

Rainforest Foundation Norway's Partner Policy

September 2017

Partnership philosophy

Central to Rainforest Foundation Norway's (RFN) work is the strategic partnerships we build with civil society in rainforest countries.

RFN and our partners achieve more *together* than we would on our own.

The work of RFN and our partners is complementary. While our partners possess superior knowledge of local conditions and challenges, RFN has many years of experience with successful rights-based rainforest protection in various rainforest countries and across continents.

The measures implemented by partner organisations are the direct reasons for most of the results we achieve within rainforest countries. In close cooperation with partners, RFN works to establish international frameworks and influence bilateral actors and other donors that determine the direction for rainforest management in our partner countries. Together, we pressure the private sector to cease activities that result in rainforest destruction and breaches of human rights.

RFN contributes to strengthening civil society by way of capacity-building measures and systematic work with local partners over extended periods. We consider a strong civil society to be an important prerequisite for good governance and democracy.

We base the cooperation with our partner organisations on the following principles:

- Shared vision and values
- Equality
- Mutual benefit
- Respect, openness and responsibility
- Long-term vision and flexibility

Areas of work and types of partners

RFN works in cooperation with civil society actors and other allies in three areas of work:

1. Supporting the development of sustainable local communities.
2. Promoting political and legal framework conditions that ensure the protection of the rainforest and indigenous peoples' human rights.
3. Halting direct threats against the rainforest and against indigenous and forest peoples' human rights.

Protection of the large, contiguous rainforest areas and the vital ecosystems they provide, requires changes in all three of these areas. Such changes can be achieved by coordinating efforts at the local, national and international levels.

RFN's partners can be categorised into two main groups, i) indigenous movements or organisations promoting the rights of indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent groups, and ii) organisations working in the fields of environmental protection and sustainable management, human rights and democracy, political advocacy and holding the private sector accountable. These partners are generally found in rainforest countries, and the cooperation often involves financial support from RFN.

Field projects in the rainforest often have the objective of securing a given group's traditional rainforest areas and ensuring the sustainable management thereof. RFN prioritises field projects where the value extends beyond the project itself, meaning that they can be scaled up or used as models in advocacy work.

Some projects have the objective of influencing the framework conditions for indigenous peoples' rights or forest management at the local and national levels. In these efforts, we collaborate with partners that have good contact with decision-makers and the capacity to promote their message in a convincing manner.

Efforts to halt the driving forces behind deforestation are in some cases more confrontational, such as when uncovering corruption, environmental crime or human rights violations. However, there are also good examples of RFN and partners halting deforestation by reaching agreements through dialogue with businesses or industry organisations.

Changes are often most effective when we create synergies between the three areas of work. Some of RFN's partners work in one of the three areas, whereas others combine efforts in multiple areas. RFN contributes to synergies by bringing together partners in networks and collaborations.

RFN also enters into strategic alliances with other international organisations, as well as public and private actors where this can improve chances of achieving objectives.

Selection factors

When considering a new cooperation, we conduct an overall assessment of the organisation and our portfolio in the relevant area. We consider the organisation's position in civil society and whether we have the right balance of various types of partner organisations to be able to deliver in all three areas of work. RFN's needs relating to Norwegian or international campaigns, fundraising efforts or communications work are also taken into consideration.

Professionalism, capacity, analytical skills and strategic instruments are important factors for organisations with the objective of influencing governments, the private sector and other key actors. However, RFN also enters into partnerships with weaker organisations if they hold strategic positions in civil society or are genuine representatives of indigenous peoples and other local communities. In such circumstances, organisational development is an important objective of the cooperation.

RFN uses various methods to assess what organisations are potentially relevant partners. In most cases, we base our assessments on an ongoing actor analysis through close contact with the national civil society, though we may make formal announcements if this is appropriate. In all circumstances, we conduct a thorough assessment of the organisation prior to entering into a partnership.

Duration of cooperation

RFN endeavours to establish long-term partnerships with partners working directly with local communities in the rainforest, as target groups are often vulnerable, and mistakes can easily be made when moving too fast (see the paragraph on do no harm). Partnerships that have the objective of influencing political and legal frameworks, the private sector or other powerful actors may also benefit from a long-term horizon. Political processes are time consuming and results are difficult to guarantee.

In certain circumstances, RFN may enter into shorter partnerships for specific purposes and needs that cannot be met by the existing partner portfolio. The objective may be to uncover deforestation, corruption or breaches of the law, document important conditions, or intervene in an acute situation where the rainforest or local communities are threatened.

Distribution of work

RFN collaborates with organisations that have comprehensive knowledge and experience from the area of work or geographic area in question. Therefore, it is the partner organisation that develops the project, whereas RFN is an active and critical dialogue partner that can contribute with everything from control questions and technical expertise to strategic advice.

When we seek to influence local or national authorities in rainforest countries, it is generally our partner organisations that are leading the way, with RFN in a supporting role. This is a deliberate strategy to allow the national civil society to hold its own government accountable. It is often counterproductive for RFN, as an international actor, to take a leading role in national advocacy work, though it may occasionally be necessary for RFN to spearhead efforts and bear the brunt if exposure may entail risks to local partners.

In circumstances where *international* actors form the target group, RFN will often take a leading role, though we endeavour to collaborate with local/national partner organisations that know and are able to document the situation on the ground. This type of evidence-based advocacy has proven effective.

RFN is cognisant of the challenges relating to the fact that partnerships are not always perceived as equal, as we, in our role as donor, must set a number of administrative requirements regarding control of partners. We seek to solve these challenges through, among other things, openness about our obligations and responsibilities in relation to public and private donors and generally through dialogue, information sharing, predictability and honesty in relations.

RFN's added value

RFN and its partner organisations form a strategic alliance that achieves more together than we could on our own.

Organisational development

RFN contributes to a robust and competent civil society in rainforest countries by developing organisational capacity in our partner organisations. A strong civil society contributes to good governance and democratisation and is a prerequisite for ensuring transparency and participation in forest management.

Through financial support with thorough quality control, combined with close follow-up, offers of courses and training, and concrete requirements, we help partners establish good procedures for administration and finance, including solid management procedures, transparency and strategic leadership.

RFN seeks to systematically assess and document the organisational capacity of partners. This is important in order to initiate adapted measures at the right time and to be able to measure progress.

Expertise

RFN is a professional organisation engaging in development cooperation at a high technical level. This entails that all employees have a high degree of competence in their respective areas of work, including regional and linguistic expertise. We have also defined a set of topics that we refer to as RFN's core competencies. We shall be experts on these topics and deliver competence and results equal to the best in the field. RFN's partner organisations can benefit from the competence at RFN in the planning and implementation of projects. RFN's core competencies are defined as:

- Rights-based sustainable rainforest management
- Indigenous peoples' and other forest peoples' human rights
- The rainforest's importance to biodiversity, climate and development and the causes of deforestation and forest degradation
- Key political and legal frameworks of significance to rainforest management
- Strengthening of civil society, with a special focus on indigenous organisations

Strategic alliances

A key added value of RFN for local partners is access to influential shared arenas included in RFN's network. By engaging in political advocacy work together with partners, for instance in climate negotiations, campaigns directed at businesses, or in the UN's human rights bodies, we enable partners to elevate local and national problems to an international level.

With more than 50 organisations distributed across three continents, RFN's partner network represents a significant alliance with a wealth of knowledge and experience. RFN facilitates knowledge sharing and exchange of experience by way of thematic and geographic network meetings and seminars.

How the organisations and indigenous groups benefit from the alliance opportunities will vary and is adapted to the individual organisation's needs and interests.

Sustainability

RFN is aware of the importance of creating sustainable projects, but also recognises that the type of work we support in partners is often dependent on external funding. To the extent possible, we will contribute to partner organisations developing systems for self-financing, but it is often more relevant to ensure that partners do not become dependent on RFN as their sole donor. We seek to avoid this by encouraging and assisting partners in obtaining additional supporters. By building strong organisations, we increase the chances of them attracting and qualifying for support from other donors.

To ensure predictability and transparency, RFN has guidelines for phasing out and ending of partnerships. If cooperation is to be phased out, the objective is that partners shall have a clear time horizon for the cooperation, and that there shall be a joint plan for how to best ensure that results achieved are safeguarded following phase-out. In this manner, potential misunderstandings, unrealistic expectations and conflicts can more easily be prevented, and the prospects of long-term sustainability are improved.

Generally, RFN does not fund measures that should be the responsibilities of the state. To the extent we do this, the measure always entails an element of holding governments responsible with the objective that they will assume the responsibility with time.

Do no harm

RFN's work influences power relations both globally and locally. Most of it is intentional – we wish to give weaker groups a stronger voice. However, as with all development cooperation, our work also has unintended consequences. The do-no-harm principle is about avoiding negative effects and contributing positively to strengthening cooperation, rather than increasing tensions.

The key to good projects with minimal negative consequences is solid situational awareness. Projects that involve local communities in the rainforest should always be based on thorough analyses of social conditions, and in some cases it may be necessary to devote substantial time and resources at an early stage in the project to analysis and confidence building.

Some of the countries in which RFN works are characterised by war and conflict. In these contexts, RFN's problem analysis will seek to identify what factors drive the conflict and what factors may promote peace. The work of both RFN and partners must be organised in a manner that avoids exacerbating the situation and instead strengthens the forces for peace.

Three cross-cutting principles

Respect for human rights, gender sensitivity and anti-corruption are values central to RFN's work. To ensure high-quality efforts in these areas, and to reduce the risk of negative consequences, we have developed specific policies and guidelines for these fields. We emphasise making our partners aware of our expectations of them within the cross-cutting themes and assisting them in implementing these principles in their work.

RFN works in particular to promote indigenous peoples' and forest-dependent local communities' rights to land, resources, culture and way of life. Our work also entails a special focus on civil society's rights to work and express itself freely and independently, without fear of violence or reprisals. In all this, we must ensure that our entire approach is rights-based. RFN has developed a separate policy for a human rights-based approach.

The gender perspective is pivotal in our efforts for rights-based, sustainable resource management. We seek to ensure that the perspectives and interests of both women and men are reflected in the development and implementation of all initiatives supported by RFN, and that our efforts do not contribute to gender bias in the distribution of goods and resources. RFN has defined a separate gender policy with operationalisation of these principles.

Corruption is an important cause behind rainforest destruction and breaches of indigenous peoples' and forest-dependent local communities' rights. Measures that strike down on corruption and contribute to openness around the distribution of funds for forest protection are important. Corruption is also a permanent risk in relation to our partner organisations. RFN has zero tolerance for corruption in our own activities, and accountable financial management is emphasised in our cooperation with partners. Our guidelines to prevent corruption in our own activities are available in our project manual.