p> <p>Complementary outreach and capacity for field activities, including improved emergency response.</p> <p>Enhanced ownership of endorsed policies/strategies.</p> <p>Attuning official programs to public needs through acting as a conduit for public opinion and local experiences</p> <p>Attention drawn to important but otherwise forgotten issues relevant to local people.</p>	<p>Government provides official mandate to CSO involvement.</p> <p>Access to information, capacity building, technical knowledge and expertise on CSOs' new roles on the "demand-side".</p> <p>Possibility of influencing forest planning and policy formulation processes.</p> <p>Government provides legal backing to CSO operations on the ground.</p> <p>Better image of CSOs in the eyes of the government;</p>

The following activities are in view to achieve these benefits:

- Establish a CSO coordinating body designed to serve as a focal point in the state-CSO collaboration. Because of the diversity of CSOs, a coordinating body will help to organize and mainstream their contributions into the partnership process.
- Foster a policy environment conducive to fruitful collaboration: Such a consultative environment is achieved where all parties are prepared to be cooperative and willing to learn from each other. Where CSOs selectively report or use distortion by highlighting criticism of the government; or where the government is not receptive to outside advice, fruitful consultations are nearly impossible and are likely to be no less than confrontations.
- Establish a common framework for monitoring, reporting and verification of the effectiveness of the operation of the partnership; and the quality and usefulness of the CSOs' contributions. This will mitigate the challenge of the existing variation in monitoring, reporting and verification methods used by different CSOs. Furthermore, if civil society-led forest monitoring is to be internationally recognized and accepted, there is the need to harmonize different methodologies and establish a common framework to infuse harmony in the processes

- Address CSOs' long-term funding issue either through government budget allocations or do nor/ development partners' sustainable contributions. These could be channeled through the CSOs coordinating body based on transparent agreed modalities for allocating/accessing the funds. In the end, access to funds will determine the long-term relevance, legitimacy and survival of the CSOs.
- Promote CSO-Development Partners' collaborations. This could be done selectively depend ing on the mandate of the different Development Partners.

For example, in its Strategic Framework the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has defined five Strategic Objectives to eradicate poverty and food insecurity. To achieve this, FAO is seeking to expand its collaboration with civil society organizations committed to these goals. To this end, FAO identified the following mutual benefits to FAO and CSOs in such a partnership (Table 2).

Table 2: Some of the mutual benefits from FAO-CSO collaboration:

Benefits for FAO	Benefits for CSOs
<p>Inclusion in discussions of isolated and vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Better representation in debates and discussions.</p> <p>Increased advocacy and mobilization capacity.</p> <p>Complementary outreach and capacity for field activities, including improved emergency response.</p> <p>Enhanced ownership of endorsed policies/ strategies.</p> <p>Access to resources (human, physical, knowledge).</p>	<p>FAO provides access to a neutral forum for discussions vis-à-vis private sector, member states and other stakeholders.</p> <p>Access to information, capacity building, technical knowledge and expertise on key food security areas.</p> <p>Possibility of suggesting items for discussion in the agendas of FAO meetings.</p> <p>FAO can facilitate discussion and the exchange of views between CSOs and member states at all levels.</p>

3.4.6 Strategic area 6: Promoting Legal Backing/Mandate for CSOs Intervention

Lack of official mandate —that is the informal manner in which provision for CSOs and community participation in forest planning, governance and policy decision-making is done —is a key obstacle to civil society involvement in policy development process alongside local people and their organizations. Existing forest governance policy structures in West African countries do not generally enable civil society organizations, particularly NGOs, to play their roles effectively. For example, the existing governance policy structure in FLEGT/VPA member countries in the sub-region, which does not provide any official role and incentives for a meaningful participation of CSOs, is an outstanding illustration of this. Nevertheless, it is important to note that legal backing through registration

for example is not enough to provide the needed official mandate or political support.

These things are not obtained by decrees, but are earned recognition through hard work. In short, political support and official mandate are yours as soon as you make yourself relevant through meaningful contributions, as illustrated earlier with the Regional Forest Forum contribution in mitigating wildfire incidences in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana. The following activities could be useful in promoting legal backing/mandate for CSOs interventions in ECOWAS member countries:

- ***CSOs honestly seeking to make official development programmes more participatory:*** This could be the goodwill on the part of CSOs to trigger government trust and legal backing for CSOs operations in the forest sector.
- ***Improve government's commitment to poverty reduction and participatory development:*** Where government's commitment to poverty reduction (through access to forests and benefits from joint forest management) and participatory development is weak, there will be little interest in working with CSOs or in improving their operating environment (Clark, 1995). Such governments, mindful of current trend of donor interests in channeling funds through CSOs, may create their own "government-oriented CSOs" which then receive funds from less discriminating donors or from government budget allocations. This is very much the case in Senegal, where the so called NGOs *filles du terroir* phenomenon is being intensified by senior officers from government agencies. This creates considerable tension between these "government-oriented NGOs" and the more independent, people-oriented NGOs.
- ***Take measures to curb the rapid ascension of "bogus" CSOs*** which serve their own interests rather than those of the weak and vulnerable groups. From an NGO perspective, the most favorable policy setting is when legal restrictions are minimal and when regulations and reporting are most lax. But in such policy environment, the door is wide open for unhealthy and even corrupt activities which may taint the NGO sector as a whole.

Regulations therefore should be carefully assessed as to which merely hamper the contribution of the NGO sector and which are necessary to ensure adequate level of incentives for the intended purpose. In addition, efforts must be mounted to improve coordination, duplication of efforts and any such gaps which could still hamper NGO participation even in the case of a non-interventionist policy environment.

- ***Entering into Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and agreements to legitimize the roles played by CSOs clarifying expectations, dos and don'ts, etc.***

CHAPTER 4: IMPLEMENTATION MODALITIES

In most West African countries, particularly so in its Sahelian zone, forest policy is difficult to disentangle from farming policy, livestock policy and inland fisheries development policy. The need for a total approach to rural development, emphasizing linkages between these land-based sub-sectors through food security, productivity and rural livelihoods enhancement, is in order at this level. The modalities for the implementation of the strategy should therefore take account of these linkages. Key methodological elements as well as institutional setting for the implementation of the strategy are set below.

4.1 Key methodological elements for implementation

The methodological elements for the implementation of the strategy include the following:

- **Integration:** the orientations of forestry should integrate with those of agriculture, inland fisheries and livestock in a process that ensures complementarities and synergy of actions for better management of natural resources, the fight against desertification, and social and economic rural development. CSOs, especially CBOs and NGOs will have to organize themselves holistically and collaborate across the different land-based sectoral interventions and activities since they have to work with the same sets of rural people and organizations. The CSOs Coordination body suggested above will play a key role in this regard.
- **The participative approach:** the active, voluntary and responsible participation of rural people/communities and their organizations will be emphasized; actions will be decided and implemented by the population groups most concerned with interventions in which they are the major beneficiaries. Appropriate incentive schemes will be designed to motivate the participation of rural actors, including CBOs, NGOs, local people, farmers and their associations.
- **A locally-centered development:** forest policy should translate into key empowering actions at local community level for the protection of the forest heritage and its judicious exploitation by/or with the local population groups which will then benefit from the fruits of their participation in their own development, acting themselves for themselves. The effectiveness of such actions will require local capacity development and empowerment, an area where non-governmental organizations are most effective. The clear legal mandate/backing mentioned earlier should be in effect in this case.
- **Ensuring sustainability of actions and available resources:** This is one of the most common principles of forest policy which link the exploitation and management of forests to the satisfaction of the needs of the present population in terms of both quantity and quality without prejudicing those of future generations. Governments, development partners, are to work with CSOs in securing long terms funding prospects for CSOs thus empowering them to sustain their actions on the ground.

4.2 Institutional setting and arrangement for implementation

The implementation of the sub-regional strategy will not require setting up new institutions, but only a distribution of responsibilities over the existing institutions at different levels, locally, nationally, and sub-regionally; the exception may be the CSOs Coordinating Body, which may need to be created in countries where such body does not exist yet.

At local community level, the local people and their organizations will have to be organized with support from specialized NGOs for a more structured and responsible participation in policy making processes that impact on the resources they depend on. Relevant NGOs will be charged with capacity development in rural areas to empower rural folks and their organizations for actions and meaningful participation. NGOs themselves could be empowered through legal backing and capacity development over possible gaps for more effectiveness in their supportive role.

At national level, government agencies in charge of rural development in general and the forest sector in particular would have to work together and in collaboration with development partners (FAO for example) to elaborate a national action plan for the implementation of the strategy, taking into account national specificities.

The national action plan will, in collaboration with existing CSOs, make provisions for the establishment of a national coordination body for rural development and the institutionalization of regular consultative meetings with NGOs, CBOs and farmers' organizations for monitoring and evaluation of progress in implementation. Roles and responsibilities will be clearly defined together with means of implementations. A mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of the working arrangements will be developed as well for the implementation of the strategy, taking into account country specificities.

At sub-regional level, the ECOWAS Commission in charge of forestry will play a key role of coordinating the implementation of the strategy, as part and parcel of the ongoing forestry dialogue and newly adopted forest convergence plan in the West Africa sub-region during a ministerial meeting in September 2013. This will ensure further discussions and recommendations for sustainable development of forestry through enhanced participation of civil society actors and their organizations in forest planning and policy development processes in West Africa.

The ECOWAS Commission on forests shall endeavor to design and roll out an awareness creation, adoption and monitoring mechanism to ensure widespread application of the strategy by ECOWAS member states. The issue of sustainable funding for an effective participation of civil society will be looked at holistically at the sub-regional level under the coordination of the ECOWAS Commission on Forests. It must be reiterated here again that access to financial means in a sustainable manner will determine the long-term relevance, legitimacy and survival of the CSOs, thus the forest resources of the sub-region.

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A Sub-Regional Strategy for Enhancing the Participation of the Civil Society in Forestry Planning and Policy Making Processing in West Africa

Forest planning and policy making process in West Africa – and elsewhere in Africa for that matter – has largely been dominated by the State, with very little room for a meaningful participation of civil society. This state of affairs led to a management of forests and forest resources which failed to produce sustainable outcomes. There has been poor governance of forests, alarming deforestation and land degradation, exacerbated by increasing rural poverty and large foreign debts.

As these and other environmental problems strain the West African sub-region, the need for pluralism in forest sector development is gaining momentum. The need to accommodate multiple interests in charting the future of forests is indeed gaining wide recognition, as evidenced by the declarations in favor of sustainable forest management in Agenda 21 and by the many international conventions on forests in which African countries are participating. How to accommodate multiple interests in the forest sector is the real issue facing Africa's forestry authorities today.

Although there is a growing set of tools and methodologies to reinforce participation of stakeholders in national forest programmes and similar processes, there is a need to approach the issue strategically, thinking regionally and acting nationally and locally. It is in this context that the present study has been commissioned by FAO Sub-regional Office for Africa to prepare a sub-regional strategy for enhancing the participation of civil society actors in forestry planning and policy making processes in West Africa.

ISBN 978-92-5-108947-7



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I5112E/1/11.15