Optimizing Forest Governance in a Small Island Developing State: An approach to enhance Effectiveness, Coordination, Efficiency, and Accountability through Incremental perfectionism.

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Abstract

Forest governance refers to the set of rules, norms, and processes that shape how forests are managed, used, and conserved. National forest policies play a crucial role in promoting good forest governance by providing a foundation and framework for decision-making and actions related to forests. A clear, inclusive, and adaptable policy empowers actors across diverse groups, but the real test lies in effective monitoring, enforcement, and stakeholder engagement. Strong institutions, sufficient resources, and political will pave the way, while considering local context. Small Island Developing State like Mauritius have unique forest governance challenges due to their limited landmasses and scarce resources. Moreover, vulnerability to degradation from these factors is compounded by the impact of climate change and frequent natural disasters like cyclones and rising sea levels. Ultimately, whilst the success of a national forest policy hinges on its design, a well-orchestrated implementation symphony remains key. This paper dives into the National Forest Policy implementation challenges in Mauritius (NFP). It explores key micro-, meso-, and macro level barriers through focused group discussions and semi structured interviews of key stakeholders and bellwethers and proposes an approach termed 'incremental perfectionism' to improve the NFP implementation.

Key Words*: Incremental Perfectionism, forest governance, Policy optimization, barriers*

1.0 Introduction:

The Republic of Mauritius is Small Island Developing State (SIDS) of approximately 2042 km^2 and comprise of the of the main island Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agalega, St. Brandon and disputed territories Chagos Archipelago and Tromelin. The principal island Mauritius, isolated with its mild climate and diverse landscape, boasts a unique collection of plants found nowhere else on Earth (Baider et al., 2010). However, this natural treasure has faced four centuries of human impact. After the arrival of the first settlers, forests were indiscriminately cleared for timber, settlement and infrastructural development (Cheke and Hume, 2008). Large swaths of native forests were also replaced with commercially valuable trees like pine and eucalyptus.

Presently only a quarter of the island (47 031 ha) is forested and just a fraction of that remaining area is native forest in good condition (Forestry Service, 2019; NBSAP, 2017; Page and d'Argent, 1997). Mauritius has two distinct forest ownership categories: public (approximately 22,100 ha) and private (approximately 25,000 ha). While all state forests receive legal protection under the Forest and Reserves Act, only 6,540 ha of private forests, including river and mountain reserves, enjoy similar safeguards (Forestry Service, 2021).

French and British colonial rule prioritised agriculture for food security, rural employment, and economic growth in Mauritius prior to its independence. However, post-independence, the nation has strategically transitioned towards a diversified economy focused on manufacturing, tourism, and the service sector, including offshore and freeport activities (Zafar, 2011; Tandrayen-Ragoobur and Kasseeah, 2018).

Similar to many other SIDS, Mauritius faces heightened vulnerability to exogenous shocks, climate change impacts, land degradation, and natural disasters (Bolesta, 2020; Singh, 2014; Von Tigerstrom 2005). SIDS also face unique challenges in managing their forests due to several factors (Wilkie et al., 2002; FAO; 1999). Their limited land area makes their forests highly vulnerable to degradation and fragmentation. Secondly, SIDS often lack the financial and human resources necessary for effective forest management and enforcement. Thirdly, these islands rely heavily on their forests for livelihoods, culture, and essential ecosystem services, making sustainable management critical. Finally, SIDS are particularly susceptible to climate change threats like sea level rise, cyclones, and salinization, further impacting forest health and governance. This underscores the need for innovative and tailored approaches to forest governance in these island nations.

Although the forests of Mauritius are small in size, they perform various environmental and ecological functions that significantly surpass their direct economic aspect. Various legislations such as the Forests and Reserves Act (1983) and the National Parks Act (2015) have been enacted safeguard forest resources. Additionally, comprehensive policies and strategies like the National Forest Policy (NFP 2006) and the National Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plan (NBSAP), Protected Area Network Expansion Strategy (PANES) promote education, biodiversity conservation, and forest cover increase through tree-planting campaigns and urban forestry initiatives. The NFP in particular, seeks to balance the various societal needs associated with forests while prioritizing long-term environmental sustainability and public well-being. The document has been formulated to cover all types of forests regardless of their ownership. It significantly departs from its 1963 predecessor by prioritizing environmental and protective functions and social benefits over revenue generation. The NFP identifies ten critical challenges impeding the forestry sector and outlines corresponding goals, objectives, and strategies to address them. In essence, it charts a course for forestry activities, tackling these identified issues and problems (National Forest Policy, 2006).

Effective policy implementation contributes to sustainable development (Mugambwa et al., 2020). According to Bryon (2006), successful forest policies take into account the long-term well-being of society, promote fairness, and balance a comprehensive range of benefits. These policies must remain flexible to accommodate shifting priorities and acknowledge the ever-changing dynamics of forest management. However, policy tools, the methods used to achieve desired outcomes, are crucial alongside the development of policy documents. Although creating a policy is often seen as the first step for positive change, it is essential to remember that successful implementation requires proper strategies and resources beyond the initial formulation (Bali et al., 2021; Smith, 1973).

A policy is a dynamic document and needs to be reviewed periodically. Arts and Visseren-Hamakers (2012) underscores the need for adaptive, context-sensitive forest governance that integrates diverse voices, addresses power imbalances, and navigates complex trade-offs. The National Forest Policy of the Republic of Mauritius was enunciated in 2006, approximately 17 years ago. While there has been significant progress in addressing some of the main issues identified in the NFP, several of the objectives have not been fully attained.

'Incremental perfectionism', unlike traditional perfectionism which strives for fast perfection, is a growth-oriented approach that emphasizes steady progress and improvement over time. Small but significant incremental change in the forest policy enabling framework rather than immediate and large disruptive systemic change may prove more effective in achieving the desired goals achieving the policy objectives.

This paper examines forest governance challenges in Mauritius through an analysis of the methods of policy implementation, perception of stakeholders and interview of past and current policy makers (referred to as bellwethers). The study identifies barriers at individual, institutional, and national levels and proposes the 'incremental perfectionism' approach to enhance effectiveness, coordination, efficiency, and accountability

2.0 Methodology:

The research methodology was designed to gain insights into the mechanisms of policy implementation. This involved a multifaceted approach, including one-on-one consultations, desk reviews, focused group meetings, and semi-structured interviews with former decision-makers or influential figures (referred to as 'bellwethers'). These interactions facilitated the collection of empirical data. The underlying assumption was that the policy process is influenced by institutional theory, which emphasizes the formal and legal aspects of government structures (Kraft and Furlong, 2012).

Three approaches were adopted to gather data:

Methodology Approach A: Project implementation and resource mobilization within Governments

The method involved reviewing documents and circulars pertaining to the annual budgeting process issued by the concerned Ministries.

To better understanding policy implementation process at Government level, internal procedures were explored through interviews with 11 officials from 5 key ministries/institutions dealing with agro-industry, civil service, finance, environment and legal advice (Attorney General's office). The process was conducted between January 2022 and April 2022.

Methodology Approach B: Perception mapping of stakeholders

For perception mapping of stakeholders, a total of 11 focus groups were organized across a stratified sample of representatives from different organizations representing key government agencies [forestry Service (Mauritius), Forestry Service (Rodrigues), National Parks and Conservation Service, Department of Environment and Small Farmers Welfare Fund] and civil society [Environmental activists group Save Soil, NGO Maison Familiale (Zone 3 Rodrigues), group of farmers at Dubreuil (Mauritius), group of herbalists (Mauritius) and University students]. A deliberate effort was made to involve civil society groups that had not participated in the formulation of forest policy in 2006. Each focused group discussion involved 6 to 10 individuals of a common background with similar interest.

Methodology Approach C: Identifying the strengths and weakness of policy implementation.

Between May and June 2022, semi-structured interviews with five former influential policy makers were conducted. These interviews aimed to uncover the opportunities and challenges encountered by policy makers who are actively involved in translating policies into practical implementation. The special emphasis was on understanding the reasons behind perceived failures and identifying potential changes that could lead to successful project implementation in the future.

3.0 Results:

Results Approach A: Project implementation and resource mobilization within Governments

The results identified three distinct approaches are adopted for the implementation of Policies (including the NFP) in Mauritius.

Pathway 1: Resource mobilization within Governments

Three to four months before the annual budget exercise, the Ministry of Finance requests supervisory ministries to prepare financial proposals within specified guidelines. This exercise also consists of seeking resources for the recurring budgets of institutions.

The project proposals, which support policy implementation, are linked to the annual budget and typically cover a one-year duration. For multi-year projects, a three-year projection format is used, and special mechanisms are employed for longer projects. Line ministries consolidate proposals from various departments and submit them to the Ministry of Finance for examination. The Ministry assesses approximately 300-400 projects emanating from the different institutions of the Government. Selection committees prioritize projects based on government priorities and equitable resource distribution rather than on merit. Line ministries are often informally informed of their allocated budgets. Projects related to implementation of the NFP follows the same process.
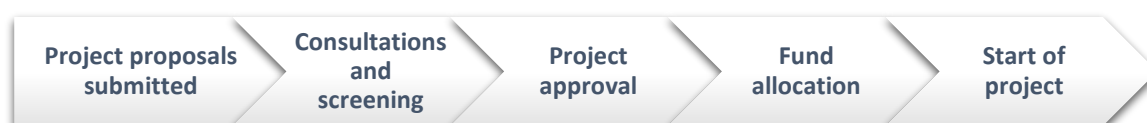

Figure 1: Resource mobilization from central government for projects related to policy implementation

Pathway 2: Legislative Reform

Another approach to implementing policies involves using legal instruments. When a Ministry is connected to a specific policy area, it can initiate a drafting process by informing the cabinet about its decision and the rationale behind it. Once the Cabinet approves, the State Law Office receives instructions for drafting the new law. Additionally, regulations can be introduced during the budget process through the Finance Bill, effectively implementing budgetary measures through legislation.

| Legal ammendment proposed | Cabinet approval is obtained | Drafting instruction to State law Office | Bill is debated in Parliament | Law is gazetted |

Figure 2: Law formulation in policy implementation

Pathway 2: External support system

The third approach to policy implementation involves leveraging external resources, often provided by international donor agencies. Each agency allocates resources according to its specific objectives and criteria. While this funding method holds considerable significance, it may not fully meet all the agency's requirements. Additionally, the priorities of these international aid agencies can evolve over time.

Results Approach B: Perception mapping of stakeholders

The perception mapping through the Focused Group meetings brough out the following insights:

1. Awareness of a National Forest Policy – While all the government institutions consulted were acquainted with the NFP, only one third of civil society organizations were cognizant of the forest policy's existence
2. Awareness of Government Action for forest management – In terms of participants' awareness of government actions for forest management, all the government agencies were well-informed. However, among the six civil society organizations, only one was aware of these actions, representing 16% of all civil society groups.
3. Awareness of respondents on role and importance of Forests - While all the government institutions consulted were cognizant with the role and importance of forests, only one third of civil society organizations were conversant on the subject.
4. Willingness to participate in Forest Development – All government agencies supported participating in forest development, and 83% of civil society expressed willingness to join.
5. Forest management model preference – Regarding forest management, all government agencies prefer government-led management. Among civil society organizations, four expressed the same preference, while one favored joint government/civil society management. A separate group from civil society had no preference.
6. Preferred area of intervention for improved forest management – Participants proposed several forest management improvements, grouped into six categories. Figure 4 summarizes the number of groups making these suggestions, regardless of their status as state agencies or civil society organizations. The preferred areas of intervention were: project delivery, institutional empowerment and communication strategy.
7. Perceived government efforts in different areas for the implementation of the NFP - Respondents showed awareness of government efforts in resource mobilization, capacity building, and forest management (Figure 5). Notably, the results did not distinguish between state agencies and civil society organizations.
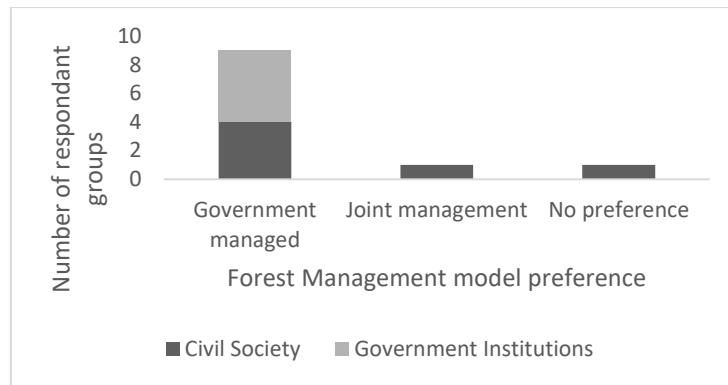
Figure 3: Preference for forest management model

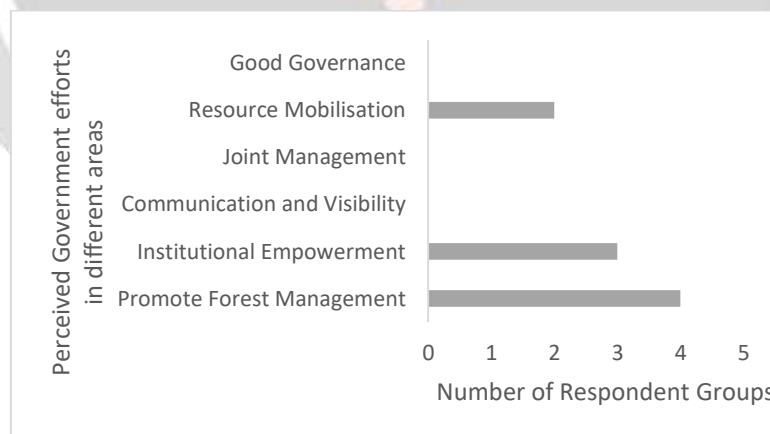Figure 4: Preferred areas of intervention for improved forest management

Figure 5: Perceived government efforts in different areas for the implementation of the NFP

Results Approach C: Identifying the strength and weakness of policy implementation.

The data collected from various bellwethers are summarized in table 1 for simplified analysis. This analysis aimed to identify the key strengths, weaknesses, and specific conditions required for implementing development projects and activities related to the NFP.

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5
Strengths	1. Developmental partners are available 2. Adaptability of institutions	1. Proven success models are available.	1. Funding are often not an issue because of myriad of international partners. 2. Transfer of technology	2. The Government has highly qualified people.	3. Qualified Staff Good institutional infrastructure
Weakness	1. Field realities are not always evident at the decision centers. 2. Outcomes are often realized well after the project lifetime	1. Recipients are not always willing to work in new setups. 2. Expectations are too high. 3. Projects have a limited lifetime.	1. Inadequate capacity in some specific areas. 2. Absence of clear project objectives and management methodology to implement policies	1. Policies often do not survive change of government. In many cases an "perpetual reboot" is a classic scenario.	1. Poor coordination and institutional leadership. 2. Lack of motivation.
Special enabling conditions	1. Advocacy for a cause. 2. Change in perception. 3. Policy guidance documents.	1. Education/awareness can contribute to bring about transformative changes. 2. Actions should be people centered	1. Pooling of local talents. 2. Change in mindset and government functioning. 3. Institutions should move out of their comfort zones 4. Personal commitment of the leaders	1. Looking beyond political gains is important. The ideal scenario is to balance between popular decisions and applying economic rigor	1. Ensure proper transition between incoming and outgoing Governments

Table 1: Perceived strength and weaknesses for implementation of the NFP by bellwethers

4.0 Discussions

Part A: Project implementation and resource mobilization within Governments

Pathway 1: Resource mobilization process by Government agencies

The Programme-Based Budgeting (PBB) system in Mauritius, which was first introduced during the fiscal year 2006-07 as part of a broader fiscal management reform, focuses on aligning government priorities with spending

plans, enhancing value for money, and strengthening accountability. Mauritius has integrated PBB into a medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF) to achieve better outcomes and efficient resource allocation (Tandrayen-Ragoobur and Padachi, 2013). Through the PBB, Mauritius has actively utilized budgetary resources to advance its National Forestry Policy, emphasizing sustainable practices, environmental protection, and community engagement. For example, the government has allocated funds to promote tree planting outside forests, contributing to increased tree cover and environmental enhancement (Padayachy, 2023). The PBB has laid a foundation for better resource management, but ongoing efforts are essential to maximize its effectiveness and achieve desired outcomes. Oundo (2017) highlighted the importance of addressing organization structure, transparency, and staff capacity factors to enhance program-based budgeting.

The PBB budget cycle consists of 4 distinct phases consisting of: 1) budget planning and consultations, 2) budget appropriations and proposals, 3) budget enactment and execution, and finally 4) audit and reporting. Project initiatives aimed at implementing the National Forest Policy adheres to the established Programme-Based Budgeting (PBB) cycle.

The Key government officials consulted identified four core dimensions of the PBB's budget planning and consultation phase:1) establishing realistic fiscal targets and corresponding expenditure levels through the macroeconomic framework, 2) defining spending priorities via expenditure policies, 3) aligning resource allocation with both policies and targets (the core PBB process), and 4) addressing operational efficiency and performance to optimize spending and outcomes.

The budget appropriation phase is generally streamlined, especially for majority governments, but this apparent simplicity might mask potential issues. The consultations revealed three critical issues: 1) the lack of a standardized funding request format, leading to inconsistent and incomplete proposals, 2) missing documentation in initial proposals, with crucial information provided verbally during screenings, circumventing written commitments, and 3) there are no standardized format for submitting proposals. Typically, these budget proposals are brief and lack essential details such as timelines, projected implementation steps, and expected outcomes. Interestingly, during screening committees, additional information is verbally presented to persuade assessors, but this information often remains unrecorded in written commitments. We believe that these aspects warrant closer examination.

Regarding the project implementation we identified two potential gaps: 1) the absence of defined project implementation plans may hinder systematic follow-up and achievement of targets and 2) the lack of multistakeholder steering committees weakens accountability and oversight. Furthermore, robust monitoring and evaluation are essential for building knowledge and institutional memory, crucial for continuous improvement and success in future projects.

Once budgets are allocated, implementation becomes central, demanding effective execution by institutions. The National Audit Office ensures responsible public fund use through audits and reports, as mandated by the Finance and Audit Act (1982). In the context of project implementation, it was highlighted that there is a notable absence of detailed project implementation plans. However, the establishment of a multistakeholder steering committee model has proven effective in ensuring rigorous systematic follow-up and enhancing accountability when projects deviate from their intended targets. Project monitoring and evaluation can contribute to organizational learning, fostering knowledge development and institutional memory (Wongtschowski et al.,2016; Ashton et al., 2021) The integration of best practices throughout project cycles is essential for achieving improved project delivery.

Pathway 2: Legislative Reform

Mauritius follows a structured process involving legislative bodies, legal advisors, and policy considerations to enact and refine its laws. The Cabinet, led by the Prime Minister, makes policy decisions for the government. The government outlines its legislative priorities in the Five-Year Government Programme at the start of a legislative term. The State Law Office/Attorney General's Office (initiates the drafting of legislation through its legal advisors and with noteworthy contribution of relevant institutions. The draft bill is debated in parliament and resubmitted to the State Law Office when required.

The annual Budget Speech, delivered by the Minister of Finance, significantly influences regulations and amendments to primary legislation with financial implications.

While the current legislative reform approach is not financially prohibitive, it does require significant time due to extensive consultations and alignment with existing laws.

It is important to recognize that the mere promulgation of a law does not automatically result in improved administration of state institutions. Rather, it serves as a precursor to change. The actual transformation occurs when responsible authorities implement the law, necessitating the allocation of human and logistical resources. This process is closely linked to the initial step of securing financial resources for the implementation of the legislation.

Pathway 3: External Support System

External support in Mauritius is facilitated through external donor agencies that mobilize funds for specific activities and projects (e.g. through GEF Project and Program Cycle). These endeavors encompass a spectrum of activities, spanning from enhancing infrastructure to institutional reforms, advancing legislative changes, and fostering capacity building or technology transfer.

While this avenue presents several opportunities, it also entails certain limitations. Projects seeking external funding must meet thresholds and adhere to ceilings set by the external agency. The type of projects eligible for funding is subject to alignment with the agency's priorities. Additionally, external financing often comes with co-financing requirements, typically in kind. Co-financing acts as a catalyst, enhancing the impact of projects within their respective domains. The development of such projects undergoes rigorous analysis, with specialized units within (or external from) these agencies meticulously reviewing project proposals. Proper execution involves a project director, a steering committee, and well-defined stages. However, it is important to recognize that these projects are often temporary and may have long term sustainability issues, particularly in terms of funding.

Part B: Perception mapping of stakeholders

The focused group discussion revealed that government agencies are well-informed about state forest management initiatives. However, Civil society organizations exhibited limited awareness of the government's forest management initiatives. The government's communication efforts regarding its ground-level actions appear weak. Remarkably, state agencies budgets generally lack a dedicated fund for visibility, and communication responsibilities primarily fall to the minister's press secretary, often a political appointee prioritizing politician visibility over ministry work.

While all parties consulted acknowledged the importance of forests, the majority of civil society members lacked awareness of the underlying reasons and mechanisms. Our interviews highlighted the persistent lack of knowledge among the general population, despite the high literacy rate in the country. It appears that even the state agencies that participated in this discussion seem unaware of the efforts of other agencies. It is very likely that the state is really not making the effort or not communicating enough about activities related to this. We are of the opinion that this underscores the challenge of protecting forests beyond state control and preserving trees outside forest boundaries when the population lacks fundamental awareness of forest and flora significance.

The concept of contributing to forest development through joint management yielded mixed results. While most respondents expressed willingness to engage in activities related to forest development, joint management was not as well-received. According to the participants key areas for enhancing forest management, in order of priority, include project delivery, institutional empowerment, communication strategy, joint management, resource mobilization, and good governance. In the context of project management, it is essential to adhere to standard operating procedures (SOPs) to foster good governance. Additionally, addressing institutional exclusion and ensuring that all individuals feel integrated into the system and have equal opportunities should be a central goal. Arts and Visseren-Hamakers (2012) emphasize the shift from traditional government-centric approaches to more inclusive and collaborative governance mechanisms. These modes of governance involve networks, partnerships, and shared responsibilities.

Part C: Identifying the strength and weakness of policy implementation

Strengths

The World Bank emphasizes the need for a comprehensive understanding of the forest governance challenge to drive effective reforms (World Bank, 2009). The 2009 World Bank report identified several key factors that serve as the roots of forest governance. These factors include institutional arrangements, legal and regulatory

frameworks, capacity and resources, stakeholder participation, information and monitoring system, social norms and values, and political economy factors. When these factors are strong, they enhance the effectiveness of forest management and outcomes.

In our study, the some of the bellwethers interviewed identified the main strength of the current forest governance system as: strong, flexible and effective institutions (institutional arrangement), qualified employees and strong technical expertise (capacity). Interestingly, the strong presence of various United nation agencies [such as the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Union (EU), the French Development Agency (AFD), and the World Bank] and bilateral agencies within the country was also identified as a strength. The respondents argued that these organizations play a crucial role in sustainable development and poverty alleviation by providing both funding and expertise. Leveraging existing proven models, they facilitate efficient technology transfer, enabling quick solutions that can be replicated in Mauritius, thereby saving valuable time and knowledge.

Weaknesses

The causes of forest policy failures are many and varied, however, according to Fraser (2002), recurring factors include economic incentives favoring resource exploitation without considering environmental damage, limited government capacity, and inadequate communication about the urgency of sustainability issues to key stakeholders.

Regarding the factors that are adversely impacting the forest policy implementation, the bellwethers conveyed diverse interpretations stemming from their individual experiential backgrounds. The key limiting factors identified include disconnection from field realities of decision-makers, policy continuity faces challenges during government transitions, short life expectancy of some projects, lack of clear goals and objectives, and inadequate capacities in some specific areas, poor coordination and leadership, demotivation, and resistance to change.

Literature on Policy Implementation Weaknesses highlights various challenges. One such challenge is the disconnection between decision-makers and field realities (Hudson et al., 2019). Decision centers, often staffed by bureaucrats, rely on diverse information sources to formulate policies and oversee their implementation. This process therefore tends to obscure field realities due to an emphasis on short- and medium-term targets driven by political considerations (Marume et al., 2016). Unfortunately, this approach often overlooks recipients' ability to adapt to changes, prioritizing short-term gains or illusory benefits. To enhance project effectiveness, a stronger connection to realities is essential. This can be achieved by addressing information gaps, conducting initial capacity assessments, and anticipating resistance to change.

The study also identified the need for an overhaul in project management to improve efficiency. Currently, a clear methodological approach is lacking, with projects simply executing activities listed in documents. A study on the World Bank's project evaluation approach sheds light on how projects are monitored and how well they run (Andrew M., 2018). Andrew argued that policy organizations tend to assess success by evaluating whether planned products are efficiently delivered, rather than focusing on whether policies effectively address the initial problems or contribute to development outcomes. Van Bodegom et al (2012) provides a structured approach to evaluate and enhance forest governance within national monitoring systems through: 1) verifying local Forest Governance Monitoring (FGM) data by linking it to national monitoring efforts, 2) raising awareness among stakeholders about its importance, 3) establishing best practices and requirements for effective implementation, 4) fostering stakeholder participation and commitment to system improvement, and 5) securing increased political will and resource allocation for FGM.

Respondents identified a lack of continuity in policies and priorities as a systemic issue. Frequent changes occur with new government administrations, often driven by personal preferences (Ringe N., 2005) rather than long-term goals. Evidence includes numerous examples of drastic policy shifts, such as the "Maurice Ile Durable" project (Elahee, 2013) which has been shelved after a change in regime.

The participants highlighted a lack of capacity in certain areas, particularly related to project management, coordination, and leadership within institutions. The absence of joint inter-institutional projects and limited information on ground realities in project submissions contributed to frustration. Additionally, the general population remains unaware of government activities due to lack of effective communication.

To achieve desired objectives in developmental projects, specific pre-conditions must be met for policy implementation. These include promoting advocacy and awareness, assessing ground realities, preparing for a shift in mindset, and reevaluating institutional functioning. Additionally, the personal commitment of leaders plays a crucial role in driving this change. These preconditions align with the principles of change management,

a practice transcending mere project management. Change management focuses on planning the change itself, not just the project, and incorporates systematic approaches like "force field analysis" to identify driving and restraining forces that can impact the change's success. By adopting these principles, development projects can achieve increased effectiveness and efficiency in their implementation.

Weigant et al. (2022) identified nine governance arrangements and emphasizes their role in promoting effective forest land restoration. These arrangements involves moving tasks to other governance levels, task-specific organizations, polycentric governance, multilevel coordination, multilevel collaboration, multilevel learning, bridging organizations, and multilevel networks.

Incremental improvements in policy objective delivery

A less disruptive way to improve delivery of policy objectives is to make changes at the governance level in small increments and then learning the effectiveness and adjusting again in an iterative process. This could be described as perfecting the way we operate in small increments or "incremental perfectionism".

In the following section we outline some progressive adjustments to the National Forest Policy enabling framework that may contribute to achieve the NFP goals

Sectoral Planning

Sectoral planning cannot take place on its own. The best practice in planning is wide consultative exercises. There are various tools that can also be used to make effective planning for example social accountability that can be defined as an approach toward building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e., in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. Mechanisms of social accountability can be initiated and supported by the state, citizens, or both, however very often they are demand-driven and operate from the bottom-up. Social accountability mechanisms are sometimes referred to as "external" or "vertical" mechanisms of accountability. Wide consultations may help in institutional exclusion and provide a platform for a wider audience and the different strata of the population (Malena C. *et al.,* 2004). Sectoral planning would also entail through wider consultation data driven planning and higher chances of sustainability of project outputs and outcomes in the long run. Jointly undertaking sectoral planning would also secure the commitment of coordination among institutions at the very onset of goal setting and clearly defining roles and responsibilities. The time lag between planning and execution allows individuals and institutions to clear issues in the first place such that there is less resistance to change when actually in the implementation phase.

Wise Investment in the sector

Investment always pertains to financial resources that ensures the ability to procure adequate adapted tools to deal with development. This is also true when it comes to building capacity to have capable human resources. The ability to use scarce resources for maximum outcome is always a difficult task but not impossible. One proposed method of using resources effectively is to find synergy among the many development projects that compete for the same resource. This can be achieved by wise planning and building synergies among the different institutions and promoting coordination and coherence. One approach could be to encourage horizontal communication. Horizontal communication, when nurtured over time can also foster teamwork, visibility, and accountability among employees at the same hierarchical level even form different organizations or units in the same Government hierarchy. Investing in the sector and the institutions can also be beneficial to increase the motivation at the individual level as well as instilling confidence in human resources.

Inter-sectoral coordination and institutional reforms

Intersectoral coordination can be achieved by reviewing institutional set-ups. Coordination allows for the sharing of tasks and use of resources efficiently and promotes wise investments and can bring about effortless achievement of common agenda. It is worthy of mention that intersectoral coordination is different from collaboration for a program or a joint project. Intersectoral coordination means more that sharing tasks, but it can be viewed as the inter connectedness of institutions and their ability to share resources and complement each other over time. For example, assigning specific tasks to each institution such that each one of them start to act as specialist or in the terms of an economist 'division of labor'. It is important to understand that coordination

requires institutional and legal reforms , change in mindset and much more. Barriers in fact are inherent when there is change. Such changes have to therefore be in small increments and giving time to people to change the way they work.

Legal amendments

To incite lasting changes in the way institutions, work, legal amendments are necessary to redistributes decisional powers and promotes a stepwise consultation and secures commitment of each institution. Legislations are also the ultimate blueprints that defines the exact roles of institution and the way they function vis a vis other, be it other institutions or civil society organizations. Legislations can also be used to empower people for specific decisional roles and are therefore more accountable. Such legislative amendments would therefore be necessary to move from decisions based on personal preferences towards rational and legally compliant decisions. (N'diaye S., 2001) It is important to highlight that *l*egislation is, however, the starting point for bringing change. Its implementation is enabled with resources that help in building capacity, arousing interest in the policy process and inciting newcomers to joint the process that enlarge the experience and perception base for more perspective. A larger set of stakeholders may in a way be more resilient to changes that leads to drastic changes to policy.

The legal amendments could also infuse good governance principles and promote its practice especially by defining roles and identifying lead actors/agencies and instilling leadership roles and accountability to these actors/agencies.

Effective Goal Setting (SMART) and monitoring and evaluation

*Governments finance projects on an annual basis. In the present case, the one thing that has been consistently missing is the way projects are formulated. Effective goal setting and adoption of SMART (*Doran, G. T. (1981) approach is widely accepted to be effective and helping get focused. SMART goals when implemented can give a consistent format of project formulation with clear goals and objectives. The adoption of planning and project management tools that are simple and helpful should be a way to achieve more focus and clarity in the way government agencies function. This way the monitoring and evaluation of project implementation is made easier and adopting adaptive management may give way to possibilities to change the course of a developmental project whenever the need would arise (Rogers P. & Macfarlan A., 2022). A proactive stance on adaptive management ensures timely implementation and corrective action thus increasing efficiency and effectiveness of action on field. Adopting SMART approach can effectively address poorly defined projects project implementation plans and provide indicators to the project implementation.

Adopting modern tools-ICT

Today, ICT is an extremely powerful tool for supporting institutions in their efforts to achieve good management (Shim, D.C. & Eom T.H., 2009). For example, real-time data storage and modeling, as well as the routing of information into a centralized database, helps to achieve unprecedented management efficiency. Also, surveys can be carried out online at low cost and in record time. The ability of ICT to collect, transform, valorize and disseminate resources, especially intangible ones, in record time and at minimal cost, is a major asset that cannot be ignored, especially as the world becomes increasingly digital. The absence of ICTs in democratization-oriented management could, in the long term, asphyxiate the very foundations of good governance. (Caillet B., 2010). Use of ICT in collection of data through surveys could gather real data form the field and project a better picture of field realities and aspirations of the people that can provide clarity with clear goals and objectives. Monitoring of project outputs into outcomes can also be executed more efficiently and effectively, giving the real focus on outcomes rather than outputs. Effectively policies are meant to have outcomes, leaving outputs for projects. Therefore, ICT can be used to effectively monitor post project lifetime and overcome the short lifespan of field projects.

Project implementation software in use especially in the private sector e.g. Microsoft Project could also change the way businesses are carried out in Governments. Project management software can make easy forecasts and thus prompts corrective actions on time while micromanaging projects.

5.0 Conclusion:

It is a fact that no governance model is perfect. It is more unfortunate however that instead of adjusting and adopting small incremental changes, we often opt for larger and drastic changes under the very fashionable term of "paradigm shift". In so doing we tend to oversee some fundamental truth at the individual and institutional level that are present e.g. resistance to change, personal preferences, ego, and the way we tend to interpret leadership solely as a decision maker, but not as a representative of the majority especially in a democratic set up. opting for small changes at the micro and the meso level level of governance structures. Changes in small increments over time may give way to a governance evolution in a more subtle and acceptable manner. Drastic changes or disruptive strategic changes to the forest policy framework over time may prove to be counterproductive and may not be effective in achieving the desired goals. Incremental perfectionism can therefore be understood as perfecting the way we do things and taking paths that optimize the processes involved. Each culture or country has its own norms and way of doing things and it is here that we can help to optimize each process without much disruption, but infusing principles of accountability, good leadership, use of technological tools or adopting proven ways of project delivery that ensure the outputs bring out the outcomes. The overall goals being more efficiency and effectiveness.

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