



A nudge in the right direction

Summary of the external evaluation of the project
Strengthening Voices for Better Choices (SVBC)

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DAILY AND ALL OVER THE WORLD, decisions are taken in forest governance that have unintended consequences. Choices are made on the basis of flawed assumptions. Unfortunately we pay for these mistakes with the loss of forests, income, biodiversity and other benefits. In its project *Strengthening Voices for Better Choices*, IUCN aimed to give a nudge in the right direction to forest departments, companies, communities and other forest governance actors. It did so by facilitating dialogue and offering platforms for interest groups to find common ground and seek better choices that respect each others' freedoms and interests.

Essentially, SVBC was about improving the arrangements for decision making in forest governance regimes. Legality may have been the project's entry point, but sustainable development was the vision that IUCN offered.

Financed mainly by the European Commission within the framework of its Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan, SVBC was implemented in Brazil (Acre), Ghana, DR Congo, Tanzania, Sri Lanka and Vietnam from 2005 to 2009. The external evaluation, carried out between June and July 2009, also aimed to give a nudge in the right direction – what can be learnt from four-and-a-half years' work in six different countries?



Key findings

- ▶ The purpose of SVBC – to support forest governance reform – made sense in each country where it was implemented, although its expected results were not all equally relevant to each country. In every country, however, the project collaborated with relevant actors and added value to a range of other initiatives.
- ▶ SVBC made many positive achievements, but its effectiveness varied from country to country. The project's legal and economic assessments, for example, were finished too late to be used in the pilot tests of new governance arrangements. Not all of the training organised contributed to the project's purpose. A lack of attention to communication weakened understanding and appreciation of the project among its external stakeholders. Lastly the lessons of the project have yet to be fully captured and disseminated.
- ▶ Strictly speaking, SVBC functioned more as a sub-programme within IUCN's wider Forest Conservation Programme than as a project *per se*. Project management was adaptive and responsive to changing circumstances. Yet there was a turnover of staff in five of the six project countries, there was no functioning monitoring and evaluation system, not enough attention was paid to knowledge management, and the multi-country nature of the project added little or no extra value.
- ▶ Many of the results of SVBC will be sustainable, such as mutual understanding, new relationships and fewer conflicts. Positive multi-stakeholder dialogues produce irreversible benefits. They do take time, however, and usually need continued support. This may take the form of an external facilitator, support for meetings of communities and civil society groups, further awareness raising, and capacity strengthening beyond the forest sector.
- ▶ In every country, the impact of SVBC ultimately was more positive than might have been expected from the project's mid-term review in 2007. Among its impacts are heightened awareness, reduced conflict, better understanding, more dialogue, new governance arrangements, fewer damaging practices, increased incomes for local communities, and a wealth of (mostly implicit) learning on multi-stakeholder dialogues relevant to other countries. Yet there is still a need for further strengthening of the voices of communities, and for correcting the unintended effects on perceptions caused by a lack of attention to communication in the first few years.
- ▶ The project's impact may vary from country to country, but overall it has been very positive. And since impact is the most important criterion for an evaluation, SVBC can be assessed as a very positive initiative.



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Highlighted recommendations

For next steps nationally by IUCN and local partners

- ▶ Continue facilitating existing multi-stakeholder processes where invited to do so and where resources are available.
- ▶ Monitor and assess the impacts of Voluntary Partnership Agreements and other new governance arrangements built or supported by SVBC.
- ▶ Continue or develop new awareness-raising and communications actions based on the lessons of SVBC.

For next steps globally by IUCN

- ▶ Launch an internal discussion on the lessons of SVBC for management processes and priorities.
- ▶ Capture practical learning on multi-stakeholder dialogues in a toolkit, guidelines or roadmap.
- ▶ Document the process of forest governance in project countries for analysis and comparison of steps, principles, milestones and tipping points.

For future project design by IUCN

- ▶ Diagnose problems and develop project ideas in advance with local partners.
- ▶ Base multi-country projects on specific country needs, preferably country projects prepared in advance in response to local problem analyses.
- ▶ Invest more time in project design, paying attention to the time required, the sequence of steps, the need for participation and the balance between global IUCN concerns and local needs.

- ▶ Include knowledge management and communication strategies in project design.
- ▶ Bring in adequate technical expertise when developing innovative multi-stakeholder projects, for example in designing and facilitating processes of change.
- ▶ Bring in adequate methodological expertise to ensure projects are designed using a systematic and comprehensive logical framework approach.
- ▶ Develop a practical monitoring framework, even for process-oriented projects with intangible and unpredictable outputs.

For future project implementation by IUCN

- ▶ Focus constantly on the project purpose and the logical framework during implementation.
- ▶ Improve human resources and project management, ensuring project staff have the necessary skills, responsibility, recognition and autonomy.
- ▶ Clarify the role of the global coordinator in multi-country projects as a guide and leader, not just a manager and adviser.

For the European Commission and other donors

- ▶ Take account of the specific constraints and added value of participatory processes when appraising projects.
- ▶ Explore how to capture and disseminate lessons learned in multi-stakeholder dialogues to improve forest governance.

The full report of the external evaluation is available from the IUCN website at:
www.iucn.org/forest



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