Forest Policy and Environment Programme: Grey Literature

Participatory Forest Management: an overview

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The inclusion of communities in the management of state-owned or formerly state-owned forest resources has become increasingly common in the last 25 years. Almost all countries in Africa, and many in Asia, are promoting the participation of rural communities in the management and utilisation of natural forests and woodlands through some form of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) (see Wily, 2001* for details on African countries). Many countries have now developed, or are in the process of developing, changes to national policies and legislation that institutionalise PFM.

A report from Forest Trends (White and Martin, 2002) suggests that the forest area under community tenure or management is now approaching 25% in global terms. However, the definition of what is meant by community tenure or management can vary. For example, in Ghana forests are nominally held by the customary authorities but in reality tree tenure is in the hands of the state which acts in the name of communities and the customary authorities.

There are now a wide range of activities variously called community forestry, adaptive co-management and Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) to name but a few. These originated in a fairly narrowly circumscribed set of activities during the 1970s, consisting of woodlots for fuel and 'social forestry' in India (Shiva, 1981; Shepherd, 1990), Collectively they represent a new set of relationships between the state (usually through forest departments) and people living in and close to forests and woodlands. This is the collection of activities which this overview terms 'Participatory Forest Management' (PFM). There is therefore great variability in the institutional arrangements of PFM, ranging from community ownership and management of forest resources to partnerships for forest management between the state and local communities, and devolution of management of forest resources from the state to individual households. FAO adopts a similarly wide definition:

> *Participatory forestry refers to processes and mechanisms that enable those people who have a direct stake in forest resources to be part of decision-making in all aspects of forest management, from managing resources to formulating and implementing institutional frameworks. More specifically, community forestry refers to a component of participatory forestry that focuses on local communities as key stakeholders for sustainability."* (http://www.fao.org/forestry/foris/webview/forestry2/index.jsp?siteId=4321and sitetreeId=14110andlangId=1andgeoId=0)

In the 1980s central governments were increasingly encouraged to devolve natural resource management to local institutions, within and outside of government. These policies were driven by a number of concerns including: (see Edmunds and Wollenberg, 2004; Arnold, 2001):

- concerns to reduce the role of, and cost to, the state in protecting forests and the conservation value of forests.
- environmentalist images of more effective resource protection by those living in close proximity to the resource
- an assumption that local control would help protect local livelihoods for large numbers of rural households;
- a belief that decentralised institutions are more locally responsive and would manage forests more efficiently by harnessing the skills, motivation and labour of interested local populations;
- a philosophical commitment to people's participation in their own affairs, and to the principles of self-determination and democracy.

Different motivations dominated in different countries. In Nepal and India community forestry programmes were initially conceived to reverse degradation of national forests, which could not be managed and protected effectively by state forestry services (Springate-Baginski et al., 2003; Khare et al., 2000). This was also one of the motivations for the establishment of the first village-owned forest reserves in Tanzania (and perhaps in Africa), described by Wily (1995). Rural poverty alleviation was a further motivation behind Leasehold Forestry in Nepal and Joint Forest Management in India (Thoms et al, 2003; Khare et al., 2000). Increasing local communities' involvement in forest management has in many cases been associated with governmental decentralisation programmes, such as in Honduras and Bolivia where responsibility for forest management, and for increasing local people's involvement in it, has been devolved to municipal authorities (Nygren, 2005; Nebel et al., 2003). In contrast with cases from developing countries, those from Europe and North America have shown no significant 'top-down' drive for participatory forest management, and involvement of communities has proceeded on a case by case basis. This has resulted in great variability in the role of participatory forest management and the institutional arrangements that have developed (Baker, 2003; Jeanrenaud, 2001).

Elsewhere, as in Cameroon and Bolivia, donors, political organisations and NGOs have been instrumental in developing participatory forest management programmes. These programmes emerged in recognition of local people's rights to resources, controlled by state authorities and exploited by the timber industry, that could be better used in improving the livelihoods of the poor (Djeumo, 2001; Nebel et al., 2003). Indeed the support of the international community for efforts to achieve sustainability and efficiency through decentralisation and public sector reform was a major factor in the promotion of PFM (Hobley, 1996). In 1997, the UK's Department for International Development alone was funding over 200 PFM projects. Early support for PFM was motivated by donors' interests in improving the conservation status of forests that were largely out of reach (both in terms of physical access and resource availability) of forest departments. However, this soon gave way to an interest in PFM as a route to poverty reduction. This shift in emphasis took place within the context of a global focus on poverty reduction (as illustrated by the Millennium Development Goals and the promotion of national Poverty Reduction Strategies) and the recognition that the location of many of the world's poorest people in and around forests suggested an important role for forests in poverty alleviation. While the contribution of forests to national economic development and poverty reduction is often argued to be significant, the magnitude of this contribution (Oksanen et al., 2003) is unclear. This is particularly true for PFM, which because of its direct engagement with local communities, has often been assumed to be an obvious way to achieve poverty reduction.

A wide variety of objectives and management arrangements are therefore subsumed under the heading of PFM (see Table 1). These vary according to the forest type and the marketed and non-marketed benefits which are sought. For high-value tropical moist forests, they range from community consultations prior to industrial logging operations (as in Ghana, Indonesia) through to full community involvement in logging operations and timber transformation (as in Cameroon [see Brown and Schreckenberg, 51], Honduras, Mexico [see Klooster, 38]). For lower-value tropical dry forests, they include community involvement in biomass regeneration (The Gambia, Tanzania), community plantations (Vietnam, Ethiopia), and involvement in fuel wood production and the commodity chain (Niger). In addition to the direct benefits from timber and timber products, consideration must also be given to other benefits such as non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and bush meat. The range of community/private sector partnerships is also expanding considerably, and now includes plantation and out-grower schemes (Underwood, 1990), carbon sequestration programmes (under the clean development mechanism), forest-based ecotourism and conservation-linked production schemes.

PFM also encompasses a wide range of different co-management arrangements with different levels of control from relatively conservative "benefit sharing" to genuine "community-based natural resource management" where local communities have full control over management of the resource and the allocation of costs and benefits. These differences are highlighted by Wily (2002) in her review of the forms of PFM allowed for by policies in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia. A review by Moss *et al.* (2005) differentiates between PFM projects on the basis of a number of factors (see Table 1), including: how they were set up; by whom (i.e. social movements, government programmes or development intervention); whether there was real devolution of power; the level of participation, control and ownership; and what the situation was prior to the introduction of PFM.

Table 1 Different variables of different forms of PFM (adopted from Moss et al, 2005)

Element
1 Objective and motivation for PFM and the state's objective in changing policy and legislation
2 Extent and development of PFM programme

3.1 Ownership of the forest resource. Categories may include:
   o Public bodies – national or state governments; local governments at regional, provincial or district level; local administrations at city, municipality, village or other levels
   o Private bodies – such as individuals or industries
   o Community groups
   o Indigenous or tribal peoples

3.2 Decision making in forest management:
   o The parties involved,
   o The form and duration of the management agreement and the unit of forest to which it relates, e.g. 5 year forest management plan

3.3 Rules and regulations for obtaining access to subsistence products from the resource
3.4 Ability to generate income from forest products. Rules and regulations concerning mechanisms for harvesting and marketing different forest products

including:
- o Benefit sharing mechanisms
- o Legal requirements for harvesting and marketing
- o New skills and knowledge required

4   Mechanism for exclusion of outsiders including:
- o The existence of any legislation,
- o The means of excluding outsiders
- o The effectiveness of exclusion

5   Type of forest and its value, particularly for timber

6.1   Inputs required by the community to establish new forest partnership including:
- o Institutional developments within the community
- o Preparation of management plans and other legal documents
- o An estimation of the cost of these inputs (where available)

6.2   Inputs required by outside agencies to establish new forest partnership and involve community in it, including:
- o Capacity building with communities
- o Technical inputs
- o Administrative inputs
- o Cost of these inputs

7   The organisation of forest users for the purpose of managing and exploiting the resource

There is an expectation that PFM can bring substantial benefits in terms of livelihood security and poverty reduction, as well as providing important indirect benefits to the poor in terms of improved local governance and empowerment. At the same time, there is growing concern that PFM approaches may not be as pro-poor as they could be and that, in some cases, poor people may be actively disadvantaged by PFM initiatives. It is recognised that many programmes supporting co-management and community based management of forests have outcomes that are not positive for the poorest elements of society. Co-management processes, and the institutional arrangements that oversee their implementation, may easily be dominated by wealthier, more powerful members of the community, producing an outcome that perpetuates or even reinforces social inequity. In the worst case, termination of "open access" in favour of "controlled utilisation" can actually result in negative impacts on the poorest members of the community (e.g. women and marginalized ethnic groups), who may lose access to the resource. For example in some cases users have been excluded from forest-user groups (Nepal) and in others the returns from co-management are not sufficient to cover community investments (East Africa). This may not be the case where communities have complete ownership.

The lack of solid evidence for the impacts of PFM is in part due to the difficulty of measuring the range of costs and benefits for different groups of people. Substantial efforts have been made to monitor the quantity and value of forest goods and services accruing to communities at an aggregate level but, with the notable exception of recent work in Zimbabwe (Cavendish, 2000) and Nepal[1], less attention has been paid to the distribution of benefits within communities.

[1] See, for example, the joint special issue on Community Forestry in Nepal by ODI's Rural Development Forestry Network and the Nepal-based Journal of Forest and Livelihood (www.odifpeg.org.uk).

So what is the way forward? Based on a review of community-based forest management in six countries, Menzies (2002) argues that PFM has reached the position where it can make the shift form experimental projects to becoming institutionalised as an accepted model of management but that, in order for this to happen, partners in the projects still have to work to reach a shared understanding that keeps communities at the centre of forest management. A 'second generation' of PFM initiatives needs to become more responsive to local situations (Thin and Gardingen, 2003). They must understand how policy, legal and institutional frameworks can alter the impact of PFM with respect to its capacity to provide a range of poverty-reducing benefits (from safeguarding subsistence use of forest products to increasing income-generating opportunities). In particular, they need to address concerns that the benefits from PFM may not be sufficient to cover the costs imposed on poor communities, which raises doubts over the longer-term viability of the approach.

On a positive note there is an increasing recognition that empowerment is an important outcome of PFM. The huge investment in time which many of these schemes require may be recompensed not only in terms of tangible economic benefits and products, but by the less visible aspects of political capital, empowerment in terms of decision making, and good governance more generally (Wily, 2003; Amente and Tadesse, 2004). The challenge now is to manage forest resources for multiple benefits, requiring communities not only to reconcile competing internal interests, but also to manage a complex interface with both the state (representing the public interest, nationally and globally) and the forest industry.

Note: The references with an asterisk (*) are included in the ODI Forest Policy and Environment Programme's *Forestry Grey Literature Collection*: www.odifpeg.org.uk/publications/greyliterature

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