

U.S. Forest Service Launches NGO Network for Greater Exchange of Ideas and Innovations

In the United States and abroad, the U.S. Forest Service works with local communities and civil society organizations to help them balance their natural resource needs with long-term sustainable management objectives. Through its International Programs office, the Forest Service has been partnering with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) around the world for over twenty-five years. These partnerships have produced countless exchanges of ideas and have yielded improved best practices around the world. But, those ideas and best practices were not always reaching the local-level NGO, until now.

In February 2019, the U.S. Forest Service launched the NGO Network to help local-level NGOs exchange information outside of their country and learn from the ideas and innovations of their global colleagues. The launch coincided with the Network's first annual meeting in which 17 member NGOs, represented by their Executive Directors, traveled to the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) in Gujarat, India to observe FES's field activities and to discuss their best practices and lessons learned for community-level natural resource management activities. The site visits stimulated discussion within the network regarding community engagement and participatory approaches to international development.

Reflecting on her experience of the meeting, Laly Lichtenfeld from Tanzania People and Wildlife shared: "This week in Udaipur has been an incredible opportunity to learn about the breadth of work around the world focusing on community-based natural resource management, whether it be from forestry, wildlife conservation with birds and other animals, or rangeland management, just how universal and how important this work is around the world and how similar some of our approaches and strategies are, it's truly been exciting." Diana Lucia Eusse, from Asociacion Calidris in Colombia, expressed a similar sentiment: "We are having an opportunity to understand what is happening in other countries, what is happening with other organizations, and I feel proud, and I also feel hope, because we are doing a good job and for sure we are supporting many things to improve livelihoods and other important things for people."

The U.S. Forest Service will act as a secretariat for the NGO Network and will organize an Annual Executive Directors Meeting and intersessional activities focused on natural resource management, rural development, and organizational management. The next Annual Directors Meeting will take place in Tanzania in 2020. The Network's exchange of lessons and experiences will advance the Forest Service's aim to support cooperative, sustainable, international development initiatives that impact communities and natural resources at the grassroots level. The Network also supports the Forest Service's domestic efforts, as the agency incorporates the Network's methods and approaches into the partnerships with rural NGOs and communities in the United States.

Member Organizations:

Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, Jordan
Lebanon Reforestation Initiative, Lebanon
Tanzania People and Wildlife, Tanzania
Mpingo Conservation & Development Initiative, Tanzania
Arannayk Foundation, Bangladesh
Foundation for Ecological Security, India
Yayasan Puter, Indonesia
Myanmar Environment Rehabilitation-Conservation Network, Myanmar
Federation for Community Users, Nepal
Foundation for Preservation of Wildlife & Cultural Assets, Armenia
Great Baikal Trail Association, Russia
Camp Alatoo, The Kyrgyz Republic
Agency for Sustainable Development, Ukraine
International Institute for Education in Brazil
Asociacion Calidris, Colombia
Proyecto Aldea Global, Honduras
Instituto del Bien Comun, Peru