

RAINFOREST FOUNDATION NORWAY STRATEGY 2008-17

MISSION

Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) shares its mission statement with its sister organisations in the United States (RFUS) and the United Kingdom (RFUK):

The Rainforest Foundation is working for a world where the environment is protected and human rights are fulfilled. Its specific focus is the intersection – in the rainforest – of these two worldwide struggles.

The fate of the rainforest, its inhabitants, and life on this planet are inextricably linked. The rainforest plays a critical role in the regulation of the earth's climate and in the maintenance of biological diversity and life. It is home to millions of indigenous peoples and other populations whose rights, culture, and very existence are threatened by its destruction. It cannot be saved unless those who live there, with the support of people from around the world, are able to defend and conserve their environment while meeting their immediate and long-term needs.

The mission of the Rainforest Foundation is to support indigenous peoples and traditional populations of the world's rainforests in their efforts to protect their environment and fulfill their rights by assisting them in:

- *Securing and controlling the natural resources necessary for their long-term well-being and managing these resources in ways which do not harm their environment, violate their culture or compromise their future; and*
- *Developing the means to protect their individual and collective rights and to obtain, shape, and control basic services from the state.*

RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

The destruction of the tropical rainforest is one of the most serious environmental problems of our time. Although the dramatic consequences are well known, the problem is aggravated by the continued loss of tropical forests – mainly rainforest – at the rate of 130,000 km² per year. It is imperative that this tragedy is not allowed to continue. While they are of global importance, the consequences of rainforest destruction are felt most directly by forest-dependent communities. Millions of people lose not only their livelihoods but also the very foundations of their culture, worldview, and knowledge systems when the forest is destroyed. For this reason, rainforest communities around the world are engaged in intense struggles to defend their rights and their resources. To support those struggles is the key mission of Rainforest Foundation Norway.

Since its creation in 1989, RFN has espoused a rights-based approach to rainforest protection. We believe that the peoples who over generations have developed their cultures and societies in interaction with the highly complex yet vulnerable ecosystems of the rainforest have fundamental rights to these areas.

These rights are often only to some extent, or not at all, legally recognised by the respective nation-states. To obtain legal recognition of the collective territorial and cultural rights of forest-based peoples and communities is the first step to fulfilling their human rights. It is also, in our view, the most important prerequisite for protecting the rainforest.

Recognition of collective owner or user rights is not in itself, however, a guarantee for sustainable management of natural resources, nor for social development in line with local aspirations. RFN's experience has shown that close cooperation with local communities in order to meet material needs, strengthen cultural self-confidence, and develop the capacity to handle external pressure is often necessary for the development of long-term solutions that are both environmentally and socially sustainable.

GOALS AND METHODS

The **overall goal** of Rainforest Foundation Norway is a world in which the rainforest is effectively protected and the rights of its inhabitants are fully secured.

Our **consolidated goal** for the period 2008–2017 is that by 2017 rights-based sustainable rainforest management is implemented in important rainforest areas in all countries where RFN and its partner organizations have been active for more than five years.

To carry out its mission and achieve its goals RFN will:

1. support programmes and projects in cooperation with local organisations, indigenous peoples, and traditional populations of the rainforest;
2. seek changes in the policies and practices of governments (in countries with and without rainforests), intergovernmental bodies, and private enterprises; and
3. generate and strengthen national and international public awareness and action.

WORKING WITH LOCAL PEOPLE

Working with local communities means involvement in long-term social processes based on respectful dialogue between unequal parties. Primary responsibility for formulating aspirations and initiatives rests with the local communities and their legitimate representatives. It then becomes RFN's responsibility to understand the local context to the best of its abilities and to support only those initiatives that RFN considers to be in the long-term interest of the communities. Local partners may include national or local non-governmental organizations, indigenous associations and community-based organisations

RFN is committed in its partnership with local organisations to promoting gender equality and sensitivity in organisational development and capacity strengthening, and throughout project cycle management. We are determined to ensure that women are involved in all phases of project development and implementation and that due consideration is given to gender issues in all projects and programmes that we support.

IDENTIFYING TARGET GROUPS

The primary target group for RFN's work is rainforest-based peoples and communities – both indigenous peoples and traditional populations of the rainforest, as well as the often more numerous forest dwellers of various other categories. RFN works with these groups directly through programme activities in local communities, and indirectly through policy, advocacy, and information activities aimed at securing rights and protecting the rainforest.

As of 2013, RFN is engaged in twelve rainforest countries covering all three rainforest continents. In the Amazon, the main focus is on indigenous peoples, although other rainforest inhabitants may well be included – as rubber-tappers and small-scale farmers have been in the past. In Southeast Asia, our focus is on marginalised forest-dwelling ethnic groups. A much larger group of people, often smallholder farmers, also depends on the use of forest resources, and is included in RFN's work in various ways. In Papua New Guinea, the vast majority of the population is indigenous. Living in rural areas, they depend more or less directly on forest resources for their sustenance – thus constituting RFN's target group. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, we work with forest-dependent local communities, both Bantu and Pygmy.

A secondary target group consists of governments at the local, regional, and national levels. All projects must have provisions for policy work, so that actors at government levels can be influenced to improve existing legal frameworks and practices that affect forest-dependent peoples and rainforest ecosystems.

As regards RFN's international policy work, important target groups are national governments, national delegations to relevant international negotiations, international finance institutions, international bodies and institutions dealing with rainforest management, organisations working with the rights of indigenous peoples and forest certification, nature conservation organisations, development organisations, and selected investment funds and private actors.

RFN's policy and information work in Norway targets the political leadership, members of parliament, political parties, and government institutions, as well as public and private investment funds, like the Government Pension Fund Global, and Norwegian industries with activities that impact on the rainforest and the rights of indigenous peoples. The Norwegian public is an important target group for specific campaign and information activities.

LINKING LEVELS OF ACTION

Conditions in the rainforest are influenced by decisions and factors ranging from the local grassroots to the highest international level. It is important for RFN and its partner organisations to be active at all levels relevant for the protection of the rainforest and the rights of its people. National and international policy efforts should be informed by local experiences, views and conditions; and local initiatives should be guided by knowledge of the risks and opportunities established at higher levels. We will direct a considerable effort into influencing political and legal decisions at the national and international levels in the coming years, while maintaining close contact with what happens on the ground. Good coordination within the Rainforest Foundation network and an ability to cooperate with other organisations and actors, not least the members of civil society networks established to influence the climate negotiations, will be fundamental for achieving strategic goals. New national laws and international agreements may have far-reaching consequences for local communities – but rights that are not upheld and opportunities that are not grasped are of limited value. It is at the local level that lives are lived and resources destroyed or protected. Working together with people at the grassroots will always be fundamental to RFN.

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY

Non-governmental organisations have often played a critical role in giving voice to – and fighting for – marginalised communities. An active, organised, and well-informed civil society is as important for securing the rights of forest peoples and protecting the rainforest as it is for the development of democracy, transparency, and good governance in society at large.

To contribute to the strengthening of civil society in rainforest countries is an important goal for Rainforest Foundation Norway. Indeed, it is the main reason why we have chosen to build long-term partnerships with local and national organisations which share our key objectives, rather than investing in creating a network of rainforest foundations in the South. Lasting improvements in a country depend on strong internal actors. To support the development of representative indigenous associations and community-based organisations is a priority task. RFN sees its role as a facilitator, supporter and, especially, as a partner. The challenge is to be able to combine the role of a donor, providing funds and exercising control, with that of a partner: an actor who shares the objectives of the local people and takes on whatever role is necessary and feasible in order to reach the goal. We see frank mutual discussions on strategy, priorities, needs, and activities as an ongoing obligation, and strive to become more effective in influencing decisions by exerting coordinated pressure from the South and the North, and attacking issues from the local grassroots up to the international arena. Facilitating greater sharing of experiences among partners and developing South-South networks will continue to be part of that task.

CHOOSING LOCATION AND FOCUS

Given our dual goal of protecting the rainforest *and* securing the rights of its inhabitants, many different criteria come into play when deciding when to work and in what way. For the rainforest to survive as a globally significant ecosystem, the main tracts of contiguous rainforest on all three rainforest continents must be protected. That is why we have given priority to the Amazon, Central Africa, and Southeast Asia, including New Guinea. Within those major regions, the possibilities of securing large and intact rainforest areas by working in remote areas must be weighed against engaging at the very frontline of destruction, where protective measures are urgently needed if there is to be any hope of avoiding irreparable damage. We give priority to size, as area size is a key criterion for maintaining ecosystem services and for the rainforest to be sustainable.

Importance for forest-based peoples is another important factor. RFN sees cultural diversity as one of the most valuable products of human development. Societies that have developed their culture in long-term interaction with a particular forest environment are connected to that environment by multiple material, historical, and spiritual links. In order to defend the rights and culture of a particular ethnic group, RFN may give high priority to their forest area even though it may not be exceptional in purely biological terms.

In determining priorities among continents, countries and regions, we analyse the potential results in terms of area protected and advancement of the collective rights of forest peoples. High priority will be given to advancing the situation for those forest peoples whose fundamental rights are denied, yet the amount of energy and resources invested will be weighed against the chances of success and the capacity of local partners to absorb and convert support into meaningful action and institutional development. Generally speaking, RFN considers it essential to influence the development on all three rainforest continents significantly and will aim at a balanced level of investments.