

NES

NATIONAL
ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY



LEARNING FROM NES ALBANIA

GOOD PRACTICES FROM A
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM

INTERNATIONAL
LAND
COALITION

SUMMARY

NES Albania is supported by CSOs, MPs, academic institutions, the World Bank and SIDA. The Government considers it a credible and trustworthy point of reference to consult on issues of land and forest governance. How did NES Albania get there? First, the identification of common challenges in land and forest management and use by a number of stakeholders laid strong foundations for the NES in 2013, when a **scoping paper**—later on the basis of the NES Strategy—was produced.

Secondly, the NES has created a **linkage between the grassroots and the policy-making level**. Advocacy is strongly evidence-based. Claims are not only reinforced by the fact that **inputs are gathered directly from rural and forest communities** (meetings are often held with local level administrators, forest associations and regional forestry federations), but also **supported by research institutions and academia**. **Field visits** are arranged for MPs to see with their eyes the living conditions and needs of forest communities. In public hearings and informal meetings with government officials, NES representatives are listened to and their statements and requests are considered well-grounded and influential. The platform is currently guided by a **Coordination and Consultative Committee (CCC)** bringing all NES stakeholders together in regular meetings. Its legitimacy is demonstrated by the fact that at present the CCC also includes the MPs who are part of the working group currently drafting the new forestry law in the parliament.

Finally, the NES has gained trust across the board by using the expertise it could mobilise for **capacity building in local government units and awareness raising on women's land rights participation in forest users' associations**.



NES ALBANIA

GOOD PRACTICES

TOWARDS MAKING LAND GOVERNANCE MORE PEOPLE-CENTRED

The ILC's **Database of Good Practices** is an initiative that documents and systematises ILC members and partners' experience in promoting people-centred land governance, as defined in the Antigua Declaration of the ILC Assembly of Members.

Further information at www.landcoalition.org/what-we-do

The activity of **NES Albania** supports people-centred land governance as it contributes to:



COMMITMENT 1

Respect, protect and strengthen the land rights of women and men living in poverty.



COMMITMENT 4

Ensure gender justice in relation to land.



COMMITMENT 6

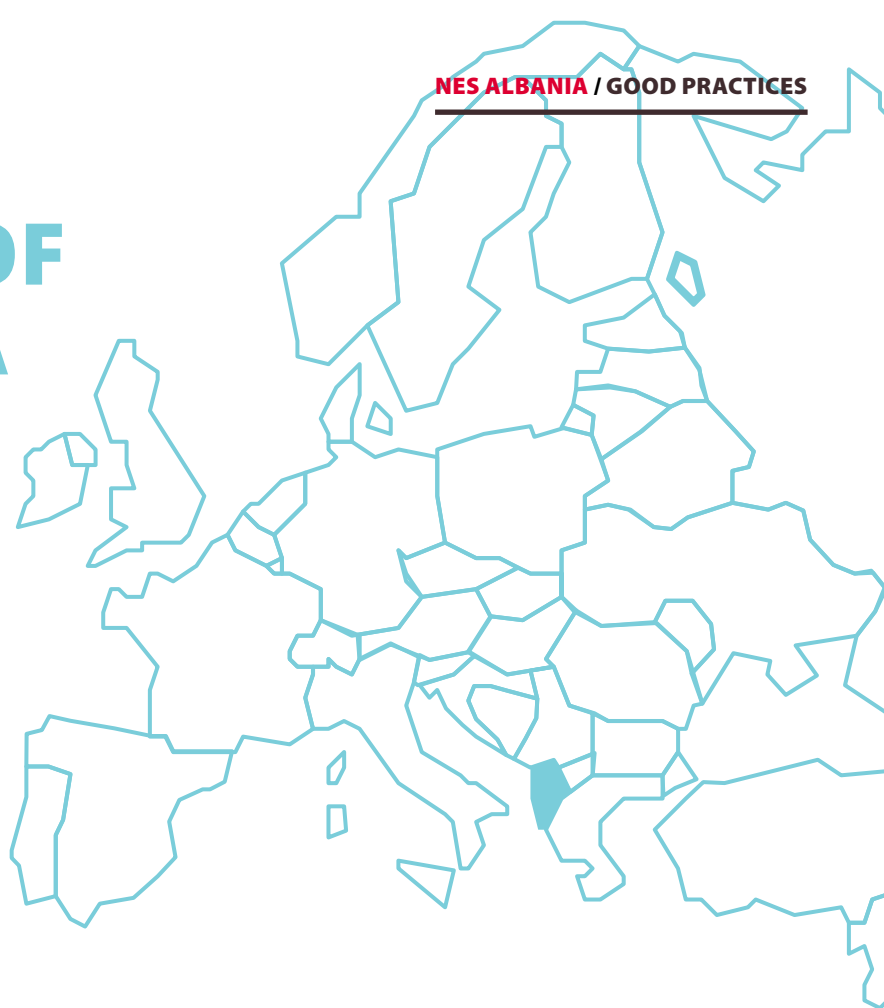
Enable the role of local land users in territorial and ecosystem management.



COMMITMENT 7

Ensure that processes of decision-making over land are inclusive.

THE ORIGIN OF NES ALBANIA



In 2013 – as part of the ILC’s 2011-2015 Strategy – a National Engagement Strategy was formulated in Albania. This was the result of broad-based consultations and discussions amongst multiple stakeholders. The first step was the production of a scoping paper in which the most critical and urgent challenges in land governance in Albania were identified. These were:

- i) achieving legal improvements in the ownership of agricultural, forest, and pasture land; ii) making progress with the forest and pasture land transfer process; and iii) strengthening the role and capacities of forest and pasture users’ associations as well as women’s involvement in decision-making processes. This was the common basis for an agreement on the establishment of the NES and the 2014-2016 strategy, implemented under the lead of NFCFPA (read more in the **Albania Country Strategy - 2013**).

During the last 26 years Albania has undergone significant legal, administrative and territorial reforms, with changes affecting the land and forestry sectors. The most important change was the transfer of immovable property into private ownership.

The forestry sector is moving towards more decentralised forest management. In 2016, as a consequence of the administrative and territorial reform, forests and pastures were transferred to the newly established local government units. User-ship and ownership rights are extremely important for local communities as the forest and its products are the basis for their livelihoods. This decentralisation process can have a positive impact on them. However, forest user rights are still not taken into due consideration and the new draft law - currently undergoing a consultation process - has not yet been approved. This in particular is what NES Albania is seeking to make a difference on.

● THE COORDINATION AND CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Setting up a coordination and consultative body - In the first year of the Strategy the main focus of NES Albania was to build synergies among different actors, particularly in forest governance. A Coordination and Consultative Committee (CCC) was set up when the NES was launched.

Broad participation of multiple and influential stakeholders - Besides NFCFPA (the National Federation of Communal Forests and Pastures of Albania), coordinating the NES, the CCC includes MPs, the Ministry of Environment (in 2013 also Ministry of Agriculture), academics, the World Bank, the Swedish International Development Agency SIDA, the CNVP Foundation (Connecting Natural Values and People – working closely with NFCFPA) and other CSO representatives like the Forest Regional Federations from Korçë, Kukës and Fier districts, the Center of Studies and Consultations “NATURE” and the Trans border Wildlife Association (TWA). Some of the MPs participating in the CCC are also part of the Committee for Environment and Productive Activities, the parliamentary group responsible for submitting the draft law on forestry to the Parliament. Having them in the CCC is of crucial importance for the NES. The participation of stakeholders like the World Bank and SIDA is also crucial. Both had already worked on forestry in Albania in collaboration with the Government. More concretely, the World Bank had supported the creation of a Forest Users Association and sustained the decentralization process taking place in the country. SIDA had also supported the Albanian

forestry sector. Grants from both the World Bank and SIDA are channelled through the CNVP Foundation.

Regular meetings - The fact that the CCC meets regularly and brings together stakeholders with common interests has encouraged the participation of targeted, committed and powerful stakeholders like the World Bank, with whom NFCFPA was working with also before the beginning of the NES. The CCC gathered five times between 2013 and 2016. The result of the last meeting, held on 10 September 2016, in which also representatives of the newly established municipalities and Association for Local Autonomy participated, was the new NES Strategy.

CCC members particularly appreciated the contribution of MPs. An agreement was reached on the actions that each CCC member should implement to improve forest governance. A summary document including relevant directions was written and shared with decision-makers and partner organisations.

Effective advocacy through joint efforts and a common definition of issues and priorities – The territorial and administrative reform reduces the number of local government units from 364 to 61. Its consequences on the forest sector are significant, as the reform assigns a bigger role in forest management to the new local government units. These, however, do not yet have adequate planning capacities for forest and natural resources and still lack professional staff, infrastructure and tools.

In 2013 a new forestry law was being drafted, when – due to a change of government – the process came to a halt. The parliamentary group in charge of the drafting process decided to engage the Ministries to ensure that the draft law was brought in line with the territorial and administrative reform under implementation. This opened an important opportunity for the NES to push for the inclusion of aspects like the allocation of additional rights to traditional forest users in the new draft law. These were not addressed in the previous draft, which – however – was indeed introducing positive changes. For example, unlike the 2008 forestry law, it mentioned forest users associations. Nevertheless, it was not taking the implications of the decentralization process into due consideration.

NES Albania advocates for forest management rights to be brought closer to the users and for Forest Users Associations to be assigned an enhanced legal role and better economic rights. Forest users should be able to not only use the forest but also sell forest products and gain profits for their families.

It was also thanks to the comments sent



by the CCC that the previous forestry law draft was abandoned and a new draft law is now in preparation. The MPs, because they were members of the CCC, were aware of the issues generated by the previous draft law. The World Bank and SIDA were also in agreement with the criticism raised by the NES.

A working group was set up for the preparation of the new forestry law. Its members – because they were also part of the CCC – knew what the position of the NES was and they took it into account in their work. Furthermore, the NES led on the advocacy efforts put in place regarding the contents of the sub-acts. Three sub-acts will be released after the approval of the law. They will regulate issues that are not addressed explicitly by the forestry law.

● LINKING THE GRASSROOTS WITH THE NATIONAL LEVEL THROUGH RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY

Participatory research at the grass-roots level - In 7 regional meetings the NES – through NFCFPA - collected inputs from the representatives of the municipalities, the administrative units, the regional environmental agencies, the Environmental inspectorate, the directorates of the forestry service, Prefectures, Forests and Pastures Regional Federations and Associations. In these meetings NFCFPA presented the new law and asked participants to share their views and suggestions for improving it. This allowed the NES to define the grassroots' claims and to bring them to the national level.

Agreeing on a common evidence - based position - When the Government asked for inputs from the NES, the World Bank encouraged the NES stakeholders to discuss and agree on a common position. A working group was created within the CCC, which included NFCFPA, SIDA and the Faculty of Forestry Science and was responsible for producing comments and writing a document for the Government. A meeting of the working group took place in NFCFPA's office to align the different positions within the NES and agree on comments to present to the Government in a public hearing.

The strong connection with the local level strengthened the NES' position in the eyes of the Government. The claims that the NES presented were not seen as coming from specific organisations or individuals,

but directly from the people affected by the forestry law on the ground.

Evidence-based advocacy – Based on the inputs collected during the regional meetings, NFCFPA prepared a document with concrete proposals for the new draft law in Albanian and in English. The proposals encouraged mainly to better define roles and responsibilities and recognise forest users' rights. Eventually, 23 proposals were sent to high representatives of the Albanian Parliament, the EU Delegation in Albania, SIDA, the World Bank, USAID, CNVP, FAO and the Ministry of the Environment.

In February 2016 the NES was invited to a public hearing by the Parliamentary Committee reviewing the draft law. This happened shortly after the CCC meeting of December 2015. Thanks to the research work conducted by NES Albania, two representatives of the NES could share the platform's position and the inputs gathered on the ground. The criticism to the draft law raised by NFCFPA was backed by the Faculty of Forestry Science and the Forest Engineers Association. The Ministry had to take it into careful consideration. The NES had already shared written comments with the Director of Forestry from the Ministry of the Environment, who had given a presentation on the draft law in front of the members of the CCC, triggering a lively debate within the NES.

● FIELD VISITS

Bringing policy-makers closer to the field - Field visits with 3 MPs (two of them already members of the CCC, the third one a member of the Parliamentary Committee for the Environment and Trade Activities) were organised in an area close to Tirana. Parliamentarians met with the communities, which had the opportunity to explain their concerns regarding forest use rights to the MPs. MPs could see with their own eyes that:

1. The forest was well maintained and forest users had not damaged it;
2. People were highly dependent on forest resources;

3. Families had used forest resources for generations, having inherited them from their ancestors.

The MPs' viewpoint changed as they became more sympathetic and understanding of forest communities' needs.

Increasing the trustworthiness of the NES - Thanks to this and the other practices outlined above, the credibility of the NES today is such that the Government has begun to ask for inputs from the NES on forest-related matters, acknowledging the authority and trustworthiness of the NES in this regard.

● CAPACITY BUILDING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

The NES has contributed to developing the capacities of local government units in the municipalities that currently have forestry staff. For example, training was provided on how to use GIS and computer programmes for mapping.

NFCFPA assisted one municipality in drafting their annual plan, including

the needs of the community in the planning – for example the need for firewood. The municipality mapped the medicinal plants and the other natural resources on its territory. NFCFPA supported the inclusion of this data in their annual plan. More municipalities that are now beginning their work will be offered similar training in the future.



FORESTRY AND WOMEN - AWARENESS RAISING AND PARTICIPATION

Awareness raising - The NES organised meetings with rural women and women working in local administration to raise awareness on their rights, particularly with relation to forests and land. Women were informed that they could join the Forest Users Associations and the Associations' boards, which are the decision making bodies.

Women's participation in forest governance - Currently the involvement of women in the implementation of local

level plans and projects is still very low. However, 130 out of 240 Forest Users Associations now include women. This was mainly the result of NCFPA's and CNVP's campaigning activities. A World Bank project will start in 2017 and will include an open call for grants to Forest Users Associations. One of the criteria for eligibility will be that the associations have at least 30% of women in their decision-making bodies. NCFPA's work to prepare the Associations to become eligible for this call has already started.

CHALLENGES



Despite the progress achieved so far, NES Albania still faces significant challenges. These are mainly linked with government changes. Today the political situation in Albania is relatively stable. However, the political elections of June 2017 might affect the on-going processes and the activity of the NES.

Furthermore, the territorial and administrative reform is currently in

an initial phase. Because the smallest administrative units have little governance experience and insufficient infrastructure, challenges might emerge as the reform's implementation process continues.

LESSONS LEARNED

ENSURING INCLUSIVENESS AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION

- Setting up a body like the CCC guarantees the **commitment and participation** of a broad range of stakeholders. The CCC is a solid platform of multiple actors that meet frequently to discuss challenges and actions.

REACHING AN AGREEMENT ON A SHARED PURPOSE WITHIN THE NES CORE GROUP

- Regular and broadly **inclusive meetings** are crucial for constructive discussion to take place. The CCC has gathered five times between 2013 and 2016. Members have agreed on the actions that each CCC member should implement to improve forest governance in the country. A summary document including relevant directions was written and shared with decision-makers and partner organisations. The NES Strategy 2014-2016 was the result of consultations and discussions amongst multiple stakeholders, which produced a scoping paper outlining the main challenges in forest governance in Albania. The second Strategy, approved in 2016, derived from a meeting of the CCC in which also representatives of the newly established municipalities and Association for Local Autonomy participated. A working group was created within the CCC to produce a document with the NES' recommendations for the Government. A meeting of the working group took place to align views and agree the contents of a public hearing.

LINKING EFFECTIVELY WITH OTHER INITIATIVES PURSUING RELEVANT GOALS IN THE COUNTRY

- The **participation of stakeholders** like the World Bank and SIDA in the NES adds value and leverage to the platform. Due to their involvement in the forest sector through previous cooperation with NCF-PA, the CNVP Foundation and the Albanian Government, and to the pre-existing synergies of interests and priorities, both are part of the CCC and play an active role within it. For example, the World Bank encouraged the NES stakeholders to discuss and agree on a common position to present to the Government for more effective advocacy.

NAVIGATING RELATIONSHIPS WITH NATIONAL POLICY AUTHORITIES TO INFLUENCE CHANGE TOWARDS PEOPLE-CENTERED LAND GOVERNANCE

- **Engaging MPs** in discussions and fieldtrips brings excellent results. Some of the MPs participating in the CCC are also part of the Committee for Environment and Productive Activities, the parliamentary group responsible for submitting a new draft law on forestry to the Parliament. Having them in the CCC is of crucial importance for the NES. Field visits with 3 MPs were organised in an area close to Tirana. MPs met with the communities and could see the conditions of the forest and the forest users with their own eyes. They engaged with community members and became more sympathetic and understanding of forest communities' needs.

ACHIEVING LONG-TERM LEGITIMACY FOR THE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM

- **Trustworthiness** is essential. While the NES is a fundamental vehicle for obtaining credibility at the national level, NES members that already benefit from a good reputation nationally and internationally can be an asset.
- **Building a solid network** of relationships is key. Both developing good institutional relationships and establishing contacts with specific individuals are useful strategies. For example, even informal meetings with Ministers or local government officials can lead to important results. Persistency is fundamental. Documents and requests can be sent by email or post, although return receipts and tight follow-up messages are often a fundamental guarantee for a timely response.
- **Collecting evidence from the ground** and using it in advocacy makes claims more grounded and advocacy efforts overall more effective.
- **Communication** is important. NES Albania produces a monthly newsletter called LifeGreen that gathers stories from the field and policy papers. It is distributed broadly at the national level. It not only consolidates the position of the NES further but it also makes its work and achievements widely known.

WHAT IS NES?

In recent years, equitable access to land, particularly in rural areas, has been high on the international policy agenda and is recognised as a crucial element attributing to sustainable development and poverty reduction. Innovative and progressive land policies and laws, particularly at the national level, are key to determining equitable access to, use of, and control over land and other natural resources. The National Engagement Strategy (NES) is the first step of an approach being promoted by the International Land Coalition at country level, in order to create conditions for inclusive and people-centred land-related policy change. Jointly formulated and co-owned by ILC members and other relevant actors at national level, the NES itself is a framework for identifying key priority areas on which land-concerned actors see opportunities for catalysing change, either at the level of policy formulation or at the level of implementing existing progressive policies. The NES process also involves the establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform that accompanies

the implementation of the NES, and makes necessary adjustments on the basis of lessons learned. A NES process is therefore aimed at facilitating collaborative and coordinated action amongst different stakeholders involved with land at the national level to promote people-centred land governance. Through these NES processes, opportunities are increasingly made available to national civil society actors to collaborate among themselves and with international actors, both governmental and non-governmental, and to engage with local and national governments.

Currently, NES exist in **Africa** (Cameroon, DRC, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Senegal, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda), **Asia** (Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, The Philippines) **Europe** (Albania) and **Latin America** (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru).

NES are under formulation in Honduras, Jordan, Moldova, Mongolia.

This paper is based on the information shared during the NES Global Learning Workshop held in Tirana in October 2016; an interview with the facilitator of NES Albania Albora Kacani; the NES Strategy of 2013; the NES report from 2016; Albania's Country Assessment from 2017.

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