

# Roundtable: perspectives of forest communities



**Slice of good fortune:** A community forest enterprise at work in Mexico *Photo: Forest Trends*

## **Community forestry in Mexico** by Adolfo Chavez

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In Mexico, 13–15 million people live in forested regions, 55% of them in extreme poverty. Approximately 44 million hectares of forest are owned by about 9000 *ejidos* (communes) and local communities. More than 2400 of these *ejidos* have forest management and harvesting rights approved by the government, and more than 500 000 hectares of the community forests are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. One of the problems the communities with certified forests face is selling their products for prices that make certification worthwhile; the majority of communities sell to local and regional markets and only a few have access to international markets.

### **One of the problems the communities with certified forests face is selling their products for prices that make certification worthwhile**

Over the last eight years, the Secretariat for the Environment and Natural Resources, through the National Forestry Commission, has allocated significant financial resources through programs such as ProArbol, the Community Forest Development Programme (PROCYAMAF), and the COINBIO Programme.

Community forests can be divided into five types based on the extent to which they have been able to use their resources. They range from communities with little organization that, because of their very nature, have not yet developed their forest management plan or begun to benefit from their resources ('level 1' of development), to producers with the necessary infrastructure for the secondary processing, value-adding and marketing of their forest products ('level 5').

An example of the latter is the Nuevo San Juan Parangaricutiro community in Michoacán in the southwest of the country.

This community owns land covering about 18 000 hectares, including 10 000 hectares of natural production forest, 578 hectares of protection forest, and 1300 hectares of plantation forest. In 1981 the community had no money, no equipment and no level of organization. Now there is a strong enterprise organization (under the political eye of the local governance system and its general assembly) and a thriving industry, including a highly productive sawmill, a resin-production operation, a wood-processing facility that produces furniture and mouldings, and a water-bottling facility.

Some of the issues faced by the community in developing its thriving operation included the community's initial lack of confidence in its leaders; difficulty in obtaining finance from banks; and product quality control.

Success depended on good organization for the management and harvesting of resources and the development of dialogue spaces within the community, with support from outside. There are certainly problems in the running of the community, but when people come together they are always able to reach a consensus. It is important that the management of resources is transparent and done in a responsible manner. In Mexico we want to all communities to attain level 5 development, whether through timber production or a creative blend of varied forest-based enterprises.

## **Community forest user groups in Nepal** by Ghan Shyam Pandey

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Forests in Nepal were nationalized in the 1960s and the Forest Department was established to manage them. Nevertheless, the government failed to protect forests: local people were

evicted and then treated as encroachers on the forest; the rate of deforestation was high; corruption was widespread in the sector; and landslides and flooding were common. The government and forest-dependent people were virtually enemies.

When the forest policy shifted towards community forestry it was, in effect, a shift towards green hills and reforestation. Community forestry user groups (CFUGs) were created to manage more than 1 million hectares of forest; this area could potentially be expanded to more than 3 million hectares (more than 60% of the forest area). Among many achievements has been a reduction in the deforestation rate from 10.6% to 1.7% nationally. The message from this forest reform is clear: people can protect and manage forest in a better way than can the forest bureaucracy alone.

CFUGs have realized the benefits of networking to exchange experience, knowledge, skills and learning. The Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal (FECOFUN) was founded in 1995 to help the CFUGs to organize; it is involved in policy dialogues, helps build capacity for community leadership, and performs an advocacy role.

CFUGs have become a basic foundation of rural development in Nepal. But there are still many issues to confront. For example, who owns forest land? The government has handed over the forest resources, but communities are asking government to hand over ownership of the land. Who has the right to the carbon? These are questions we are trying to resolve now.

### Cameroon's community waste by Patrice Pa'ah

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There is a vicious circle: we exploit the resources in the forest to survive, but because of a lack of infrastructure and appropriate technology the act of exploitation degrades the forests,



**Fine point:** Producing high-value products—such as these Cameroonian pens—from wood waste can create thousands of jobs *Photo: P. Pa'ah*

reducing our capacity to survive and thrive. We have abundant resources but neither the harvesting model nor the economic model have changed since the 1960s. The challenges are huge: the sustainable development of resources requires new approaches. A lack of access to production capital severely limits the community development of forest resources and the alleviation of poverty.

At the moment, community forestry in Cameroon creates a lot of waste; we need to be more efficient. Recently there was a transfer of technology from Quebec, Canada, that has enabled us to use residual timber scraps to produce pens. Small-scale enterprises based on this sort of technology can create thousands of jobs. Everyone can make a contribution to improve the competitiveness of enterprises. But we need to facilitate community access to capital and technology. Community forestry doesn't need to re-invent the wheel. But support is needed to expose people to inspiring ideas and to support the transfer of technology.

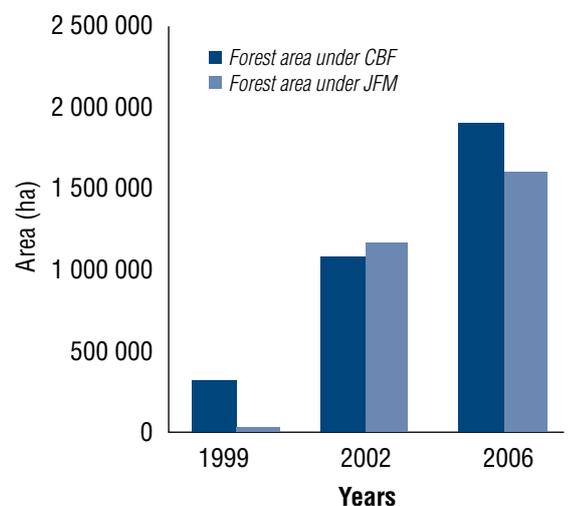
### Community-based forest management in Tanzania

by Charles Meshack

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In Tanzania, participatory forest management approaches are operating in more than 60 districts (out of a total of 104), with varying levels of support. To date, about 1.9 million hectares of forest are under community-based forest management (CBFM) in around 1500 villages, and joint forest management (JFM) between the state and 530 villages is being applied across about 1.6 million hectares. Figure 1 shows the growth in both these approaches since 1999.

**Figure 1:** Change in forest area under CBFM and JFM, Tanzania, 1999–2006



Both CBFM and JFM are spreading rapidly and now cover more than 10% of the total forest area of mainland Tanzania. Both devolve management responsibility to a more local level and produce better outcomes than open-access management regimes.

**Table 1:** The decentralization continuum

Issue	Management regime		
	State	JFM	CBFM
Who initiates?	Not applicable	State	Village/district
Who signs/formalizes?	Not applicable	State + village	Village/district
Who terminates?	No applicable	State	Village/district
Who decides allowable benefits from harvesting?	State	State	Village
Who decides harvesting levels?	State	State	Village
Who has overall management responsibility?	State	State + village	Village
Who enforces the rules?	State	State + village	Village
Who keeps the money?	State	State (some village)	Village

There are significant problems associated with JFM, however. Early on, many donor funds were directed towards catchment forests with high biodiversity values—with limited use-potential under prevailing laws. The government has provided little guidance on the sharing of costs and benefits between the state and communities and within villages; elite capture is a significant issue. The management costs to communities often exceed the minimal benefits they receive. In addition, increases in wildlife populations have led to increased crop damage, which is causing conflicts.

CBFM promises greater returns for local people: some areas are generating revenues from their forests that are sufficient to maintain the participatory forest process and to produce a surplus for community development. In other cases, however, the benefits are yet to materialize. Table 1 shows the differences between state management, JFM and CBFM that might point out the reasons for the relative success of CBFM.

There is evidence of massive increases in the efficiency of forest revenue collection when responsibilities devolve from district to village. The single most effective mechanism for improving local forest governance is civic education and legal literacy around the rights and responsibilities of and returns from CBFM.

## Community forest associations in Kenya

by Michael Gachanja

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Prior to European settlement, all forests in Kenya were managed by local communities, and there were substantially more closed forests than there are today. In 1962 the area of closed forests was 1.68 million hectares, which was 2.7% of the total land area. Today, closed forests cover 1.7% of the land area and the percentage continues to decline. Under the old forest law, timber production was the key driver of forest management, which was operated largely on a command-and-control basis by the Forest Department (now the Kenya Forest Service). Among the shortcomings of the law was the

lack of a comprehensive mechanism for involving local communities in forest management.

Clamor for change resulted in a review of the legislation and, ultimately, the enactment of a new forest act, which came into force on 1 February 2007. The Act upholds the principle of public participation in forest management. Under it, forest communities are able to register as community forest associations (CFAs) with an accompanying management plan for protecting, conserving and managing the forests consistent with traditional forest-user rights. Forest management agreements between the Kenya Forest Service and a CFA can confer a range of rights on the CFA, including the right to harvest timber and non-timber forest products and to engage in grazing, ecotourism and plantation establishment.

To date, however, there has been little change on the ground. Many CFAs have been formed, mostly on an ad hoc basis. Nine forest management plans have been prepared, all with donor support, but no forest management agreement has been signed. Legislation to support forest management agreements has not been gazetted, although it was finalized more than a year ago. Kenya's political situation following post-election violence in 2007 and the formation of a grand coalition government, which is slowly unifying Kenyans, is contributing to the slow pace of forest-sector reform.

The requirement that applications by CFAs should be accompanied by a forest management plan has made the process beyond the capacity of local communities. Moreover, inadequate advice during the formation of CFAs has led to the formation of associations that may not be appropriate for forest management.

Another issue is that the forest-user rights being conferred to communities are limited and inadequate; most of the forests are owned by the central government. The state doesn't want to cede rights, although it is keen to use communities to control illegal activities.

To address such issues, a key action would be for government, NGOs, grassroots organizations and the private sector to boost the financial, marketing and technical capacity of CFAs. In addition, the government should ensure that the model established by the new Act provides CFAs with tangible benefits.