Community participation in forest management

Results from ex-post evaluation of projects in six countries

by
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Community labours: Ghanaian participants relax in front of project-funded teak nursery. *Photo: M. Dourojeanni*

THIS PAPER HIGHLIGHTS the main conclusions and lessons summarized in the report of an ex-post evaluation of seven ITTO community forest management projects completed between early 2002 and 2005.

Community participation in forest management, rightly considered an essential feature in the conservation of tropical forests worldwide, has been pursued for decades. However, it has proven to be a very elusive objective, despite significant efforts made on every continent. Few programs or projects can claim enduring success in terms of increased community income, sustainable forest management (SFM) and/or conservation.

ITTO projects are no exception to this reality; the successes they have achieved are limited. However, the seven ITTO projects reviewed here (in Bolivia, Ghana, Panama, Peru, the Philippines and Togo) have proven, once again, that the main problems are not related to the participating communities themselves, but essentially are consequences of serious project design failures, important technical deficiencies, and to a lesser extent, flawed project implementation.

[1]*ITTO consultants working with the support of Carlos Rodríguez Chang (Bolivia, Panama and Peru), Baharuddin Haji Ghazali (the Philippines) and Astrid Bergqvist (Ghana and Togo).*

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2. Training and enhancement of human and institutional capacity using updated and adapted materials, tools and technology generated from the project should continue to increase the knowledge and skills of those involved in forest law enforcement and combating illegal logging.
3. Concerted efforts should be taken to disseminate and facilitate the actual and systematic implementation of the guidelines developed under the project for controlling illegal logging throughout the country at local, provincial and national levels. Provinces, districts and parties that have adopted or shown interest in adopting the guidelines should be supported in this regard.
4. The coordinating forums established and consolidated under the project (JIKALAHARI in Riau and KAIL in Kalimantan Barat) should be strengthened to maintain the momentum gained in the campaign against illegal logging in the two provinces and to highlight their status as pioneering pilot case studies on addressing illegal logging using a multi-stakeholder consultation and participation approach.
5. The difficulties encountered by the project in securing the cooperation and involvement of the private sector should be examined further to identify and overcome obstacles including through appropriate motivation and incentives.
6. Appropriate methodologies and mechanisms to manage and resolve conflicts among stakeholders should be further developed to facilitate the activities of the coordinating forums.
7. Alternative sources of income for local communities, including community forest projects, should be developed to reduce their involvement in illegal activities and encourage their support and participation in campaigns against illegal logging.
8. The experiences and achievements of the project in Riau and Kalimantan Barat should be adapted and replicated in other parts of Indonesia where illegal logging is still rampant.

The complete report of this ex-post evaluation is available from the ITTO Secretariat.

The projects

Table 1 presents a list of the seven projects that were evaluated. Three were located in Latin America (Bolivia, Peru and Panama), three in West Africa (Ghana and Togo) and one in Southeast Asia (the Philippines). These projects were approved between 1996 and 2001. Their total cost, not including the first phases of four of them, amounted to US$5.7 million and ITTO's contribution to this total was US$4.2 million.

Community list

Table 1: Sumary of projects evaluated

PROJECT NUMBER	PROJECT TITLE, LOCATION & COUNTRY	TOTAL & ITTO BUDGETS *(US$)*	START-UP *(mm/yy)**	COMPLETED *(mm/yy)***
PD 44/99 Rev.2 (F)	Implementation of a Management Plan by the *Chiquiacá* and *Orozas* Communities in Tarija **(Bolivia)**	505 439 285 589	06/01	06/04 (11/04)
PD 48/98 Rev.1 (F)	Reforestation of the *Abutia* Plains by Indigenous Communities in the Volta Basin **(Ghana)**	712 088 576 188	12/99	12/03 (03/05)
PD 49/98 Rev.1 (F)	Participatory Tropical Forest Development by Women in Indigenous Communities in *Worobong* **(Ghana)**	833 334 589 534	07/00	09/03 (03/05)
PD 37/95 Rev.2 (F)	Management of Cativo Forests and Non-timber Products with the Participation of Rural and Indigenous Communities in *Darién* **(Panama)**	1 585 667 1 042 667	09/96	12/01 (02/02)
PD 38/99 Rev.1 (F,I)	Demonstration Community Forest Management in the Natural Cloud Forests of the *Urumba* Basin in San Ignacio **(Peru)**	623 100 443 100	10/99	09/01 (02/02)
PD 21/97 Rev.2 (F)	Developing Tropical Forest Resources through Community-Based Forest Management in *Nueva Vizcaya* **(the Philippines)**	957 135 913 285	07/98	12/01 (09/02)
PD 9/99 Rev.2 (F)	Sustainable Management of *Missahoé* Reserved Forest Forestry Resources with the Participation of the Local Rural Communities for an Optimal Timber Production in Kpalimé **(Togo)**	508 994 384 524	11/99	11/02 (04/03)
TOTAL		**5 725 757** **4 234 887**		

**Official dates of project initiation* ***Expected dates of project completion (actual dates of project completion, including formal project extensions)*

Similarities and differences between the projects are summarized in Table 1. All projects: 1) addressed direct long-term social and economic development of local farmers or indigenous (often tribal) people through their direct involvement in these activities; 2) dealt with mostly residual protection forests or forest lands usually already highly degraded by past abusive uses; and 3) were included in buffer zones, or located in the vicinity of protected areas.

The differences among projects were, in some cases, substantial. Orozas and Chiquiacá in Bolivia, Urumba in Peru and Darién in Panama were essentially focused on natural forest management, while Abutia and Worobong in Ghana were exclusively oriented to reforestation, and Nueva Vizcaya in the Philippines and Missahoé in Togo were a mix of both. The project in Bolivia was, for all practical purposes, two projects in one, and (in contrast to the others) Panama's was essentially a research project. Five out of eight projects (considering Orozas as a second Bolivian project) were executed by NGOs, including the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute of Panama. In addition, the Latin American projects were developed in very distant and inaccessible locations, while the African and Asian projects were more easily accessible.

The projects also differed in terms of implementation status and length: four of the projects (Urumba, Nueva Vizcaya, Abutia, Worobong) had completed their second phases at the time of evaluation, implying a much longer presence of ITTO financed operations in the field (seven to ten years) than in those with a single project phase. The time elapsed between project completion and ex-post evaluation varied from five years (Darién) to less than a year (Abutia).

Important social engineering successes

In all projects except one, the target populations were poorer rural, traditional, indigenous and/or tribal groups. All projects were either successful (Darién, Abutia) or very successful (Worobong, Missahoé, Nueva Vizcaya, Orozas/Chiquiacá, Urumba) in promoting participation, raising local people's environmental and forestry awareness, organizing and empowering communities, developing forestry community enterprises, and training community and enterprise members on a variety of themes. On the whole, the project executing agencies overcame traditional resistance and mistrust, and achieved very high levels of participation and considerable enthusiasm regarding project objectives that were often sustained after project completion.

The evaluated projects reveal a number of innovative approaches regarding participation that may be useful for future ITTO work in this area, including the following:

- The establishment of formal for-profit community enterprises bringing together those community members interested in the forestry venture. Often, not all community members are willing to participate.
- Payments to community members for actual work in logging, or planting and maintenance, must be considered a production cost, not a 'benefit' or a 'share of benefits', as is usually the case in community development projects.
- Revenues derived from the projects, or project-created enterprises, must directly benefit those members who effectively participate, and should not be exclusively oriented to community infrastructure improvements, which also benefit community members who do not work and/or participate in project activities.
- Early and clear definition of the share of benefits obtained at harvest corresponding to each shareholder (government, landlords, community, and participating community members) is essential to avoid conflicts.

- The establishment of a 'Forest Fund' constituted from a portion of the resources from the project, by saving a portion of the initial incomes to be provided by the project, or (eventually) by imposing a small levy on the salaries paid to community workers (as in Missahoé, Togo), is an excellent option to ensure the maintenance of plantations until major profits are generated from project activities.

While community participation in project design was below desirable levels in projects that were in their first phase, participation during execution was excellent in five of the projects. The mechanisms of project governance at the enterprise and community level, as well as at the project level, were efficient. Additionally, in several of the projects the enterprises created were useful for carrying out business activities other than forestry or were different from those proposed by the project.

Women's participation in the projects and community enterprises was a part of all projects, and was especially important in the Worobong project. Forest enterprises run exclusively by women were established in Orozas and Missahoé, and strong leadership on the part of women was also visible in Nueva Vizcaya and Chiquiacá. However, enthusiasm and participation are clearly fading in some of the communities as a consequence of the projects' failure to fully achieve most development objectives, especially the generation of additional income.

Deficient project design

Poor project design has been identified as the key weakness of most reviewed projects, especially with regard to four aspects: 1) inadequate strategic analysis of the options available to associate community abilities, needs, and interests with the economic potential and technical requirements of forest activities; 2) absence of economic analysis of forest ventures proposed for the new community enterprises created by the projects; 3) deficiencies in forestry technical matters including low quality or absence of forest management plans; and 4) insufficient project duration.

Inadequate strategic analysis

Two of the Latin American natural forest management projects focused on the sustainable utilization of largely inaccessible protection forests, with no adequate consideration given to high production and transportation costs and associated environmental risks. Two of the three African projects planned to establish more than 1000 hectares of forest plantations in only two to three years, with no serious provision for future maintenance costs, the continuity of planting, or the sustainability of the plantations. Another project included degraded land rehabilitation to provide ecological services; however, this mainly benefited rich farmers in the lowlands with costly responsibilities imposed on poor hill farmers, and no provision for compensation. Also, alternative or complementary options, such as reforestation with fast growing tree species in natural forest management projects, sequential planting, properly adapted *taungya* systems, or adequate fruit tree planting in forest plantations, were not adequately considered.

All these problems, among others, are a consequence of a lack of proper analysis during project preparation and, in several cases, of insufficient detailed consultations with local populations before project approval.

Absence of economic analysis

Inadequate economic analysis was the most serious issue faced by the ventures to be developed by the new community enterprises under the projects. The project proponents generally did not take into consideration that the projects were to become self sustaining, profitable economic ventures at completion. Technical and especially economic feasibility studies were absent in all evaluated projects. Most proposed ventures were assumed to be *a priori* profitable actions, an assumption not borne out by reality.

Deficiencies in forestry technical matters

Most projects faced serious technical problems or deficiencies regarding quality baseline information, detailed soil studies, site and species selection, and silvicultural practices, among others. In most cases, the plantations as well as forest nurseries were abandoned after planting or as soon as projects concluded. Essential maintenance activities such as pruning, weeding, thinning, and fire control were not carried out. The management plans for natural forests, as well as for forest plantations, were either entirely absent, of very low quality, or incomplete. Most of the plans examined were overly simplistic and, if applied, they would not ensure economic or ecological sustainability.

Insufficient project duration

Time constraints were a constant problem across all projects. None of the projects, including those that were already in a second phase, were completed on time and some even required extensions of over 15 months to reach formal completion. Nevertheless, in no case were these additional periods long enough to achieve objectives. The problem is especially significant for reforestation projects that may require over 25 to 30 years before final harvest. Farmers faced serious difficulties in maintaining plantations while at the same time needing to produce food under the increasing shade of the growing trees, with less land available for new crops.

Implementation problems

Some projects faced serious problems during execution. The two South American projects failed because essential conditions for achievement of project objectives were not granted by the responsible governmental agencies. These necessary conditions include: legal community access to the forest resources, and/or authorizations (such as management plan approval and the granting of logging permits) to utilize the forest resources. However, even if these legal aspects had been rectified, these two projects would probably not have achieved their objectives as a consequence of other project design weaknesses. Another project (Darien) was successful at providing technical information, as planned, but unable to achieve its general objectives regarding sustainable management, in part because the species that was the main subject of the project lost its economic importance nationwide in the course of project implementation.

All projects had at least nominal official support from governments. However, the more successful projects were those with the highest level of effective support from governmental forestry agencies, including Nueva Vizcaya, Missahoé and Worobong, which received considerably more technical inputs from forestry agencies than the others. The less successful projects received less effective support, including cases where the executing agency's financial contribution was not delivered in its entirety.

Gap between social aspects and economic and technical aspects

As a consequence of the deficiencies discussed above, the considerable success of the projects at organizing local communities and at achieving their active and informed participation in the forest ventures was not matched by the project results in terms of expected benefits. None of the seven projects achieved their respective development objectives, even though in most cases they attained most expected outputs. In general, the projects were not able to provide either significant additional welfare or increased

More alike than not

Table 2: Main similarities and differences among evaluated projects

FACTS/PROJECTS	OROZAS	CHIQUIACÁ	URUMBA	DARIÉN	NUEVA VIZCAYA	MISSAHOÉ	ABUTIA	WOROBONG
GENERAL OBJECTIVE	Forestry activities developed by local communities to improve their own social & economic welfare							
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	Mostly management of natural forests & to a lesser extent reforestation						Reforestation	
	Timber marketing improvement, species diversification			Research	Watershed management	Forest management	Forest land and forest rehabilitation	
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	Information, effective participation, organization, training and empowerment of local people							
FOREST TYPES	Often highly degraded mature protection forest and/or secondary protection forests and denuded forest land					Denuded forest land and/or very degraded production forests		
PROTECTED AREA STATUS	Most projects are located in protected areas, their buffer zones or in the vicinity of protected areas							
BENEFITED COMMUNITIES	Farmers			Tribal & afro-american	Farmers & tribal	Tribal farmers		
RURAL POVERTY LEVEL	Middle	Poor	Very poor	Very poor	Poor	Poor	Very poor	Very poor
EXECUTING AGENCY	NGO	NGO	Government	NGO	Government	Government	NGO	NGO
DURATION *(planned)*	36 months		24 months	48 months	36 months		48 months	36 months
DURATION *(actual)*	41 months		28 months	67 months	38 months	41 months	63 months	55 months
PROJECT PHASE	I	I	II	I	II	II*	I	II**

** ITTO project preparation facility utilized ** a project not executed exclusively in the same area*

income to the participating communities during project implementation. Additionally, because project activities and initiated community ventures were not continued or maintained, it can only be expected that they will not accomplish these goals in the future unless additional measures are applied.

The gap between results and proposed objectives has given rise to frustration and disappointment of participating communities in most of the projects. All of these communities are requesting and expecting to be granted either project extensions or new projects to attain the initial development objectives.

In this general scenario, Missahoé (Togo), Nueva Vizcaya (the Philippines), and Worobong (Ghana) show good to very good possibilities of achieving their development objectives if moderate follow-up assistance is provided. These were, by all evaluated parameters, the most successful projects. A fourth project with good prospects is Chiquiacá, one of the sub-projects included in the Bolivian project. The Missahoé and Worobong projects, thanks to better technical advice that allowed for good site and species selection, had exceptionally good results in significant portions of the plantations established. Missahoé also better met community needs for crop production and forest plantations, while Worobong realistically reduced the original excessive project plantation target by one-half.

In some cases, the main successes were not related to the objectives of the project. In Urumba, for example, the project improved the productivity of coffee and successfully promoted several other social infrastructure improvements, including the construction of a new road, a medical post, and an electrical power plant. In Worobong, the project increased local incomes through cassava processing plants, and in Nueva Vizcaya, the project was instrumental in obtaining additional assistance for local farmers to improve agricultural productivity.

Conclusions and recommendations

The poor performance of most of these projects is clearly not a demonstration of any inherent difficulty to successfully implement community forestry management. None of the causes of failures can be attributed to the participating communities that demonstrated extraordinary commitment in trying to meet project objectives. All causes of failure were related to project design, or to a lesser extent to implementation deficiencies.

Projects aiming to create economic ventures for communities must be treated like any other for-profit investment and not like conventional or traditional development projects. Sustained profits are the best proof of and the main condition for success of forestry-based community projects. Therefore, projects of this nature should include or be preceded by economic and technical feasibility studies.

The need for technical forestry assistance was evident in all projects except in Darién, especially at the stage of project preparation. The three most successful projects benefited from either a first phase (Nueva Vizcaya and to some extent Worobong) or a project preparation facility (Missahoé). Technical assistance must make up for the often limited understanding of the principles of sustainable forest management in communities. Options to address this problem include:

1) Considering the complexity of community forestry projects, it may be more cost effective for ITTO to provide technical assistance for the preparation of projects than to conduct intense ex post evaluations. Formal project preparation facilities such as offered in Missahoé (Togo) should be extended to other communities/countries.

2) ITTO may also consider strengthening training programs to revitalize and renew the basics of forest management, especially among young professional foresters and relevant community stakeholders of producer countries.

Natural regeneration is an important and underutilized tool to restore degraded forest land as has been demonstrated in Nueva Vizcaya. Projects such as Worobong, Missahoé, Orozas and Urumba could also take advantage of this simple and inexpensive approach.

The duration of community forestry development projects, especially those dealing with plantation forests, must be realistic and the prospects for sustainability of project outputs must be enhanced. Several options to ensure sufficient durations/sustainable outputs that can be combined are available, including:

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Market trends

Weather factors steer timber prices

by
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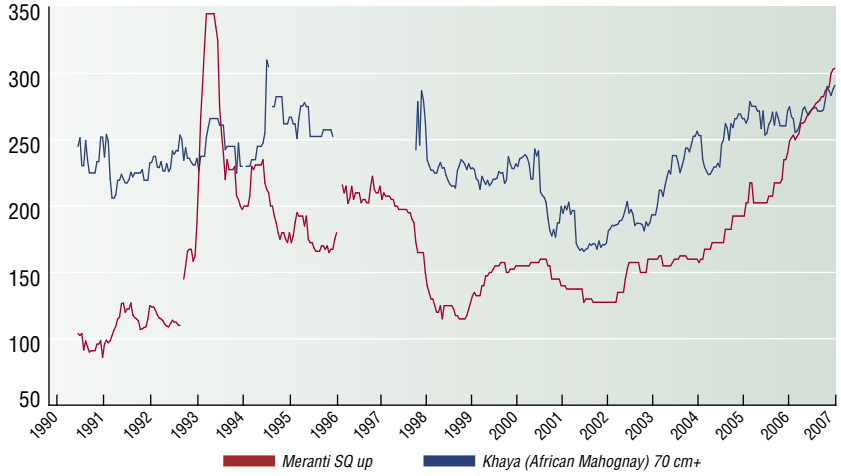
IN RECENT MONTHS, tropical timber prices have been particularly affected by weather. A longer than usual rainy season in West and Central Africa and heavy thunderstorms in Southeast Asia have driven prices upwards due to supply shortages. Mild winters in Europe and Japan have held demand relatively steady, further contributing to rising prices. This is in stark contrast to previous years when business slowed considerably during Christmas and the winter months, usually resulting in downward pressure on prices.

Logs

Figure 1: Nominal FOB prices of African and Southeast Asian logs ($/m³)



Far East demand lifts African prices

West and Central African timber prices held onto 2006 gains in December as opposed to previous years when prices weakened ahead of the Christmas holiday. Tight supply and active demand from China and India continued to support prices. In January, West and Central African log prices surged on the back of robust demand from the Far East, a longer than usual rainy season and a mild winter in Europe. *Figure 1* shows that prices for African mahogany (khaya) logs are reaching new 13-year highs. Sapele log prices have also been edging up and are at levels roughly similar to those of iroko.

Flooding sends Southeast Asian prices up

Prices for Southeast Asian timber products rose sharply across the board in early January after severe thunderstorms struck several production areas and floods forced evacuations in Malaysia and Indonesia. Prices for Southeast Asian timber products have risen moderately since then as flooding receded in most states, except the Jakarta area and Sarawak. Some small mills may be driven out of business due to inadequate insurance coverage for such disasters. As of February 2007, meranti logs had reached 14-year highs while dark red meranti sawnwood prices were at their highest level since ITTO started to track this product in 1998 *(see Figure 2)*. Meanwhile, prices for Southeast Asian plywood (notably meranti) reached fresh ten-year highs, finally

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- spreading the budget over a longer implementation period;
- planning for a second (or follow-up) phase at project conception;
- building a reserve into project budgets for maintenance costs ('Forest Fund') such as was adopted in Missahoé; and
- building into the project economic options for sustainability after funding has ended.

Some other comments/recommendations for ITTO and its members are:

1) Openness and flexibility in considering project modifications is a definite advantage. Addressing design errors in approved projects during implementation (eg Worobong) is much better than enduring such errors (eg Abutia).
2) ITTO should consider limiting its project investments exclusively to permanent fruit trees when requested to finance community development actions that are not related to forest products. If other agricultural crops are needed for the success of the project, the funding should come from other sources.
3) ITTO should generally not invest in pure forest research projects. When such support is justified, ITTO should seek participation of other specialized agencies.
4) Member governments should avoid submitting community forest management project proposals to ITTO unless they can guarantee clear community land tenure or access to forest resources, as well as clearance of forest management plans and/or logging authorizations.
5) Transfer of the infrastructure and pertinent goods acquired with project funds to community enterprises should be included in project completion procedures.

The complete report of this ex-post evaluation is available from the ITTO Secretariat (itto@itto.or.jp)