



The Natural Resource Governance Framework

Improving governance for equitable and effective conservation

Jenny Springer, Jessica Campese and Barbara Nakangu



INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE

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Contents

Executive summary	IV
-------------------	-----------

Acknowledgements	VIII
------------------	-------------

I. Introduction	1
------------------------	----------

Why natural resource governance?	3
----------------------------------	----------

Natural resource governance in IUCN	5
-------------------------------------	----------

Development of the NRGF	7
-------------------------	----------

II. The Natural Resource Governance Framework	9
--	----------

Cross-cutting values	9
----------------------	----------

Principles and criteria	14
-------------------------	-----------

III. Applications of the Natural Resource Governance Framework	35
---	-----------

Assessments of governance contexts and systems	35
--	-----------

Assessments of activities and actors	39
--------------------------------------	-----------

Assessment and alignment of governance-related methodologies, approaches and tools	40
--	-----------

VI. Conclusion	41
-----------------------	-----------

References	42
------------	-----------

Endnotes	48
----------	-----------

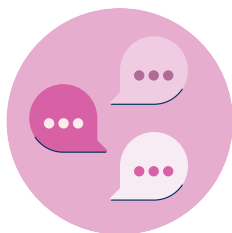
Executive summary

Governance is a critical determinant of the social equity, effectiveness and sustainability of natural resource use and conservation. Improving natural resource governance, including securing rights and sharing power and responsibilities, benefits both people and nature. Despite this, governance remains relatively poorly understood and weakly addressed in many natural resource and conservation contexts.

The Natural Resource Governance Framework (NRGF) is an IUCN knowledge product created to provide a robust, inclusive and credible approach to assessing and improving natural resource governance at multiple levels and in diverse contexts. The overarching goal of the NRGF is *to set standards and guidance for decision makers at all levels to make better and more just decisions on the use of natural resources and the distribution of nature's benefits, following good-governance principles*. The NRGF builds on and complements the governance-related work of multiple IUCN programmes, Commissions and Members.

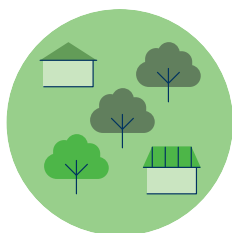
The central component of the NRGF is a comprehensive yet concise framework that distils key best-practice elements of effective and equitable governance relevant to conservation and natural resource management. This framework is designed to serve as a knowledge resource in itself and as a basis for a range of applications to understand and improve natural resource governance in diverse contexts.

This publication presents the NRGF as it has been developed to date through a robust and inclusive process involving IUCN experts, Members and partners. The framework comprises two cross-cutting values, a set of 10 key principles for equitable and effective governance and criteria that are important for the fulfilment of each of the principles. The cross-cutting values are sustaining nature and realising social equity and human rights, and the 10 NRGF principles are:



1. Inclusive decision-making

Decision-making regarding natural resource policies and practices is based on the full and effective participation of all relevant actors, with particular attention to the voice and inclusion of rights-holders and groups at risk of marginalisation



2. Recognition and respect for tenure rights

Rights to lands, resources and waters are recognised and respected, with particular attention to the customary, collective rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, and to women's tenure rights



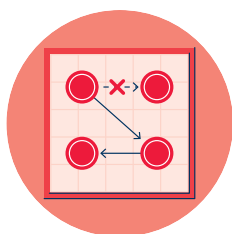
3. Recognition of and respect for diverse cultures, knowledge and institutions

Natural resource governance is grounded in sound and diverse forms of knowledge and respect for diverse cultures, values and practices



4. Devolution

Decisions are taken at the lowest possible level appropriate to the social and ecological systems being governed, with particular attention to empowering the roles and authority of Indigenous peoples and local communities in natural resource governance



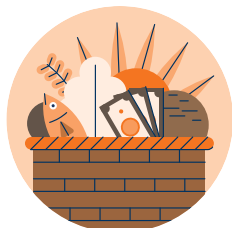
5. Strategic vision, direction and learning

Natural resource governance is guided by an overall vision of desired environmental and social outcomes, and allows for adaptation in response to learning and changing conditions



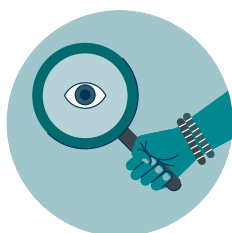
6. Coordination and coherence

Actors involved in or affecting natural resource governance coordinate around a coherent set of strategies and management practices



7. Sustainable and equitably shared resources

Actors responsible for natural resources have the means necessary to carry out sustainable management and governance activities, including from the equitable sharing of benefits generated from natural resources



8. Accountability

Actors responsible for or affecting natural resource governance are accountable for their actions and the environmental and social impacts they produce



9. Fair and effective rule of law

Natural resource-related laws and their application are fair and effective and protect fundamental rights



10. Access to justice and conflict resolution

People are able to seek and obtain remedies for grievances and resolve conflicts regarding land and natural resources

Rights-holders and stakeholders can use the NRGF as an organising framework to identify governance strengths, challenges and pathways for improvement, through participatory processes. It can be used in diverse contexts, and for a variety of purposes. NRGF applications piloted to date include assessments of:

- Assessments of natural resource governance in a particular context or system, in order to better understand the state of governance and define actions to improve governance in response to what is learned;
- Assessments of a conservation project or programme to identify and address the strengths and weaknesses in how they tackle governance issues; and
- Assessments of how other methodologies and tools address governance issues, using the NRGF as a point of reference.

There are a variety of NRGF tools to guide implementation of these diverse applications. These tools are briefly described in this document and are available in full on the NRGF [webpage](#).

Through this work, IUCN seeks to ensure that the norms, institutions, processes and power relations that shape the management of natural resources enhance the voice and decision-making power of all rights-holders and stakeholders – particularly marginalised groups – in ways that contribute to ensuring healthy ecosystems, social equity and human rights.

Acknowledgements

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This work from 2017–2020 builds upon a previous phase of NRGF development led primarily by CEESP during the 2013–2016 IUCN Programme period. As described in the text, a key focus during that phase was to conduct regional dialogues and scoping analyses, including work led over time by: Osvaldo Munguia, Adalberto Padilla and Juanita Cabrera-Lopez in Mesoamerica; Amran Hamzah and Harry Jonas, in Asia; and Jennifer Mohamed-Katerere and Barbara Nakangu, in Africa. Analytical work by Emmanuel Nuesiri, Anne Larson, Rene Oyono, Alois Mandondo, Nigel Crawhall, Allison Silverman, Paul Martin, Ben Boer and Lydia Slobodian further informed understanding of key concepts and assessment approaches. The contributions of all those who attended the NRGF regional meetings and analyses are gratefully acknowledged, as are the comments provided by participants in the September 2016 NRGF Knowledge Hub session at the 2016 World Conservation Congress, and contributions from members of the initial 2013–2016 NRGF Working Group. We acknowledge and thank Aroha Mead, previous Chair of CEESP, Jennifer Mohamed-Katerere and Janis Alcorn, early NRGF Working Group Chairs, and Gonzalo Oviedo,

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I. Introduction

The Natural Resource Governance Framework (NRGF) is an International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) knowledge product created to provide a robust, inclusive and credible approach to assessing and improving natural resource governance at multiple levels and in diverse contexts. The overarching goal of the NRGF is *to set standards and guidance for decision makers at all levels to make better and more just decisions on the use of natural resources and the distribution of nature's benefits, following good-governance principles.*

IUCN's work on the NRGF is motivated by its recognition that governance is a crucial determinant of the effectiveness, sustainability and social equity of natural resource management, use and conservation.¹ Although attention to governance has increased significantly in recent years, poor governance continues to be a major impediment to the well-being of people and nature. One factor contributing to this situation is the fragmented understanding of governance within the conservation and natural resource sectors. Thus, there is a need to translate awareness of the importance of good natural resource governance into clear, coherent knowledge resources and practical tools that enable rights-holders and stakeholders to assess governance and identify and pursue actions to improve it.

The central component of the NRGF is a comprehensive yet concise framework that distils key best-practice elements of effective and equitable governance relevant to conservation and natural resource management.² Linked to this central framework of key elements is a set of participatory tools for assessing and improving natural resource governance in diverse contexts. The NRGF and associated tools provide a basis for increasing the coherence of governance approaches across and beyond IUCN, and for promoting wider and more robust attention to rights-based governance in the conservation and natural resource sectors. Through this work, IUCN seeks to ensure that the norms, institutions, processes and power relations that shape the management of natural resources enhance the voice and decision-making power of all rights-holders and stakeholders — particularly marginalised groups — in ways that contribute to ensuring healthy ecosystems, social equity and human rights.

This publication presents the NRGF as it has been developed to date through a robust and inclusive process involving IUCN experts, Members and partners. The framework comprises a set of 10 key principles for equitable and effective governance, criteria associated with each of these principles, and two cross-cutting values. In addition to serving as a knowledge resource on natural resource governance, the NRGF can be used in multiple ways to understand and improve governance. The publication introduces several types of these applications of the NRGF, associated tools and examples of their uses to date.

The publication has three main sections and a brief conclusion.

Section I presents important aspects of the context and process for developing the NRGF. It highlights the relevance of natural resource governance to conservation, human rights and social equity; provides background information on how governance is integrated into the IUCN Programme; and summarises the analytical and multi-stakeholder process used to develop the NRGF.

Section II presents the NRGF as a comprehensive and concise analysis and synthesis of key best-practice elements for equitable and effective natural resource governance. It sets out the main components of the framework, including two cross-cutting values, 10 principles and criteria for unpacking best-practice aspects of each principle. Section II also includes considerations informing the development of each component, describes the rationale for each principle in terms of its importance to the realisation of social and environmental outcomes, and summarises the principles and criteria in a table.

Section III provides information on how to use the NRGF to conduct governance assessments. It describes the following types of applications for the NRGF (though applications are not limited to these):

- ⦿ Assessing natural resource governance in a particular context or system in order to better understand the state of governance, improve governance in response to what is learned, monitor governance over time and compare governance across contexts;
- ⦿ Assessing particular conservation (or other) activities, such as a project or programme, including ways to identify and address the strengths and weaknesses of how the activity is governed and how it tackles natural resource governance issues; and
- ⦿ Assessing how other methodologies and tools address governance issues, using the NRGF as a point of reference.

Section III introduces and briefly describes supportive tools and examples of their use. These tools are available on the NRGF [webpage](#).

A brief conclusion follows Section III.

The NRGF aims to provide an organising framework that diverse stakeholders and rights-holders can use to assess and understand natural resource governance issues relevant to their contexts, and identify — through participatory processes — the actions needed to improve governance for equitable, rights-based, and effective conservation. Thus, this publication has a wide range of potential audiences, including conservation practitioners, Indigenous peoples and local communities, policy makers, civil society organisations and others with an interest in better understanding and improving natural resource governance.

Why natural resource governance?

Natural resource governance can be defined as the norms, institutions and processes that determine how power and responsibilities over natural resources are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens — including women, men, youth, Indigenous peoples and local communities — participate in and benefit from the management of natural resources (Graham et al., 2003).

In the last decade, governance has emerged as a crucial and determining factor for sustainable development and natural resource management and conservation. There is growing recognition that governance significantly determines both the effectiveness of conservation efforts and the extent to which conservation contributes to human well-being. These linkages operate in multiple directions. For example, research suggests that governance is a critical factor in local support for conservation initiatives and that this support is important, in turn, for conservation effectiveness (Bennett & Dearden, 2014; Bennett et al., 2019). Specific elements of good governance, such as inclusive decision-making and coordination, contribute to positive conservation outcomes by engaging the interests and initiatives of all actors managing or relying on natural resources in a given context (e.g., de Koning, 2017). Similarly, securing rights and recognising diverse cultural and knowledge systems helps ensure that Indigenous peoples and local communities are able to sustain their own collective actions towards the stewardship of

biological and cultural diversity (Artelle et al., 2019; Springer & Almeida, 2015; Kothari et al., 2012).

In addition, good governance enables nature conservation and natural resource management to contribute to positive social outcomes (such as more secure rights and livelihoods, enhanced empowerment, including for women and girls, and enhanced sense of dignity and belonging) and guards against the risk of negative social impacts (such as conflict and the loss of secure rights and livelihoods). Healthy ecosystems are the basis of rural livelihoods and ways of life, especially for many Indigenous peoples and local communities, and vulnerable, marginalised and/or minority groups. However, conservation may not necessarily contribute to the well-being of local people unless they have a voice in decision making, are able to secure the use of and benefits from natural resources, and have access to protections against displacement or harm to their environment. Where key elements of good governance are absent, actions aimed at achieving positive environmental outcomes can have negative social impacts and are less likely to be effective (Tauli-Corpuz, 2016).

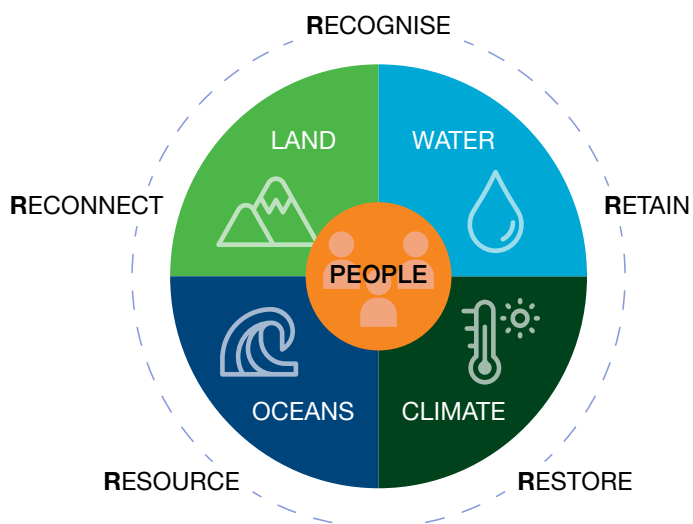
The ideal of good natural resource governance has been integrated into key global frameworks — such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change — that guide and shape global conservation action. Nevertheless, available global measures indicate that natural resource governance remains weak. For example, of the 70 countries surveyed in 2014 for the Environmental Democracy Index, 79 per cent had only fair or poor laws on participation in environmental decision-making (WRI, 2015). More than two-thirds of 180 countries scored below the midpoint in the 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, 2019). Moreover, inconsistent or poor understandings of good governance — as well as the limited availability of, and skills in using, tools to facilitate good governance — have often hampered the integration of measures to promote effective, inclusive and equitable natural resource governance in the implementation of conservation programmes.

Natural resource governance in IUCN

IUCN identifies human rights as one of the ethical foundations of good natural resource governance, reflecting the close interlinkages between environmental degradation and the fulfilment or violation of human rights (UNHRC, 2018; Springer & Campese, 2011).

In light of its importance to IUCN's mission, governance has been one of IUCN's main global programme areas since 2013. It was one of three global priority areas in the IUCN Programme for 2017–2020, the key phase in the development of the NRGF. The overall expected global result of the 2017–2020 IUCN priority area 2 on promoting and supporting effective and equitable governance of natural resources, was that "*Natural resource governance at all levels enables delivery of effective conservation and equitable social outcomes by integrating good governance principles and rights-based approaches*". In the IUCN Programme for 2021–2024, approved by IUCN Members in February 2021, governance is a central part of the Programme Area on People (Figure 1).

Figure 1. IUCN's Nature 2030 Programme Framework



Source: IUCN Programme 2021-2024.

The centrality of governance in the IUCN Programme means that the IUCN Secretariat and the six IUCN Commissions share a responsibility to contribute to the realisation of governance results. Accordingly, governance is a prominent focus in multiple IUCN programmes and initiatives. For example, IUCN's work on protected areas has included the development of governance frameworks and best-practice guidelines for protected area governance (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013), and governance is one of the four components in the Green List Standard for protected areas (IUCN & WCPA, 2017). IUCN's work on sustainable water conservation and use has included a substantial focus on transboundary water-basin governance (Sanchez & Roberts, 2014), and landscape governance and rights-based approaches have been key concerns in IUCN's work on forest conservation (Blomley & Walters, 2019). Beyond IUCN, the World Resources Institute (Davis et al., 2013) and the World Bank and Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) (The Program on Forests (PROFOR) & FAO, 2011) have developed important frameworks for assessing forest governance.

This work demonstrates the increasing focus on governance in environmental sectors, which has significantly advanced understanding of, and attention to, governance in specific contexts. At the same time, previous work has focused on specific natural resource sectors (such as forests and water) or contexts (such as protected areas), and has considered related but different definitions, key elements and sets of issues. What is missing is an overall framework for understanding the key elements of natural resource governance across multiple levels and contexts. In adopting governance as a core programme area, IUCN committed to filling this knowledge gap by developing the NRGF as a robust, inclusive and credible approach for assessing and improving natural resource governance at multiple levels and in diverse contexts.

IUCN's key mandates for the NRGF initiative have been to develop an overarching framework that helps define what constitutes good – “effective and equitable” – natural resource governance, and to support the development and use of approaches and tools for assessing and improving natural resource governance. Given that IUCN already has a substantial set of governance tools (such as for protected areas), one role of the NRGF is to provide a point of reference for building coherence and consistency across the multiple streams of IUCN's governance-related work. In addition, the NRGF may be applied directly through the development and use of new approaches and tools derived from the framework, especially in areas where other governance tools do not yet exist.

Development of the NRGF

The framework presented in this publication has been developed through a robust and inclusive process that has integrated reviews of relevant literature, regional scoping activities, expert and stakeholder engagement and application pilots. The process has involved IUCN Secretariat Programme, Commissions and Members, as well as other key experts and stakeholder and rights-holder groups.

Regional dialogues and analyses were emphasised from the outset, with a view to incorporating the perspectives of key constituencies and thereby helping ensure the on-ground relevance of framework elements. Specifically, participants at the NRGF Inception Meeting in 2013 agreed that initial scoping and conceptualisation should be grounded in dialogue, research and action by local actors across diverse regions. Three focal regions — Mesoamerica, Eastern and Southern Africa, and Asia — were selected by members of the initial NRGF Working Group. In Mesoamerica, efforts focused on engaging with Indigenous peoples' organisations through regional workshops and the preparation of case studies documenting Indigenous perspectives on good governance (Elías, 2017). In Eastern and Southern Africa, a series of dialogues culminated in the preparation of a regional analysis of key governance issues using draft NRGF principles as a way to test and inform their further development (Nakangu, 2016). In Asia, case studies and a regional analysis of governance issues fed into a workshop that brought together researchers and representatives of non-governmental and Indigenous people's organisations to provide inputs into and feedback on draft principles (Hamzah et al., 2016).

These regional dialogues and engagement activities were complemented by extensive literature reviews, with a particular focus on other frameworks and standards addressing aspects of natural resource governance such as forest and protected area governance. Principles and key elements used prominently in IUCN's work were also reviewed. The sequencing of research and analysis with regional engagement processes enabled stakeholders in several regions to provide inputs to and feedback on the emerging structure and contents of the framework, as described above. Additional expert inputs were gathered through comments on drafts as well as from a 'knowledge hub' workshop on the NRGF held during the 2016 World Conservation Congress. Conceptual papers prepared on specific principles further informed understanding of those principles and criteria for their realisation.³

The results of these research and engagement processes were analysed, synthesised and structured into an initial design document (Springer, 2016). This working paper provided the basis for pilot assessments, including a field assessment in the United Republic of Tanzania (NRGF, 2017), and an analysis of the correspondence between the NRGF and other IUCN governance resources (Campese, 2018). Experiences from these pilots and further reviews of literature published since 2016 fed into a meeting of the NRGF Technical Working Group, involving key governance experts, in October 2018. The current publication integrates the results of this additional research, analysis, piloting and expert review.

II. The Natural Resource Governance Framework

The NRGF consists of 10 principles and associated criteria for understanding, assessing and improving the governance of natural resources, underpinned by two cross-cutting values. This section describes each of these three main components of the NRGF:

1. Values — the cross-cutting and foundational ethics and goals of good natural resource governance;
2. Principles — key elements that need to be in place to realise effective and equitable governance; and
3. Criteria — aspects important to the realisation of the principles.

Cross-cutting values

Values are inherent in the NRGF's mandate to promote the effective and equitable governance of natural resources, including by taking a rights-based approach (IUCN, 2016). Values are judgments about what is important (Mohamed-Katerere, 2013); the two values stated here, 'sustaining nature' and 'realising social equity and human rights', express judgments about what natural resource governance should be and the goals it is seeking to achieve. The inclusion of values in the NRGF makes these foundational ethics and goals of good governance explicit and allows them to guide and inform other components of the Framework.

IUCN's vision of **"a just world that values and conserves nature"** provides an overall values-based orientation for the NRGF. This vision is further unpacked here to articulate the two interlinked values of the NRGF, each of which includes two related qualities.

Sustaining nature

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This value is derived from the orientation of the NRGF towards the conservation of nature. It shows that the framework's approach to natural resource governance is guided by an environmental ethos and by a concern to ensure that nature is valued and sustained. Nature is understood as part of a socio-ecological system in which biophysical, institutional and social dimensions interact (McGinnis & Ostrom, 2014). The value of sustaining nature is reflected in the IUCN mandate that natural resource governance should be effective and should result in effective conservation (IUCN, 2016). The quality of effectiveness underpins aspects of governance, such as strategic direction, sound knowledge to inform decision-making and adequate implementation capacities and resources (Lockwood, 2010; USAID, 2013; Bennett & Satterfield, 2018).⁴

A second key quality relevant to sustaining nature is that governance should be adaptive and thereby enable responses to uncertainty and changing conditions in ways that enhance environmental and social resilience (Chaffin et al., 2014). Resilience is used here to refer to “the ability of a system and its component parts to anticipate, absorb, accommodate, or recover from the effects of a hazardous event in a timely and efficient manner, including through ensuring the preservation, restoration, or improvement of its essential basic structures and functions” (IPCC 2012). While adaptiveness could be considered as part of effectiveness (because conservation that is not sustained is not effective over the long term), it is highlighted here as a distinct quality because it is essential for dealing with rapid global environmental change. Throughout the framework, adaptiveness calls attention to the importance of: learning, monitoring and feedback; cross-scale interactions; diversity; and connectivity (Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2014; Jones, 2018; Bennett & Satterfield, 2018).

Realising social equity and human rights

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This value is derived from the mandate of the NRGF to promote and support a rights-based approach to conservation. It is reflected in the IUCN requirement that natural resource governance should be equitable and produce equitable social outcomes (IUCN, 2016). Social equity is one key quality of this value.⁵ It focuses attention throughout the framework on ensuring that all actors are treated with fairness and respect and — beyond this — on overcoming power asymmetries in the ways that women, men, Indigenous peoples and local communities are able to engage in and benefit from natural resource governance. Gender equality is central to achieving social equity in natural resource governance, as is attention to the rights, cultures and identities of Indigenous peoples (Tauli-Corpuz, 2016; Elías, 2017). Equity requires that natural resource governance gives particular attention to the needs of, and potential impacts of natural resource decision-making on, vulnerable, marginalised and/or minority groups.

A second key quality of this value is human rights, which involves bringing a rights-based approach to conservation and conservation governance. Rights-based approaches aim to ensure that conservation policy and practice respect rights in all cases and further support their realisation to the extent possible (Campese, 2009). While equity and human rights are closely related, as stated in the UN definition of a human rights-based approach to development (Box 1), taking a rights-based approach specifically grounds efforts to achieve social equity in human rights standards and focuses on the protection and fulfilment of rights. Thus, the NRGF includes being ‘human rights-based’ as a distinct quality. Specific human rights standards that underpin and provide guidance for the NRGF include, among others:⁶

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNGA, 1948) and its associated covenants on Civil and Political Rights (UNGA, 1966a) and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNGA, 1966b);
- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNGA, 2007) and International Labour Organization Convention 169 (ILO, 1989); and
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (UNGA, 1979).

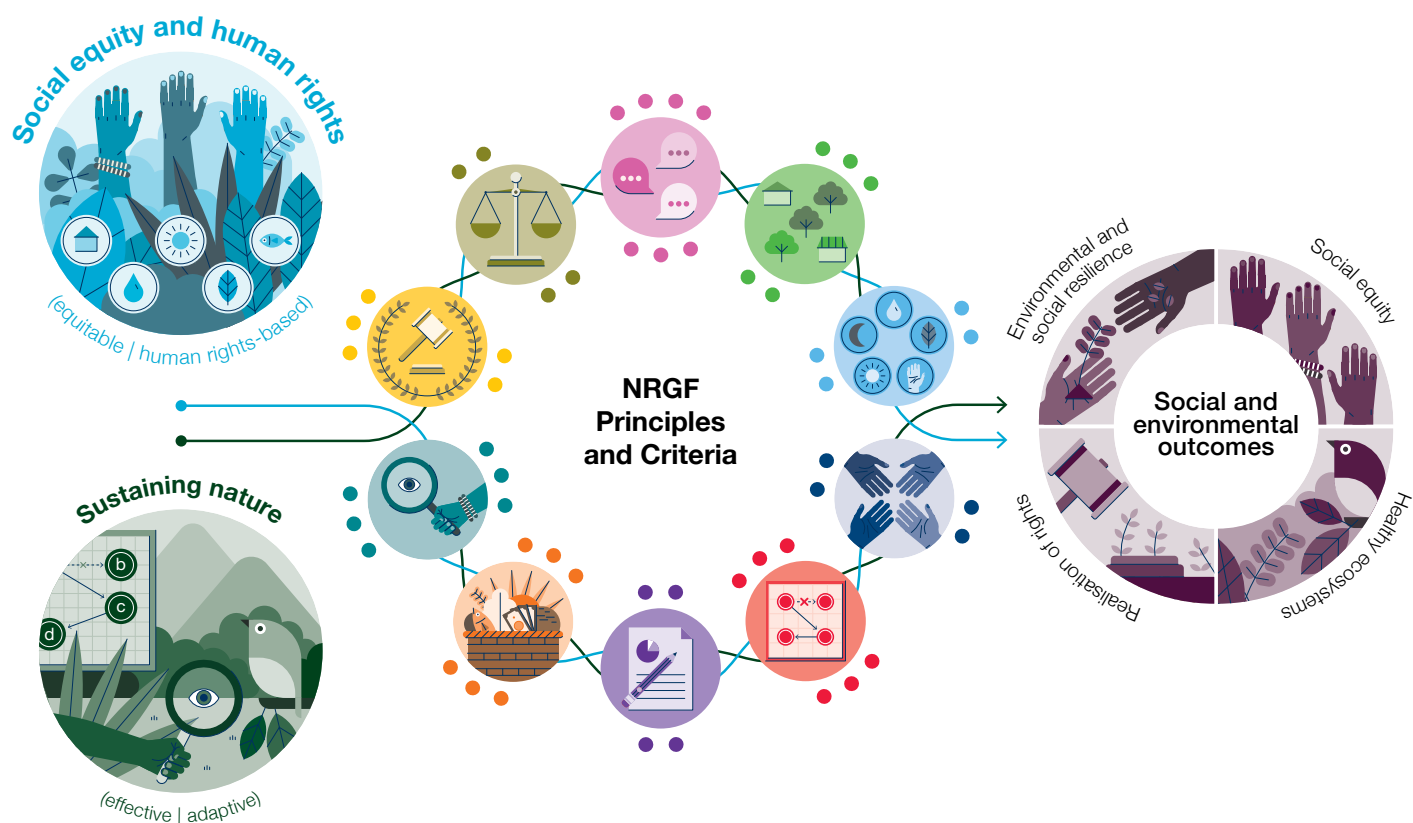
A rights-based approach recognises people as rights-holders⁷ and calls attention to duty-bearers as those responsible for the realisation of rights (Campese, 2009). It orients the NRGF towards the respect, protection and fulfilment of procedural and substantive rights⁸ and to the rights of specific groups, including women and Indigenous peoples (Springer & Campese, 2011). Substantive rights closely associated with the environment and natural resources include rights to life, health, property, culture and an adequate standard of living. Relevant procedural rights include the rights to participation, information and access to justice (Springer & Campese, 2011).

Box 1. What is a human rights-based approach

A human rights-based approach is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress.

Source: UN Human Rights-based Approach Portal (n.d.).

As illustrated in Figure 2, values of ‘sustaining nature’ and ‘social equity and human rights’ are cross-cutting in the NRGF. These values underpin and animate the more specific principles and criteria described in the following sections.⁹ The two values also point towards the positive social and environmental outcomes that efforts to improve natural resource governance are seeking to achieve. The arrows running from the two values and through the principles to the outcomes highlight the mutually reinforcing relationships among healthy ecosystems, social equity, resilience and the realisation of human rights.

Figure 2. Cross-cutting values in the Natural Resource Governance Framework

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The cross-cutting roles of 'sustaining nature' and 'social equity and human rights' in the framework are reflected in the fact that many of the principles (as described below) relate to both of these values and their associated qualities. For example, the principle of inclusive decision-making is: grounded in and aims to realise the procedural right to participation; contributes to social equity by taking into account the views of those at risk of marginalisation; enables more effective decision-making by enabling the inclusion of diverse perspectives and sources of information; and contributes to adaptive governance by broadening participation and drawing on multiple forms of knowledge.

Principles and criteria

Principles provide the core architecture of the NRGF and articulate key elements of good governance. While values establish high-level and cross-cutting orientations to guide and inform all other aspects of the framework, principles are more concrete elements that can be assessed in terms of their status within specific contexts. At the same time, in keeping with the mandate of the NRGF to support the assessment and improvement of governance at multiple levels and in diverse contexts, the principles are designed to remain relatively broad and flexible. Overall, the principles and criteria can be used to assess or highlight the strengths and weaknesses of a governance system, approach or related intervention, as described in more detail in the section below on ‘applications’ of the NRGF.

The NRGF comprises a set of 10 NRGF principles. Considerations that have informed the identification of these principles include:

- Building on existing knowledge and experience – that is, avoid reinventing the wheel and take into account existing principles and frameworks for assessing natural resource governance;
- Taking into account and relating, in particular, to other governance principles used by IUCN;
- Reflecting the on-ground experience and perspectives of diverse rights-holders and stakeholders;
- Embedding the NRGF values without repeating them;
- Being sufficiently concrete to provide a basis for assessment and sufficiently broad to ensure their relevance in multiple contexts;
- Ensuring that, collectively, the principles are comprehensive without being duplicative; and
- Comprising a manageable number of principles for the purposes of assessment.

To build on existing frameworks, 13 global assessment frameworks focused on governance in natural resource sectors (such as forests and protected areas) were reviewed to identify the core principles or key elements that most frequently appear in them.¹⁰ (Across the frameworks, the terminology used for these elements varies; they may be referred to as principles, attributes, characteristics, indicators, considerations and/or themes.) In order to take account of and relate to other principles used within IUCN, two sets of governance principles – those included in the IUCN Programme 2017-2020 approved by IUCN Members at the 2016 World Conservation Congress, and the principles

that underpin IUCN's work on protected areas governance – were also reviewed and compared.¹¹ The on-ground experiences and perspectives of rights-holders and stakeholders were gathered through extensive regional processes, involving case studies, dialogues, regional analyses and workshops, as described in Section I.

Twelve working principles were initially defined, drawing on these analyses and inputs and taking into account the other considerations noted above – such as comprehensiveness, embedding without repeating the cross-cutting values and relevance to multiple contexts (Springer, 2016). Based on pilot activities and expert inputs, including from regional workshops and the NRGF Technical Working Group, those draft principles were revised and consolidated into the 10 NRGF principles presented below.

Each principle is supplemented by a set of criteria, which are conditions that need to be in place for a principle to be fulfilled. The criteria also provide additional information on what upholding or realising a principle would look like in practice. In developing the criteria for the NRGF, it was considered that, for each principle, these should:¹²

- Unpack the principle by providing a greater level of detail, while remaining broad enough to be relevant at multiple levels and in diverse contexts;
- Reflect best practices in relation to the principle;
- Embed the NRGF values and qualities (as described above);
- Be comprehensive so as to provide confidence that the principle will be upheld if the criteria are met;
- Constitute a manageable number for the purposes of assessment (defined as 4–7 criteria per principle); and
- Use simple language that does not repeat the language of the principle.

Importantly, the NRGF criteria address the following three aspects of governance:¹³

- 1.** Legal and policy frameworks – focusing on the extent to which policies, laws, rules and norms establish the requirements and mechanisms for upholding the governance principle;
- 2.** Institutions and processes – focusing on the extent to which institutions, platforms and processes are in place to uphold a given principle; and
- 3.** Outcomes – focusing on the extent to which the principle is realised in practice.

These three aspects arise from the definition of natural resource governance (see “Why natural resource governance?” above); they are also included in other frameworks, such as the Law for Sustainability Framework (Martin et al., 2016) and the Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Forest Governance (PROFOR & FAO, 2011).

Addressing these three distinct aspects in the criteria highlights the importance of each for the realisation of good governance. For example, policies, laws, rules and norms establish standards, but may not be implemented if there is a lack of supportive institutions and processes. Supportive institutions or processes may be in place but remain fragile or inconsistent in the absence of established policies, laws, rules and norms. Assessing the practical realisation of good natural resource governance principles enables the identification of gaps between policies, implementation and outcomes, as well as differences in outcomes between locations or among different groups.

Using the considerations noted above, and taking account of the different aspects of governance, a set of 4–7 criteria was developed for each NRGF principle. These criteria draw on best practices from the literature on natural resource governance, criteria and indicators in other related frameworks,¹⁴ and inputs from NRGF Technical Working Group members.

As noted by Kishor and Rosenbaum (2012) in relation to indicators, using a defined set of principles and criteria “brings order and a degree of comprehensiveness to the assessment” that “prevents the evaluator from overlooking topics and encourages an organized assessment”. Although some principles and criteria may be more relevant than others in a given context, using a conceptual framework prompts consideration of whether and how specific issues are relevant and ensures they are not overlooked. At the same time, criteria are intentionally kept general here because the NRGF is meant to apply across multiple contexts and levels. As discussed in Section III, this means that applications in particular contexts may require further tailoring of the criteria, such as through more specific guiding questions or indicators.

The 10 NRGF Principles and their associated criteria are presented below. The entry on each principle includes several components. These are:¹⁵

- ◎ A title and one-sentence summary of the principle;
- ◎ A paragraph that briefly introduces terms associated with each principle and the relevance and rationale for including it in the NRGF (with reference to cross-cutting values and qualities); and
- ◎ Criteria that distil key best practice elements for the fulfilment of each principle.

Principle 1: Inclusive decision-making



Decision-making regarding natural resource policies and practices is based on the full and effective participation of all relevant actors, with particular attention to the voice and inclusion of rights-holders and groups at risk of marginalisation

The principle of inclusive decision-making recognises the central importance of participation to the realisation of equitable and effective natural resource governance. At the same time, it aims to avoid weak interpretations of participation by emphasising the central and active roles in decision making of people with particular rights to, or reliance on, natural resources. It also involves creating conditions for including the voices of marginalised people alongside the voices of those who often dominate decision-making processes (Oyono & Madondo, 2016). Participation itself is a procedural right that further enables the realisation of multiple substantive rights. Inclusive decision-making also contributes to social equity by addressing power imbalances in access to decision-making spaces and in the dynamics of decision-making processes. Participation enhances the effectiveness of natural resource governance by bringing multiple perspectives and associated knowledge to bear on decision making.

Participation and inclusive dialogue among resource users are also key components of adaptive governance (Folke et al., 2005; Dietz et al., 2003). While the need for inclusive decision-making is most often highlighted in relationships between local people and the state, the principle of inclusive decision-making is also a crucial factor in relations within communities (e.g. to ensure the inclusion of women, youth and other groups) and between local people and businesses, non-governmental organisations and other non-state actors.

The following criteria are important for the realisation of Principle 1:

- Relevant legal and policy frameworks include robust provisions on the inclusion of rights-holders and stakeholders in decision making.
- Platforms and processes are in place to enable full and effective participation in decision making.
- Processes for inclusive decision-making engage diverse groups, are socially and culturally appropriate and take into account power dynamics within and between groups.
- Rights-holders and stakeholders have access to information on the environment and natural resources.¹⁶
- Rights-holders and stakeholders have the capacities and support they need to participate in decision making, including through appropriate representation.
- Natural resource decisions take into account the views expressed through participatory processes.
- Free, prior and informed consent is required, secured and maintained for decisions concerning Indigenous peoples and other customary rights-holders and their lands and resources.¹⁷

Principle 2: Recognition and respect for tenure rights



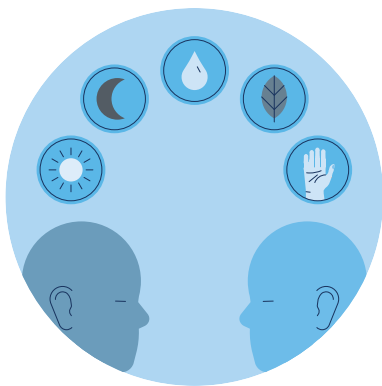
Rights to lands, resources and waters are recognised and respected, with particular attention to the customary, collective rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, and to women's tenure rights

Tenure rights refer to the social relations and institutions governing access to, use of and control over land and natural resources (von Benda-Beckmann et al., 2006).¹⁸ Recognition of and respect for land and resource rights, especially customary collective rights, contribute strongly to effective and equitable natural resource governance by enabling local stewardship of lands and resources. Strengthening tenure security — particularly for Indigenous peoples, local communities and others with long-standing systems of traditional governance over lands, waters and resources — enables the institutions, knowledge and practices associated with these governance systems to contribute to more effective conservation and climate solutions (Stevens et al., 2014; Larson & Springer, 2016). Tenure security also contributes to social equity where it involves the recognition of and respect for all tenure rights, particularly rights of groups at risk of marginalisation. Land and resource rights enable the realisation of a wide range of human rights and are a central right of Indigenous peoples. International frameworks, such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (FAO, 2012), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNGA, 2007) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNGA, 2018), reflect a global consensus on the need to recognise and respect all tenure rights. These include women's tenure rights and the customary rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities that may not yet be recognised formally under statutory laws.

The following criteria are important for the realisation of Principle 2:

- Relevant laws, policies and rules mandate recognition and respect for all tenure rights, with particular attention to the customary (including collective) rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, and women's rights.
- Tenure rights are robust – enabling rights-holders to sustainably access, use, benefit from, manage and protect lands and other natural resources from threats.
- Accessible and effective processes and capacities are in place to recognise and respect land and resource rights, including for the purposes of formal recognition.
- Effective processes and capacities are in place to protect and enforce tenure rights.
- Overlapping tenure rights and claims are clarified in law and resolved in practice.

Principle 3: Recognition of and respect for diverse cultures, knowledge and institutions



Natural resource governance is grounded in sound and diverse forms of knowledge and respect for diverse cultures, values and practices

This principle acknowledges the value of bringing diverse – including traditional – knowledge, practices and innovations to bear on adaptive processes of natural resource management. It also draws attention to the close links between biological, cultural and linguistic diversity ('biocultural diversity') and the ways in which these sustain each other (Maffi & Woodley, 2010). Embracing diversity means acknowledging and supporting the multiple values that motivate communities, women, men and all people to engage in and contribute to the stewardship of nature. A focus on biocultural diversity also promotes mutual respect among actors, in keeping with a rights-based approach.

The following criteria are important for the realisation of Principle 3:

- Governance strategies and actions are informed by sound, diverse forms of knowledge, including Indigenous and local knowledge.
- The diverse cultural values and practices that sustain natural resources are respected and protected.
- Governance institutions foster learning and adaptive management, valuing insights from diverse cultures and knowledge systems.
- Indigenous and local knowledge are integrated into natural resource governance in respectful, appropriate and meaningful ways, including through appropriate free, prior and informed consent.

Principle 4: Devolution



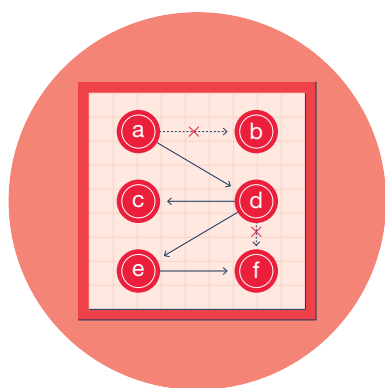
Decisions are taken at the lowest possible level appropriate to the social and ecological systems being governed, with particular attention to empowering the roles and authority of Indigenous peoples and local communities in natural resource governance

Devolution can be defined as “a process by which state control over the use of natural resources is gradually and increasingly shared with local communities” (Shyamsundar, 2005). As used here, the term devolution is closely linked to the principle of subsidiarity, by which decisions are taken at the lowest possible level appropriate to the social and ecological systems being governed. Devolution and subsidiarity are key elements of adaptive governance because they enable flexible and responsive natural resource decision-making and management. The focus on devolution further reinforces a rights-based approach towards vesting authority in empowered local actors, particularly where common-property systems are in place. Devolution should take place within the context of strong legal frameworks to protect vulnerable, marginalised and/or minority groups and the wider environment.

The following criteria are important for the realisation of Principle 4:

- Legal and policy frameworks devolve natural resource management to capable institutions closest to the natural resources concerned.
- Legal and policy frameworks for devolved — including Indigenous and community-led — natural resource governance are widely implemented.
- Local institutions (including customary institutions) have the capacities and support they need for effective and equitable natural resource governance.
- Appropriate recognition is given to the roles and authority of Indigenous peoples and local communities in natural resource governance.

Principle 5: Strategic vision, direction and learning



Natural resource governance is guided by an overall vision of desired environmental and social outcomes, and allows for adaptation in response to learning and changing conditions

Strategic vision is widely recognised as crucial for good governance because it sets the direction for mobilising action and achieving change. In the context of the NRGF, the concept of strategic vision encompasses the precautionary principle — which emphasises caution where knowledge of environmental risk is lacking — as an important component of effective natural resource governance (Cooney, 2004). A strategic vision and the direction it sets contribute to the realisation of rights and social equity when developed through inclusive processes with relevant rights-holders and stakeholders (Hamzah et al., 2016). Developing a strategic vision also requires consideration of the wider environment and society that the natural resource governance system is situated within and can affect. Adaptability, resilience and actions to build and share knowledge are important for ensuring that the strategic vision and direction are responsive to needs and changing conditions and incorporate reflection and ongoing learning.

The following criteria are important for the realisation of Principle 5:

- Relevant legal, policy and management frameworks establish strategic vision and direction for natural resource governance.
- The strategic vision and direction are set through inclusive processes that take into account the diverse values and forms of knowledge of rights-holders and stakeholders.
- The strategic vision and direction incorporate key principles of environmental sustainability, such as the precautionary principle against risks of environmental and social harm.
- The strategic vision and direction effectively and equitably address present threats and anticipate future challenges.
- Natural resource governance and management activities are consistent with the strategies articulated in the vision.
- Governance institutions have processes in place for ongoing monitoring, reflection and learning, thereby enabling responsiveness to changing conditions and needs.

Principle 6: Coordination and coherence



Actors involved in or affecting natural resource governance coordinate around a coherent set of strategies and management practices

This principle addresses the need for actors involved in natural resource governance to come together around a coherent set of strategies and management practices. Coordination may be ‘vertical’, where it involves links across multiple levels of actors with roles in the governance of an ecosystem or resource. It may be ‘horizontal’, where it involves collaboration and consensus across different sectors operating in or with impacts on the same geographical space or thematic area. Coordination and coherence contribute to effective natural resource governance by ensuring that actors responsible for or with impacts on natural resources work in concert or, at a minimum, do not undermine one another. Coordination and coherence contribute to adaptive governance, where they generate overlaps in capacity (‘redundancy’) across institutions and

thus increase resilience and sustainability in the event of disturbance (Dietz et al., 2003; Chaffin et al., 2014).

The following criteria are important for the realisation of Principle 6:

- Legal and policy frameworks across sectors responsible for or affecting natural resource governance are aligned.
- Coordination mechanisms are in place to enable horizontal collaboration and coherence among multiple actors and sectors operating in the same geographical space or thematic area.
- Mechanisms are in place to enable vertical coordination across multiple levels of actors with roles in the governance of an ecosystem or resource.
- Institutions collaborate and overlap functions in ways that increase resilience.

Principle 7: Sustainable and equitably shared resources



Actors responsible for natural resources have the means necessary to carry out sustainable management and governance activities, including from the equitable sharing of benefits generated from natural resources

This principle integrates a number of related concepts in natural resource governance. One of these is the need for a stream of resources or revenues as a basis for sustaining the people, organisations and actions required to manage and conserve natural resources effectively. Another is equitable benefit-sharing — a broad term encompassing the need for incentives for actions that contribute to sound natural resource governance, equity in how natural resource benefits are distributed, and the obligation to avoid losses and negative impacts from governance restrictions (FFI, 2014). It is becoming clear that benefit-sharing is closely related to the fulfilment of human rights, including the general obligations of states to recognise Indigenous peoples' rights to the productivity of their territories and natural resources (Morgera, 2018). The equitable sharing of resources also has an intergenerational dimension, requiring

that future generations will have access to natural resources and the benefits they provide (IUCN & WCEL, 2016).

The following criteria are important for the realisation of Principle 7:

- People responsible for natural resource governance have access to revenues and/or livelihoods that enable them to carry out resource management activities.
- Available revenues and other resources provide sufficient economic sustainability for the people and actions required to sustainably manage the natural resource.
- Benefits arising from the use of natural resources are shared equitably.
- The sharing of revenues and other benefits provides sufficient incentive for the sustainable management of natural resources.
- Losses borne by Indigenous peoples, local communities and all vulnerable, marginalised and/or minority peoples due to conservation — including restrictions on resource use to ensure sustainability — are prevented or, where unavoidable, are compensated.
- Natural resources are managed sustainably so that future generations have equitable access to the benefits those resources provide.

Principle 8: Accountability



Actors responsible for or affecting natural resource governance are accountable for their actions and the environmental and social impacts they produce

Accountability can be defined as “the requirement to accept responsibility and answer for actions” (Moore et al., 2010), which includes being answerable for inaction (a failure to act) on responsibilities. Accountability is widely recognised as a fundamental principle of good governance, including natural resource governance, and it was included in almost all the natural resource governance

frameworks reviewed during the development of the NRGF (Springer, 2016).¹⁹ Accountability is closely related to transparency because open and accessible information on the actions of relevant authorities is so important for holding them to account. Accountability in natural resource governance concerns the operation of governance processes as well as their social and environmental impacts. It contributes to governance effectiveness and adaptiveness, where structures and capacities are in place to hold governments, the private sector and other powerful actors responsible for their actions, and to take corrective action, where responsibilities are not upheld. Accountability is fundamental to the realisation of human rights and social equity because it concerns the processes through which duty-bearers respond to rights-holders and enables the less powerful to hold powerful actors to account. Paying appropriate attention to the effects of natural resource governance decisions and changes on vulnerable people and environments may take the form of social and environmental safeguards, which require that specific steps are taken to ensure that impacts are understood, avoided or minimised to the fullest extent possible. Such safeguards should also be developed with and agreed upon by the affected people, in accordance with human rights standards.

The following criteria are important for the realisation of Principle 8:

- The institutions responsible for natural resource governance have clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- The actors responsible for or affecting natural resource governance operate transparently and share relevant information on their actions openly and accessibly.
- Appropriate capacities and mechanisms are in place to hold authorities involved in natural resource governance responsible for their actions (and inactions).
- Social and environmental safeguards are adopted and implemented that explicitly take into account the situation of vulnerable groups and environments.
- The potential impacts of governance decisions on vulnerable people and environments are understood in advance and avoided or minimised to the fullest extent possible.
- Accountability mechanisms effectively rein in corruption.²⁰

Principle 9: Fair and effective rule of law



Natural resource-related laws and their application are fair and effective and protect fundamental rights

The rule of law refers to “a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards” (Botero & Ponce, 2011, p. 5).

The World Justice Project (n.d.) highlights that just laws are “clear, publicized, and stable; are applied evenly; and protect fundamental rights.” In relation to the environment, the IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law (WCEL) further highlights the need to integrate principles of ecological sustainability with procedural and substantive rights and obligations into an “environmental rule of law” (IUCN WCEL, 2016), which contributes to effective conservation and resilience by guarding against illegal and harmful impacts on the environment. The rule of law contributes to the realisation of human rights, where natural resource laws (or rules) integrate human rights standards and are implemented fairly and humanely. The rule of law can also promote social equity by ensuring that laws and their application are fair and take into account their potential effects on different groups – especially those who may be marginalised (such as women), minorities (such as Indigenous peoples and minority groups) and/or under-represented (such as young people).

The following criteria are important for the realisation of Principle 9:

- A clear system of natural resource norms and sanctions is defined in laws, policies or rules and is widely shared.
- Natural resource-related laws, policies and rules are consistent with human rights and take into account the situation of Indigenous peoples, local communities, women and all vulnerable, marginalised and/or minority groups.
- Natural resource-related, laws, policies and rules incorporate principles of environmental sustainability.

- Enforcement bodies have the capacity and commitment to uphold the norms and sanctions established to protect rights and the environment.
- Natural resource-related laws, policies and rules are carried out equitably, effectively and humanely.

Principle 10: Access to justice and conflict resolution



People are able to seek and obtain remedies for grievances and resolve conflicts regarding land and natural resources

Access to justice concerns the ability of people to seek and obtain remedies for grievances from formal or informal judicial institutions, in accordance with human rights standards (United Nations Development Programme, 2005). In the context of natural resource governance, access to justice is essential for resolving conflicts over land and natural resources, as well as for preventing or redressing environmental damage and negative social impacts. Access to justice is itself a key procedural right, and it contributes to social equity, where vulnerable, marginalised and/or minority groups are able to access grievance mechanisms and obtain redress. Access to justice also enables the resolution of conflicts that impede effective conservation, and it can help ensure redress for actions that damage the environment. Robust mechanisms for justice and conflict resolution provide adaptive responses to conflicts and infringements as they arise.


The following criteria are important for the realisation of this principle:



- Formal or informal mechanisms are in place to resolve conflicts and grievances regarding land and natural resources.
- People are aware of their natural resource-related rights and the avenues available to them for resolving conflicts or seeking redress.

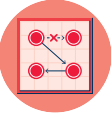
- Grievance or dispute resolution mechanisms are accessible to rights-holders and stakeholders, including vulnerable, marginalised and/or minority groups.
- Mechanisms operate impartially and effectively to resolve disputes and redress rights violations.

Summary of principles and criteria

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Principles	Criteria
<div></div> <div><p>1.</p><p>Inclusive decision-making</p></div> <div><p><i>Decision-making regarding natural resource policies and practices is based on the full and effective participation of all relevant actors, with particular attention to the voice and inclusion of rights-holders and groups at risk of marginalisation</i></p></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Relevant legal and policy frameworks include robust provisions on the inclusion of rights-holders and stakeholders in decision making.✓ Platforms and processes are in place to enable full and effective participation in decision making.✓ Processes for inclusive decision-making engage diverse groups, are socially and culturally appropriate and take into account power dynamics within and between groups.✓ Rights-holders and stakeholders have access to information on the environment and natural resources.✓ Rights-holders and stakeholders have the capacities and support they need to participate in decision making, including through appropriate representation.✓ Natural resource decisions take into account the views expressed through participatory processes.✓ Free, prior and informed consent is required, secured and maintained for decisions concerning Indigenous peoples and other customary rights-holders and their lands and resources.

Principles	Criteria
 <p>2. Recognition and respect for tenure rights</p> <p><i>Rights to lands, resources and waters are recognised and respected, with particular attention to the customary, collective rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, and to women's tenure rights</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Relevant laws, policies and rules mandate recognition and respect for all tenure rights, with particular attention to the customary (including collective) rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, and women's rights. ✓ Tenure rights are robust – enabling rights-holders to sustainably access, use, benefit from, manage and protect lands and other natural resources from threats. ✓ Accessible and effective processes and capacities are in place to recognise and respect land and resource rights, including for the purposes of formal recognition. ✓ Effective processes and capacities are in place to protect and enforce tenure rights. ✓ Overlapping tenure rights and claims are clarified in law and resolved in practice.
 <p>3. Recognition of and respect for diverse cultures, knowledge and institutions</p> <p><i>Natural resource governance is grounded in sound and diverse forms of knowledge and respect for diverse cultures, values and practices</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Governance strategies and actions are informed by sound, diverse forms of knowledge, including Indigenous and local knowledge. ✓ The diverse cultural values and practices that sustain natural resources are respected and protected. ✓ Governance institutions foster learning and adaptive management, valuing insights from diverse cultures and knowledge systems. ✓ Indigenous and local knowledge are integrated into natural resource governance in respectful, appropriate and meaningful ways, including through appropriate free, prior and informed consent.

Principles	Criteria
 <p>4. Devolution</p> <p><i>Decisions are taken at the lowest possible level appropriate to the social and ecological systems being governed, with particular attention to empowering the roles and authority of Indigenous peoples and local communities in natural resource governance</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Legal and policy frameworks devolve natural resource management to capable institutions closest to the natural resources concerned. ✓ Legal and policy frameworks for devolved — including Indigenous and community-led — natural resource governance are widely implemented. ✓ Local institutions (including customary institutions) have the capacities and support they need for effective and equitable natural resource governance. ✓ Appropriate recognition is given to the roles and authority of Indigenous peoples and local communities in natural resource governance.
 <p>5. Strategic vision, direction and learning</p> <p><i>Natural resource governance is guided by an overall vision of desired environmental and social outcomes, and allows for adaptation in response to learning and changing conditions</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Relevant legal, policy and management frameworks establish strategic vision and direction for natural resource governance. ✓ The strategic vision and direction are set through inclusive processes that take into account the diverse values and forms of knowledge of rights-holders and stakeholders. ✓ The strategic vision and direction incorporate key principles of environmental sustainability, such as the precautionary principle against risks of environmental and social harm. ✓ The strategic vision and direction effectively and equitably address present threats and anticipate future challenges. ✓ Natural resource governance and management activities are consistent with the strategies articulated in the vision. ✓ Governance institutions have processes in place for ongoing monitoring, reflection and learning, thereby enabling responsiveness to changing conditions and needs.

Principles	Criteria
 <p>6. Coordination and coherence</p> <p><i>Actors involved in or affecting natural resource governance coordinate around a coherent set of strategies and management practices</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Legal and policy frameworks across sectors responsible for or affecting natural resource governance are aligned. ✓ Coordination mechanisms are in place to enable horizontal collaboration and coherence among multiple actors and sectors operating in the same geographical space or thematic area. ✓ Mechanisms are in place to enable vertical coordination across multiple levels of actors with roles in the governance of an ecosystem or resource. ✓ Institutions collaborate and overlap functions in ways that increase resilience.
 <p>7. Sustainable and equitably shared resources</p> <p><i>Actors responsible for natural resources have the means necessary to carry out sustainable management and governance activities, including from the equitable sharing of benefits generated from natural resources</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ People responsible for natural resource governance have access to revenues and/or livelihoods that enable them to carry out resource management activities. ✓ Available revenues and other resources provide sufficient economic sustainability for the people and actions required to sustainably manage the natural resource. ✓ Benefits arising from the use of natural resources are shared equitably. ✓ The sharing of revenues and other benefits provides sufficient incentive for the sustainable management of natural resources. ✓ Losses borne by Indigenous peoples, local communities and all vulnerable, marginalised and/or minority peoples due to conservation — including restrictions on resource use to ensure sustainability — are prevented or, where unavoidable, are compensated. ✓ Natural resources are managed sustainably so that the following generations have equitable access to the benefits those resources provide.

Principles	Criteria
 <p>8. Accountability</p> <p><i>Actors responsible for or affecting natural resource governance are accountable for their actions and the environmental and social impacts they produce</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The institutions responsible for natural resource governance have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. ✓ The actors responsible for or affecting natural resource governance operate transparently and share relevant information on their actions openly and accessibly. ✓ Appropriate capacities and mechanisms are in place to hold authorities involved in natural resource governance responsible for their actions (and inactions). ✓ Social and environmental safeguards are adopted and implemented that explicitly take into account the situation of vulnerable groups and environments. ✓ The potential impacts of governance decisions on vulnerable people and environments are understood in advance and avoided or minimised to the fullest extent possible. ✓ Accountability mechanisms effectively rein in corruption.
 <p>9. Fair and effective rule of law</p> <p><i>Natural resource-related laws and their application are fair and effective and protect fundamental rights</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A clear system of natural resource norms and sanctions is defined in laws, policies or rules and is widely shared. ✓ Natural resource-related laws, policies and rules are consistent with human rights and take into account the situation of Indigenous peoples, local communities, women and all vulnerable, marginalised and/or minority groups. ✓ Natural resource-related, laws, policies and rules incorporate principles of environmental sustainability. ✓ Enforcement bodies have the capacity and commitment to uphold the norms and sanctions established to protect rights and the environment. ✓ Natural resource-related laws, policies and rules are carried out equitably, effectively and humanely.

Principles	Criteria
<div></div> <div>10. Access to justice and conflict resolution</div> <div><i>People are able to seek and obtain remedies for grievances and resolve conflicts regarding land and natural resources</i></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Formal or informal mechanisms are in place to resolve conflicts and grievances regarding land and natural resources.✓ People are aware of their natural resource-related rights and the avenues available to them for resolving conflicts or seeking redress.✓ Grievance- or dispute-resolution mechanisms are accessible to rights-holders and stakeholders, including vulnerable, marginalised and/or minority groups.✓ Mechanisms operate impartially and effectively to resolve disputes and redress rights violations.

III. Applications of the Natural Resource Governance Framework

The NRGF, comprising the principles, criteria and cross-cutting values presented here, provides a foundation for developing a range of tools for assessing and improving natural resource governance. In keeping with the NRGF mandate to support improvements in natural resource governance at multiple levels and in multiple contexts, several types of applications are envisaged. These include (but are not limited to):

- ◎ Assessments of governance systems and contexts;
- ◎ Assessments of natural resource projects, programmes and actors; and
- ◎ Assessments of and alignment with other natural resource governance-related tools.

These three NRGF applications are introduced briefly below. More detailed information and resources for each of these applications are available on the NRGF [website](#) and will be updated on an ongoing basis as further resources are developed (see Conclusion).²¹

Assessments of governance contexts and systems

Assessments of governance contexts or systems are a primary application of the NRGF. Assessments of *contexts* could focus on the governance of a landscape, site, sector or country. Assessments of *systems* could focus on specific institutions or networks of actors with responsibilities for natural resource governance.

The [NRGF Assessment Guide](#) (Campese et al., 2021) provides guidance on designing and conducting assessments of governance contexts and systems using the NRGF. It is organised around four broad phases: preparation, assessment, communication about results and next steps, and taking action with continued learning and improvement. It provides general guidance, designed to be applicable in and tailored to diverse contexts and scales. As the guide emphasises, assessment processes should conform with the governance principles articulated in the NRGF, including by being inclusive, collaborative, rights-based, learning-focused, appropriate and respectful. An earlier version of the guide was used to plan a landscape governance assessment in the Kilombero Valley, United Republic of Tanzania (Box 2), which, in turn, informed the second version of the guide.

Using the NRGF to conduct assessments of particular governance contexts or systems requires that the criteria are tailored to that specific context. For example, where the NRGF criteria refer to ‘relevant’ institutions, rights-holders, stakeholders and laws, these will need to be specified based on the particular governance context or system being assessed. NRGF criteria can be tailored to assessments in specific contexts by developing guiding questions or indicators for the assessment. An indicator is “a quantitative, qualitative, or descriptive attribute that, if assessed periodically, could indicate direction of change (e.g., positive or negative) in that attribute” (Davis et al., 2013, p. 7). The NRGF itself does not specify indicators because it aims to be flexible enough to be applied in multiple contexts and for multiple purposes. However, several NRGF tools — including the Assessment Guide (Campese et al., 2021) and the forthcoming Guidance Notes — provide further information on developing context-specific indicators or guiding questions based on the NRGF criteria.

Assessments of governance contexts and systems may have a variety of specific purposes, such as:

- ***To increase the understanding of a governance context as a basis for developing projects and other initiatives.*** One purpose for conducting assessments of governance contexts is to provide a foundation for designing natural resource projects or activities. At a minimum, such an assessment can inform project design on governance strengths and weaknesses that could affect the prospects for success or pose risks. More broadly, sound understanding of the governance context provides an important basis for the design of activities and initiatives that contribute in a positive way to improving governance. An advantage of assessments linked to project design is that there is a direct

pathway from the identification of governance issues to the strategies and (ideally) resources for addressing them.

- ***To enhance overall understanding of a governance context, including to inform responsive action.*** In other cases, assessments may be conducted for the purpose of generating a broad understanding of a governance context or system. Such assessments can enable a common understanding of governance issues, constraints and needs among multiple actors and institutions. This common understanding can, in turn, provide a basis for collective action towards policy reforms and governance improvements, or enable diverse actors to focus on those dimensions of governance most relevant to them.
- ***To enable comparative understanding of governance contexts.*** Comparative assessments offer opportunities to build understanding of common challenges and good practices in natural resource governance across multiple settings. Comparative assessments require the identification of comparable ‘units’ (governance systems and scales) and the definition of a consistent set of indicators. To avoid inconsistencies deriving from perception-based scoring, comparative assessments may also need to focus on indicators that can be assessed through objective evidence. As a further development or application of the NRGF, tools using consistent indicators could be developed for comparable units (such as landscapes or key biodiversity areas) and used to conduct comparative assessments.
- ***To monitor changes in governance over time.*** Changes in governance can be monitored by conducting periodic assessments of the same governance context or system over time. This form of assessment can be used to identify key directions of change, whether positive or negative, and to inform further action as needed. As with comparisons across places, monitoring and comparing changes across time periods requires the use of a consistent set of indicators or guiding questions over time for the same governance unit.

Many assessment tools use scoring scales along with narrative text as a way to distil and communicate results more concisely.²² Scoring scales may take the form of numerical scales (such as 0–3), colour coding, or “Likert” scales (e.g. from “very weak” to “very strong” with respect to a given attribute, or “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” with respect to a given statement). Such scales are often supported by guidance or thresholds for the assignment of values. Scoring scales could be integrated into NRGF-based assessment tools, accompanied by additional guidance on the interpretation of indicators and the assignment of scores or values.

Box 2. Landscape governance assessment in the United Republic of Tanzania — Piloting the Natural Resource Governance Framework

IUCN facilitated a collaborative natural resource governance assessment in the Kilombero Valley, United Republic of Tanzania, in 2017. The overall objective was to support the IUCN [SUSTAIN-Africa project](#) in strengthening adherence to a rights-based approach, including through enhanced social and economic inclusion in the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania, where the project seeks to promote inclusive green growth.

The process was informed by the 2016 version of the NRGF Assessment Guide, with key steps including:

- Scoping meetings with convening organisations and local rights-holders and stakeholders;
- Background research about natural resource governance in the landscape, including via key informant interviews, literature review and legal and technical document analysis;
- Participatory analysis (via focus groups) of governance strengths and challenges;
- Participatory development (via focus groups) of related recommendations; and
- Follow-up, including sharing specific recommendations with SUSTAIN project leadership.

The assessment considered the 12 NRGF principles articulated in the initial design document (Springer, 2016). Principles were analysed in several clusters to manage the scope of the assessment and to ensure all focus groups had time for meaningful discussion. Appropriate clusters were identified during scoping meetings. The assessment also considered the

overarching NRGF values, primarily through analysis of the specific principles.

The assessment jointly considered the landscape and site scales. The results suggested that, on land governed by villages, Tanzanian law and policy generally allow for collective and individual tenure, devolved natural resource management, locally informed visions for natural resource use and women's and men's participation in decisions about land (with some notable limitations). On the other hand, the implementation and enforcement of key policies and laws face substantial challenges. Only limited opportunities are available for community engagement and benefit-sharing beyond village lands, including in the many protected areas in the Kilombero Valley. Available land in this area is also increasingly scarce, and there are ongoing land and resource disputes. The assessment highlighted a number of other, more specific governance challenges, including:

- A lack of information about natural resource rights (e.g. between district and village governments, and between protected area authorities and adjacent communities);
- Weak coordination and accountability – as one participant in a focus group explained, the “chain breaks down” in the enforcement of natural resource laws between the village and district levels and, as a result, local governing and management actors feel undermined; and
- Power inequalities between communities and investors, and between village and district authorities.

Sources: Adapted from NRGF (2017) and Campese et al. (2021).

Assessments of activities and actors

A second type of application of the NRGF is to assess activities (such as projects, programmes and other initiatives) and the roles of actors undertaking those activities (who may include local communities, community-based organisations, government agencies, non-governmental organisations and private sector actors). Governance assessments of projects and programmes enable those who are designing and undertaking them to identify the extent to which their activities are addressing natural resource governance issues, and to explore options for further action to improve effective and equitable governance. Assessments of actors similarly provides a basis for reflection on how well an organisation's policies, goals, processes and capacities are enabling positive contributions to natural resource governance, and how these may be improved.

The [NRGF Project Analysis Tool](#) has been developed to enable reviews of the extent to which governance is addressed in conservation and natural resource management projects, and to improve governance dimensions as needed. It can be used in any project phase, although it may have the most impact in design and early implementation (when project trajectories are most flexible). At later stages, use of the tool can inform adjustments to the approach. Applied retrospectively, the tool can be used for learning such as to improve the design and implementation of future initiatives. In all cases, the tool is meant to be used through participatory processes to enable reflections from project initiators as well as other potentially affected rights-holders and stakeholders.

Assessment and alignment of governance-related methodologies, approaches and tools

IUCN has also piloted the use of NRGF as a reference to increase coherence and consistency across multiple governance-related methodologies, approaches and tools. The purpose of this type of NRGF application is to promote greater coherence in the substantive aspects of governance that various frameworks and tools consider, even though they may be organised differently or focus on specific sectors or scales. For example, IUCN and other organisations have invested substantially in the development of methods for assessing protected area governance. Analysing the correspondence between these existing tools and the NRGF enables the identification of areas in which they are substantively consistent and where they could each be enhanced. This application also demonstrates that the NRGF is not intended to replace or duplicate existing governance frameworks or tools but rather to offer a point of reference for increasing coherence in governance approaches.

The [NRGF Correspondence Analysis Tool](#) has been developed to enable the review of the extent to which diverse natural resource tools and approaches align with the key elements distilled in the NRGF and to enhance them as appropriate. It may be applied to governance-focused tools and approaches, as well as to other tools and approaches that integrate (or aim to integrate) governance considerations. This NRGF resource was tested and refined in 2018 after an analysis of the extent to which 10 other tools and approaches used by IUCN corresponded with the NRGF (Campese, 2018).

The applications described above are only examples of the ways that the NRGF can be used to assess and strengthen natural resource governance. Applications need not be limited to these; for example, another emerging application is to use the NRGF to share lessons on governance using a common framework. Towards this end, the NRGF can provide a structure for organising and presenting governance outcomes and lessons, including as a basis for sharing results drawn from multiple projects.

VI. Conclusion

Governance processes determine both the extent to which ecosystems contribute to human well-being and the long-term prospects for the successful conservation of nature. A robust framework for understanding, assessing and improving natural resource governance is central to the realisation of IUCN's vision of a just world that values and conserves nature.

This document provides a framework for assessing and strengthening the governance of natural resources. The NRGF comprises a set of 10 principles and associated criteria that distil key elements of equitable and effective governance and two cross-cutting values that underpin them. It is intended to build knowledge and greater coherence across work that aims to improve governance in the conservation and natural resource sectors by articulating a concise understanding of natural resource governance based on research and best practices. The NRGF also provides a foundation for a growing “basket” of tools for assessing and strengthening governance in multiple contexts.

Going forward, including in the 2021–2024 IUCN Programme period, the priorities for the NRGF initiative will include:

- Supporting **awareness of and engagement** with the NRGF, including by building an NRGF Community of Practice and continuing to coordinate with related governance initiatives.
- Enhancing **capacity** to use the NRGF, including by offering training materials and developing additional tools, where needs are identified. This includes, for example, the preparation of NRGF Guidance Notes that provide concise information and practice-based examples to further operationalise the principles and criteria for various applications.
- Encouraging and supporting **applications** of the NRGF in diverse regions and with partners across the Union, including the three types of applications described in the previous section.
- **Learning and knowledge co-generation**, including to improve the NRGF over time, explore opportunities to further develop the NRGF as a standard and contribute to information about the importance of governance for conservation and human well-being.

Collectively, these actions will enable the NRGF to contribute to more effective and equitable natural resource governance.

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Endnotes

- 1** The term “conservation” is used throughout this framework to refer to the three integrated elements of “maintenance of essential ecological processes and life-support systems, preservation of genetic diversity and sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems” (IUCN et al., 1980; IUCN et al., 1991). Thus, it specifically encompasses both conservation and sustainable use of natural re-sources.
- 2** The term “equitable and effective governance” is used throughout this framework to refer to governance that realises the cross-cutting values and principles of the NRGF. The term “good governance” is used synonymously.
- 3** Conceptual working papers include Nuesiri (2016), Larson & Springer (2016), Oyono & Mandondo (2016), and Crawhall & Silverman (2016).
- 4** Although effectiveness can relate to any aspect of governance (e.g. effectiveness in securing equity), the literature on natural resource governance tends to highlight effectiveness in relation to sustaining nature. For example, natural resource governance effectiveness can be defined as “the ability of a natural resource governance group to make decisions, implement actions, and enforce rules that ensure the sustainability (i.e. long term viability) of the natural resources under their control” (USAID, 2013).
- 5** “Social equity” refers to the fair distribution of benefits and costs for all concerned rights-holders and stakeholders in a given context. It can be understood as having dimensions of recognition (of the rights and diversity of rights holders and stakeholders), procedure (inclusiveness of rule- and decision-making) and distribution (equitable sharing of costs and benefits) (adapted from CBD (2018, Annex II, para. 9); see also Franks et al. (2018) and McDermott et al. (2013). These dimensions cut across NRGF principles.
- 6** IUCN’s commitments to international human rights frameworks are established in relevant IUCN Resolutions and Policy documents. For example, Resolution 4.052 Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Barcelona, 2008) endorses the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and IUCN’s commitment to respect internationally proclaimed human rights is established in its adoption of the Conservation Initiative on Human Rights’ common principles.
- 7** The term rights-holder is used here to refer to “actors socially endowed with legal or customary rights with respect to land, water and natural resources...” as distinct from stakeholders, who “possess direct or indirect interests and concerns about [land, water or natural resources], but do not necessarily enjoy a legally or socially recognised entitlement to them” (Borrini-Feyerabend et. al., 2013, p.15).
- 8** Procedural rights focus on the processes through which rights are secured, while substantive rights focus on the contents of those rights.
- 9** See PROFOR and FAO (2011) for an earlier illustration of this type of cross-cutting relationship, which has informed the approach taken here.
- 10** “Frequency Analysis of Governance Principles,” Excel resource prepared by Jessica Campese and Jenny Springer. Frameworks included in this analysis are those found in: Borrini-Feyerabend et al. (2013); Colfer & Feintrenie (2011); Davis et al. (2013); Heylings & Bravo (2007); Lockwood (2010); Ostrom (1990); PROFOR & FAO (2011); Ratner (2012); REDD+ SES (2012); UN-REDD (2014); UN-REDD (2012); TAI (2008); Wilkie (2015); and USAID (2013).
- 11** The Protected Area principles were also included in the frequency analysis, and in this sense were “counted” twice, for two distinct purposes – once as part of an effort to understand and build on existing

- knowledge, and in the second case to take account of other governance principles in use within IUCN.
- 12** Considerations for formulating criteria were developed at the October 2018 meeting of the NRGF Technical Working Group.
 - 13** Although these three aspects have not been unpacked uniformly for all principles, they have served as important considerations in the process of defining key criteria for each principle.
 - 14** Frameworks reviewed in developing criteria include those noted in relation to principles, with a particular focus on the World Resources Institute Forest Governance Framework (Davis et al., 2013); the PROFOR and FAO Forest Governance Framework (Kishor & Rosenbaum, 2012); the IUCN WCPA Governance of Protected Areas “key considerations” (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013); the IUCN Green List of Protected Areas indicators (IUCN WCPA, 2016); and Lockwood’s framework for good governance for terrestrial protected areas (Lockwood, 2010). Additional framework sources include the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index (Botero & Ponce, 2010); the IUCN World Declaration on the Environmental Rule of Law (IUCN WCEL, 2016); Bennett & Satterfield (2018); and the Stockholm Resilience Centre (2014).
 - 15** It is anticipated that guidance notes will be prepared on each principle, with more in-depth information and analysis, as part of the further development of NRGF tools and resources. Guidance notes developed to date are available at <https://www.iucn.org/theme/governance-and-rights/our-work/iucn-natural-resource-governance-framework>.
 - 16** Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration: “access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities” (UNGA, 1992).
 - 17** “Free, Prior and Informed Consent” (FPIC) refers to the right to say “yes” or “no” (to consent) to interventions /actions that will impact lands, territories and resources of Indigenous peoples, based on a decision that is free from coercion, threats or deceit; prior to any action; and informed by all relevant information. FPIC is a collective right of Indigenous peoples (recognised in, among others, the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, or UNDRIP) and is also a “widely-agreed-upon ethical best practice with regard to non-Indigenous communities”. FPIC should not be approached as a one-off decision, but as an agreement that is actively maintained. (Sajeva et al., 2019, drawing on Hill et al., 2010).
 - 18** For further information on this principle, including definitions and relevant international frameworks, see the NRGF Conceptual Paper on Recognition and Respect for Tenure Rights (Larson & Springer, 2016), available on the NRGF website <https://www.iucn.org/theme/governance-and-rights/our-work/iucn-natural-resource-governance-framework>.
 - 19** This paper includes a list of key natural resource governance principles based on a “frequency analysis” undertaken by Jessica Campese and Jenny Springer.
 - 20** Where corruption is defined as the use of public power for private gain (Botero & Ponce, 2010).
 - 21** The NRGF Assessment Guide, NRGF Project Analysis Tool and NRGF Correspondence Analysis Tool are available on the NRGF webpage: <https://www.iucn.org/theme/governance-and-rights/our-work/iucn-natural-resource-governance-framework>.
 - 22** For example, PROFOR and FAO (2011); Davis et al. (2013).



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