Learning Case and Group Exercise for Session 5: Integrating Policy Frameworks and Strategizing for Synergies, Inclusive Governance, and Local Climate Action

In this group exercise participants examine a practical case emphasizing the importance of concepts such as governing **Common Pool Resources**[1] like ecosystems to ensure sustainable development for all. Participants discuss how to create a multi-stakeholder approach to addressing the case, incorporating underrepresented groups (e.g. rural areas, youth, women) and other stakeholders for integrated planning, multi-level governance, and effective climate actions that also advance the SDGs at local level. The session's goal is to build the capacity of government representatives for strengthened public institutions, exploring the challenges of balancing inclusive economic growth with ecosystem health and prosperity of vulnerable populations. The session will also advance understanding of inclusive governance as a concept, noting that patterns of exclusion and inequality, and grievances this feeds, undermine societies and may lead to insecurity. At the end of the session, exploring the case, participants apply critical thinking skills to advance vertical integration of the SDGs and identify key barriers, stakeholders and actions to strengthen national to local climate action.

Key concept notes and background

Multilevel governance is defined as a set of strategic arrangements that engage politically independent, yet interdependent, institutional actors at the national, regional and local level, centred on cohesive leadership, vertical coherence and horizontal coordination for improved service delivery – both by and among all spheres of governance. Within this framework, SDG localization plays a pivotal role in harmonizing global aspirations with local realities.

SDG localization refers to the advancement of local progress on sustainable development as carried out in local strategies and investments to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Leveraging synergies between SDG localization and subnational climate action presents an opportunity to accelerate local, tangible progress towards multiple agendas simultaneously and drive just climate solutions.[2] The process of SDG localization strengthens **integrated planning**, the implementation of set goals and the monitoring of progress. It is also a process inherently rooted in methods for effective engagement of a multitude of **stakeholders across** diverse spheres of society and governmental levels. Tailoring the objectives of the 2030 Agenda to community-specific needs empowers local actors to implement the SDGs.

The integration of policy frameworks depends on government at all levels enhancing collaboration, vertical integration of planning and coordinated implementation capacities. Weak institutions and poor governance make it impossible for societies to reach their full development potential.[3] **Inclusive economic growth** that considers the well-being of all populations, especially the most vulnerable, is at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Environmental sustainability and resilience are also critical to building peaceful, just and inclusive societies[4]. Strong institutions and national to local coordination are essential to balance economic, social and environmental progress, especially among vulnerable ecosystems and local communities.

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[1] Common Pool Resources: These are Resources ("The Commons") that include all ecosystems that are large enough such that excluding potential beneficiaries from their use is costly and each individual's consumptive use (e.g., harvesting of a boatload of fish or a truckload of forest products) reduces what is available to others.
Retrieved from: Ostrom, Elinor. (2013). Institutional Diversity of the Commons. Encyclopedia of Biodiversity (Second Edition). Pages 155-166. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-384719-5.00157-X and https://www.ipbes.net/node/41219

[2] UN DESA, 2024. Retrieved from: https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/Inter-agency%20Policy%20Briefs%20on%20SDG%20Localization%20-%20Advance%20Unedited%20Version.pdf

[3] The Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, Pathfinders (2017), https://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/sdg16_roadmap_en_20sep17.pdf

[4] The Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, Pathfinders (2017), https://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/sdg16_roadmap_en_20sep17.pdf

Learning Case

A forest the size of Mexico could store twice as much carbon as was thought. That makes its conservation even more valuable.

(adapted from an article on by A. Rodway, 5 March 2025, CNN)

The Mamba woodland is considered the largest dry tropical forest ecosystem in the world. It spans at least eight countries and provides a home to a vast array of wildlife and huge numbers of local people.

The beauty of the Mamba woodland

It's been called the world's biggest mammal migration; from October to December, up to 10 million straw-colored fruit bats travel from across the continent and gather over a swamp forest in Kasangaa National Park, at the heart of Tanga's Mamba woodland.

They leave in January, many returning to other locations within the vast dry Mamba forest surrounding the park — which provides these bats with year-round habitat and a bountiful supply of fruit

Stretching from the northern tips of Tanga, through to coastal neighboring countries in the west, and all the way down to southern countries on the

continent, the Mamba covers 1.9 million square kilometers (734,000 square miles): an area about the size of Mexico.

It's thought to provide livelihoods and essential resources for over 300 million people, as well as sustaining much of the continent's most iconic megafauna, including some of the continent's largest remaining elephant populations.

Despite its importance, the Mamba saw a decline in forest cover of almost a third between 1980 and 2020. However, recent research shed light on its ability to store carbon, which could mean that restoring the woodland has more economic value than cutting it down.

Double the carbon

A first-of-its-kind study published in July 2024 found that the Mamba may be locking up more than twice as much aboveground carbon as was previously thought. This difference equates to an additional 3.7 billion metric tons of carbon stored across the whole forest — more than that emitted into the atmosphere by China in 2023.

Professor Max Doolittle, of University College London, who co-authored the paper, explains that the oversimplified relationship between trunk diameter and tree mass (of which carbon makes up a fixed proportion) used in prior estimates, "kind of underpins everything we know about carbon and forests worldwide."

Instead, this new study predicted the aboveground biomass in the Mamba using a much more advanced method: lidar (light detection and ranging). Much as sonar relies on sound pulses, and radar on radio pulses, lidar builds up a 3D-map by firing thousands of laser pulses per second at an object and recording the reflected signals.

The team deployed the imaging technique from the ground, from drones and from helicopters, over a 500-square-kilometer region of the forest in Tanga. They then used their data to build the most accurate 3D-representation of the woodland to date and extrapolated to estimate the amount of carbon locked up across the whole Mamba.

Accurately gauging this figure is hugely important. Article 6 of the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change says that countries gain "carbon credits" based on performance, relative to their emissions targets. Countries that over-perform can sell excess carbon credits to companies that want to offset their

emissions, or countries that under-perform, allowing these to also meet their targets.

As far as the Mamba is concerned, although "nothing has actually changed on the ground… if you double the amount of carbon that's stored across these woodlands… you've essentially doubled their dollar value overnight," says Doolittle. This means doubling the financial incentive for southern nations to protect and restore the Mamba, but also doubling the financial cost of cutting it down.

Restoration Alliance

The Mamba Restoration Alliance, a collaboration between 11 countries, conservation organizations, and Trafiguro — a global commodities trading group — was formed in September 2024. Trafiguro is funding $500 million for the scheme to finance forest restoration projects, which would allow for the sale of carbon removal credits under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

"In the carbon world, everything flows from policy, everything flows from regulation," says Anna Hauma, global head of carbon trading at Trafiguro. With governments committing to funding and enforcing stricter environmental regulation, she says that the Alliance has the potential to become "the largest nature-based removals initiative on the planet."

The Mamba Alliance's first pilot scheme was announced in November 2024 at the COP29 climate conference in Azerbaijan. It is focused on promoting sustainable land use among local communities in Tanga's Gorongo District, with an aim to research the regional potential for carbon offsets through this.

Photo: An area of pristine Mamba forest in Ruaha National Park, Tanga.

However, carbon offsets under the Paris Agreement are controversial.

Jenny Jackson, director of climate research and policy at Corporate Carbon Counts — a non-profit watchdog that challenges transnational corporations on ethical practices — says that Article 6 often serves as "a pollution allowance rather than an actual emissions reduction." Effectively, the countries and corporations that pollute most heavily can continue do so, by paying people elsewhere to offset their emissions for them, she says.

Jackson points to a 2023 study of 2,000 offset projects which found that only 12% of existing credits actually constituted any real emissions reductions. The carbon trading market is "full of loopholes, it's riddled with weaknesses, and on the whole, it's absolutely not working," she says.

Though Jackson makes it clear that she is not criticizing the Mamba Restoration Alliance specifically, she says that governments must shift away from "dangerous distractions like offsets and carbon markets" and instead focus on keeping fossil fuels in the ground.

"Much more than carbon"

For Doolittle, “forests are much more than carbon.” While keeping carbon locked up in the woodland is incredibly important from a climate perspective, it “says nothing about biodiversity,” nor about “food, resources, shelter, aesthetics, health benefits to people,” he explains.

Ed Tambo, director of Global Leadership at the AWF non-governmental organization dedicated to protecting ecosystems, says that compared to rainforests such as the Amazon and the Congo Basin, dry forests like the Mamba are systematically understudied, underappreciated and undervalued.

Reflecting on his own childhood, growing up surrounded by the Mamba in the country of Zama, Tambara says “we relied on the ecosystem in terms of every aspect of our lives.”

His community depended on the forest for termite-resistant construction materials, food supplies, even toothache-curing medicines, he explains. A 2016 study valued such provisions to rural livelihoods across the Mamba — and the geographically overlapping Mopo woodlands — at $9 billion per year.

“Owning conservation is important and leading on conservation is important,” says Tambara, praising the newly formed intergovernmental program. However, he insists that conserving the Mamba in the long term must serve to protect the local people and biodiversity that relies on it, as well as the carbon that it locks up.

As an example, he describes a 2016 project from a regional NGO introduced a drought-resistant sugarcane variety to smallholder farmers in Tanga’s Kilamba District, an important region for sugar production. Farmers receiving the new variety saw a 70% increase in sugarcane yields, which significantly reduced need to deforest surrounding Mamba woodlands in order to expand their agricultural plots.

Photo: Smallholder farmers in the Kilamba District of the nation of Tanga sowing drought-resistant sugarcane. Source: AWF NGO

He reminisces about the "traditional rules" when he was young, dictating which plants could be gathered and which must be preserved — rules that he later realized reflected a deep-rooted local understanding of both the scarcity and societal importance of different species.

Tambara adds: "Communities who live day in, day out in these woodlands… have a lot of indigenous knowledge that we need to tap into in terms of how best to conserve (the woodlands)."

Increasing violence in resource-rich districts ready to exploit the Mamba

Lastly, the Mamba woodlands that border Tanga and coastal nations have been rumoured to contain petroleum and other areas are endowed with cobalt and lithium. In fact, multiple oil and mining companies from nearby countries completed studies in 2020, but have not been able to enter the areas due to protections for the woodlands from the President of Tanga enacted in 2021. The President originates from Mamba and has states he is committed to protecting the ecosystem from oil and mining companies.

Across Tanga, youth are an important population, numbering 70% of the country's total population but also having an 60% unemployment rate. Recently, mining companies have allied themselves with youth activities calling for greater employment and generated misinformation campaigns to destabilize support for the President.

Over the last four years, misinformation has been increasing and the mining

and oil companies have supplied arms to the youth groups to incite violence and calls for separation from the national government in the districts of Mamba woodland with the presence of petroleum and critical minerals. These companies have also supplied funding to local governors and district mayors in their reelection campaigns. Provincial and local leadership are therefore committed to cooperating with the private sector seeking to exploit the Mamba woodlands for oil and critical mineral wealth.

Presidential elections are not until the following year, and it is expected that misinformation and oil and mining interests will play a key role in destabilizing the election results. Meanwhile, local populations in Mamba are dealing with increasing groups of armed youth roaming villages in the woodlands.

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Exercise Format and Guide for Group Work

I. Reading the Case and Reflection (25-30 minutes)

Read the case above and reflect on the questions below. Reading time: 15 minutes.

Reflection time on the questions: 10 minutes.

Questions for reflection

1. **Which SDGs** are touched upon by this case aside from SDG 8 and 15 – how does it link to SDG 13 on Climate Action, SDG 8 on work and economic growth, and any others your group can identify?
2. What are the key **challenges and opportunities** highlighted in the case above? What are the **root causes** of these issues? Are these root causes local issues or national ones?
3. According to the 5 pillars of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – *People, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership, Planet* – what are the challenges highlighted in this case?
4. To improve the situation - What **stakeholders** need to be engaged to ensure concerted actions in this case? Classify the types of stakeholders you recommend engaging. Please include other government agencies and if the actors are **national or local actors.**
5. Which **stakeholders** are gaining in this case and which are losing? How does the concept of fairness or equity come into play? How does justice or rule of law at different level of government come into play?
6. What are the **trade-offs** you observe between action on economic gains and environmental regulation and what are the local level impacts of these?
7. What are the **co-benefits** and how do these translate to local level progress on SDGs?
8. What are the short-term concerns vs. long-term concerns the President must weigh before taking action on this case?
9. What are the **solutions** you would propose to improve the situation here in line with the SDG 13 and its links with other crucial goals and also Article 6 of the Paris Agreement?
10. In line with **SDG localization,** how do national level public institutions and leadership ensure any actions are effectively implemented locally?

II. Group work (30 minutes)

Split into groups as encouraged by the training facilitators around you.

Discuss in groups the answers to each question for reflection above.

Organize your responses to the questions above – these responses will be presented to the larger group for feedback and plenary discussion.

Nominate one person who will later report back to the plenary from the group or your group can present as a whole.

III. Group Presentations to the Plenary and Role Play (45 minutes)

The presentation for the plenary should not be longer than 5 minutes per group to allow time for discussions as well.

Groups in the audience will take on the roles of the following and respond to solutions with their opinions on potential effectiveness of these group presentations and recommendations.

1. Provincial/District governments in areas of woodland with fossil fuels and critical minerals
2. Provincial/District governments in areas of woodland with no fossil fuels and critical minerals
3. Private sector lobby for petrochemicals companies,
4. NGO,
5. National government – President's office
6. Ministry of environment,
7. Ministry of finance and budgetary planning,
8. Youth groups (activists not armed)
9. Youth groups in districts (armed)
10. Now organized groups of concerned tribal leaders who would no longer have access to key resources for their livelihoods from the land if the Oil company takes over the reserve.
11. Independent press and media,
12. Indigenous peoples and traditional community leaders
13. University conducting studies on carbon sequestration potential
14. Trafiguro company/Mamba Restoration Alliance/collective of international NGOs
15. United Nations

The moderators will then wrap up the lessons learned in the plenary discussion and close the session.

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