

AFAN

African Forest Action Network

RAAF

Réseau Africain d'Action Forestière

C/o **CERUT**

P.O. Box 170, Limbe.

Tel /Fax: (237) 33 22 47. *also Fax:* 33 23 00

Sat: Tel: 873 761 917 240

Fax: 873 761 917 242

Policies and Strategies for Integration of NGOs in the Implementation of Good Governance in Sustainable Natural Resource Management in the Congo Basin

A paper by NGOs under the auspices of AFAN to the 3rd CEFDHAC

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Address for the THIRD CEFDHAC, BUJUMBURA, JUNE 2000.

1. Introduction

Over the past twenty years, many forums and initiatives have focused on the management of natural resources and, particularly, forestry eco-systems.

The main revelation of these forums is, undoubtedly, that the fate of forest resources has, for too long, been left in the hands of bodies with strategies that are often limited in time and space.

More often than not, civil society has been left out of these forums. The recent extension of discussions on forests to NGOs in Central Africa does not in any way, foreshadow the many difficulties to be overcome to reach common understanding and to hold constructive dialogue in order to achieve the objective of using and conserving the eco-systems of the Congo Basin sustainably.

Efforts aimed at implementing a regional approach, decentralising and even privatising the management of natural resources have not succeeded to shake State monopoly in the sub-region where the states seem to lack new and pragmatic ideas to generate the synergy necessary for the different stakeholders to fight poverty and achieve sustainable development.

The Brazzaville Process has helped the different stakeholders to better understand and take into account Environmental Good Governance (EGG) through training and sensitisation. This is very important in achieving a regional vision for the future of Central African forestry eco-systems.

Although the EGG concept is recurrent in all current speeches, only lip service is paid to it.

Against this backdrop, NGOs meeting within the African Forest Action Network (AFAN) have a major role to play. This is the purport of this address which, *inter alia*:

1. Examines the implementation of Environmental Good Governance in national, regional and international organisations in the Congo Basin;

2. Highlights the constraints and opportunities relating to the involvement of NGOs in EGG;
3. Defines concrete strategies for integrating Congo Basin NGOs in the implementation of EGG, and
4. Defines operational mechanisms for the implementation and internalisation of integration strategies at all levels by NGOs.

2. Definition of Governance and Environmental Good Governance

Considering that there is no shared definition of the concept of **Governance**, we will borrow Le Roy's (1996) operational definition:

"Good Governance is the exercise of mastery on things, the organisation of prerogatives associated to them, and the regulation of relations between all those associated to them, more or less, voluntarily in terms of rights and obligations".

This term is used variously; it is both a methodological and an ideological tool.

Good Governance entails:

- The participation of all stakeholders
- Negotiation;
- Consensus;
- Partnership; and
- Co-ordination.

Environmental Governance:

Environmental governance is not limited to the environment or natural resources. It does not only concern environmental ministries, agencies or laws. Environmental governance must be seen within a broader perspective of governance involving representation, legislation, human rights, social justice and so on.

It is the way in which authority is exercised on nature and this authority may be State, customary, private or non-governmental.

Before considering any exceptional involvement required to achieve proper environmental governance, it is necessary to ponder on a number of points:

- The issue of responsibility and measures to be taken to strengthen it ;

- The issue of participation without representation ;
- The need for appropriate vertical and horizontal power sharing (between the central government and lower institutions on the one hand, and between the public and private sectors on the other) ; and
- The danger of delegating powers on the environment to unstable groups.

Consequently, it is necessary to examine the following :

- The role of the State (as a facilitator) ;
- The Legitimacy of the State, that is, the real authority ; and
- The institutionalisation of authorities wielding power at the local level, for instance.

3. Natural Resource Management Policies and Strategies in the Congo Basin.

Congo Basin countries have reviewed or intend to reformulate their laws on forests and the environment. The strategies adopted have maintained a sectoral approach which tends to divide natural resources into compartments within ministries whose activities and projects are not always co-ordinated.

At the regional level, it is necessary, more than ever before, to seek coherent policies, laws and practices. In this regard, the efforts of CEFDHAC are welcome and should be encouraged for the speedy implementation of the recommendations of the report drafted in this connection (Koyo et al).

The summit of Heads of State of Central Africa which took place in Yaounde in March 1999 highlighted the requirement advocated by the Brazzaville Process for a concerted approach to forestry and bio-diversity resource management issues. It is obvious that this initiative should be supported by all CEFDHAC member countries for us to achieve the best results.

What is the link between this and other regional initiatives?

Within this regional framework, common, shared and trans-border resources must be given the highest priority.

As far as they are concerned, NGOs have already understood this obligation and have, for six years, been trying to work together through AFAN and other networks

to contribute to changes in their different countries by exchanging information and experiences, albeit, under very difficult material and institutional conditions.

Before taking any initiative today, it will be important for planners, senior government officials, community leaders, donor agencies and all other bodies involved in the environmental sector to find out, both politically and operationally, what is working and what is not.

Over the past few years, there have been significant changes in the policies and programmes that aim at supporting greater ownership of forests and more effective commitment to forestry management issues by grassroots people. However, this historical transition is limited by many factors.

4. Major challenges for NGOs

In the process of contributing to the elaboration and implementation of both national and regional policies and programmes aimed at sustainable natural resource management, NGOs have encountered significant political, legal and institutional constraints. Some of these include:

- State appropriation of resources;
- Unequal resource flows and delegation of authority;
- No permanent mechanisms for consultation with civil society and, more generally, lack of permanent communication links and working relations between governments and communities;
- The needs of major industrial groups wishing to exploit natural resources and which resist changes;
- The lack of experience and savoir-faire by many NGOs;
- The need for countries to pay their external debts and meet bilateral and multi lateral commitments; and
- Inadequate knowledge on the policy formulation and reformulation process for the decentralisation of natural resource management.

5. The contribution of NGOs to a better Operation of CEFDHAC

Currently, there are significant opportunities that could enable NGOs and other stakeholders to positively contribute to a better operation of CEFDHAC. Some of these include the existence of legal frameworks in some countries, the

international willingness and support for EGG and the ongoing trend to elaborate natural resource management policies and strategies. Added to these opportunities, is the existence of NGOs and networks with some expertise and a wide margin of manoeuvre to move things round. In particular, NGOs can throw their weight behind national correspondents. Many of who appear to be unable to direct the process at the national level.

NGOs may also help in:

- Revitalising contact groups;
- Propagating national and regional initiatives on the field;
- Experimenting the results of CEFDHAC projects on the field;
- Serving as project executing agencies both at national and regional levels; and by
- Promoting EGG within the CEFDHAC context via the following measures:
 - Carrying out research on what the local people know about good governance
 - Defining a code of good conduct to be respected by all. and
 - Effectively mobilising their members for greater awareness and action on issues pertaining to environmental governance;

To achieve this, it will be necessary:

- For all other partners to recognise the role played by NGOs;
- To re-establish direct relations between NGOs and the CEFDHAC secretariat. It must be underscored that during the preparations for the third CEFDHAC, action was initiated to restore such relations. This effort needs to be continued and strengthened;
- To clarify criteria for contact group (CG) eligibility;
- To provide project running costs;
- To train and inform CGs;
- To propose the restructuring of contact group for greater representation.

6. Recommendations and Suggestions for Action on the Integration of NGOs in Implementation of EGG

Permit me reiterate here that, the concept of EGG has been widely accepted as a potential tool in sustainable natural resource management in the Congo Basin.

This acceptance regrettably, seems not to have been translated into practice. One thing, that is certain, is that for EGG to become a reality, there has to be meaningful involvement of the civil society and other key stakeholders. Below are concrete recommendations on how NGOs could be integrated in the implementation of EGG in the Congo Basin.

Policy & Strategy Development Approach: In order to have acceptable policies & strategies, they should be developed with the meaningful participation of all the stakeholders. This calls for the joint elaboration of policy & strategy development methods and approaches.

Appropriate Legal Framework: For EGG to be practised in the field, there is a need for an appropriate enabling environment. The establishment of an agreed legal framework outlining the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders would contribute to the creation of such an enabling environment.

Needs-Driven Capacity Building Programme: Equally important is the capacity of the NGOs to implement EGG. There is a need to establish a needs-driven capacity building programme which takes into account country specific issues and realities

Representation & Communication: In CEFDHAC for instance, there is a need to increase representation (gender groups) and reinforce communication between member and non-member NGOs of the CEFDHAC contact groups in order to create cohesion in the programme.

Adequate Funding Mechanism: A successful EGG programme entails the participation of all key stakeholders and proper time allocation. Both of these have significant impact on funding. The EGG programme needs to be well packaged and in order to avoid duplication and waste of resources, donors need to collaborate.

Effective Co-ordination, Monitoring and Evaluation: Everyone fully accepts that EGG is a relatively new concept that has not been tested in the Congo Basin region. For it to be effective there is a need for effective co-ordination both at national and regional levels. There should be a suitable monitoring and evaluation mechanism that will ensure the proper documentation and sharing of experiences.

Frankness and Transparency: For EGG to work, there is a need for frankness and transparency in the entire process. Partners should clearly define and make known their interests from the start of the process. Lessons learnt should be shared.

7. Conclusion

Ongoing initiatives within the region such as the Brazzaville Process (CEFDHAC) have, though in a limited manner been promoting EGG within the Congo Basin. One of the greatest setbacks in this process has been the non-integration of the civil society. In order to address the situation, there is a need to integrate the NGOs in the implementation of EGG. Currently, there are other NGO networks such as AFAN with a wealth of experience. In order to operationalise the much accepted concept of EGG in the Congo Basin, there is a need for a review of both the process of elaboration and content of most policies and strategies, building of capacities of NGOs and networks, and of course, the will and support of governments. All this should be done in an atmosphere of frankness and transparency.

8. Appreciation

At this juncture, I would on behalf of AFAN and of the NGO community, like to express my profound gratitude to BSP/CARPE for their financial assistance. My thanks also go to the Burundian Government through the Minister of Environment for its hospitality and finally to the IUCN/CEFDHAC secretariat for their collaboration.

Thank you for your attention. Please kindly visit the NGO stand at the Hotel Source du Nil.

Zachee Dinan – Ngandembou
AFAN Coordinator

