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META-EVALUATION OF PREVIOUSLY EVALUATED ITTO PROJECTS

Lessons learned & good practices towards sustainable management of tropical forests

Summary Report

5. Community forest management and enterprise

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THEMATIC SUMMARY REPORT No. 5

COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT AND ENTERPRISE

1. INTRODUCTION

Community Forest Management (CFM) and Community Forest Enterprises (CFE) have gained considerable grounds as an approach to sustainable forest management in the past two to three decades. The concept of community development appears to be a fundamental part of almost any SFM related project. The main objectives and to some extent achievements have included: (1) empowerment of local communities' leadership, promoting democratic approaches of CFM/CFE projects, including women's participation; (2) adequate information to local people about SFM and its benefits; (3) clarification and recognition of rights of local people over forests and forest land; (4) respect for local traditions, especially indigenous people's customary rules; (5) assisting local or indigenous leadership in contacting and consulting with national or regional government authorities; (6) training of indigenous or local people and identification of champions of for CFM/CFE promotion; (7) clear up-front arrangements for sharing of profits and other benefits from forest activities for the community and its members, and (8) strengthening of community organizations. Two main prerequisites underline successful CFM and CFE: (i) clear definition of land tenure and forest access rights and (ii) equitable sharing of expected benefits.

Most CFM and CFE projects have common support elements: (1) natural forest resources management and/or reforestation; (2) direct long-term social and economic development of communities through SFM and associated productive activities involving local poor farmers and indigenous people; (3) rehabilitation of degraded forest lands; and (4) management of buffer zones around protected areas.

Research and demonstration activities are often part of larger CFM/CFE projects which may include: implementing approaches and technologies for the socially, economically and ecologically sustainable utilization of forest resources in compliance with the national laws; and diversifying the tropical timber supply in the regional, national and international markets. Many projects include community based reforestation plans for production of timber and NTFPs, rehabilitation of degraded forests, as well as agro-forestry components.

The expected outcome of CFM/CME projects may include a fully operational management plan being implemented by the community enterprise, a strong and consolidated community forest enterprise; and improved income and employment for community members.

ITTO has been active in supporting CFM/CFE projects in its member countries since its inception. In 2008, the Thematic Programme on Community Forest Management and Enterprise was launched as a strategic tool to enhance on-going efforts.

2. KEY ISSUES

- The status of land tenure and property rights is often not well defined in the community-based project proposals although they are critical project elements. When population density increases, land tenure becomes a serious issue and may need to be addressed separately.
- Although improvement of livelihoods and mitigation of climate change are frequently stated as 'project benefits in proposals, they tend to be mentioned as catchwords without further elaboration.
- In many cases the project concept and strategy are not extensively and comprehensively discussed with the local population before the project approval.
- A great deal of the active participation of the community members in plantation establishment or other field activities is achieved through direct payment (e.g. money or food) and only exceptionally by means of voluntary work. Not all members of the communities are interested in the project or in its outputs and, as a result, their participation varies.
- In several cases trying to meet short-term economic needs of local people has been through such activities as promoting growing new crop varieties, agroforestry, cultivation of NTFP species, and rural

extension. While these alternatives help local people, they may diffuse stakeholder interest in SFM of existing forests and development of tree planting.

- Social aspects such as stimulating active participation, improving environmental and forestry awareness, promoting community organization and community enterprises as well as training, are usually needed.
- Decentralization and democratization pave the way for the people's own initiative in sustainable community development. However, their appropriate introduction needs careful consideration of how these principles can be promoted in the national and local contexts.
- CFM projects may be instrumental in providing diverse important benefits to the communities (including roads, medical facilities, higher crop productivity or facilitated contacts with authorities) but often fail to effectively improve community incomes which may jeopardize investment in planned forestry activities.
- Poor and illiterate rural people, living in agriculture-forest frontiers, may well understand and accept the need for sustainable forest management and forest plantations, but have no economic possibilities to pursue the required actions without financial assistance to sustain or expand project activities
- Economic viability of CFM/CFE activities continues to be a key issue for most projects in this field. Emphasis in the past has been given to social and environmental aspects without due consideration of provision of tangible economic benefits and other incentives to community members.
- In many countries, failure in CFM/CFE development has been attributed mainly to the lack of clear policies and support from the government agencies that may not approve the management plans, grant rights on the forests to the community, or provide any post-project support to the activities started.
- Ecological zoning practiced in many countries may not provide an appropriate framework for forest management planning which can extenuate problems in the approval of plans.

3. LESSONS LEARNED

Project design

- The potential of local communities to implement forest management and conservation is enormous, if well directed. The local people's response and the maintenance of their interest to participate in projects of this kind, despite the occasional absence of practical results, is a clear indication that the community forestry approach, if coupled with adequate technical and economical inputs, can be successful.
- The key prerequisites for a successful planning process at community level aiming at producing a forest management plan are: (i) careful assessment of economic and environmental viability of different production options, (ii) the scope and quality of the plan which complies with the national regulations enabling its rapid approval by authorities and thereby swift start-up of its implementation, and (iii) community's commitment to implement the plan for its entire validity period. There should be at least some kind of evidence that these prerequisites exist or can be met before starting a planning process. Some CFM projects have not been implemented due to unresolved legal matters, loss of commercial value of the species that originated the project, and as a consequence of a government and community decision.
- The main problems of community forest management projects in or around protected areas include: (1) location of project sites in strictly protected forests without a previous analysis of other available options; (2) absence of economic studies that could justify the feasibility of CFM; (3) low quality of forest management plans; and (4) lack of consideration of economic alternatives such as progressive substitution of natural forest utilization by planted forests, ecotourism, compensation for environmental services, etc.
- Some CFM projects are located in protected areas, often inside forest reserves, buffer zones or a corridor between two protected areas. There is a risk that conflicting interests may lead to unrealized outcomes.

- Not all members of local communities living in agriculture-forestry frontiers are willing or interested to participate in forestry programmes. Often most of them prefer to make their living out of agriculture or shifting cultivation, extensive grazing or other activities. This needs to be considered in project design.
- Women development can be an important objective in CFM projects. Women benefit directly from some of the activities such as forest nurseries, food processing and NTFP production but, more important, they clearly play an undisputed and respected leadership role regarding project objectives. Strong women leadership is also an added outcome of many projects.
- In spite of relatively well done forest inventory, forest management plans may lack all required characteristics of a real management plan, even though they may apparently comply with the national regulations. Such management plans demonstrate excessive emphasis on short term aspects, such as Reduced Impact Logging (RIL) practices, but give almost no consideration to long-term planning, including a sustainable cutting cycle and harvesting intensity, road design and construction, silvicultural practices, biodiversity conservation, market for the planned products, costs and economic analysis. RIL is obviously necessary but it is not sufficient to achieve SFM.
- Many projects have failed in giving adequate economic consideration to the productive activities proposed to the communities. As for any other economic venture, CFM/CFE proposals have to be preceded by a feasibility study based on technical forestry matters as well as on a sound cost-benefit analysis. Income generation needs to be addressed as a community or family business enterprise and not as a project activity.
- The ecological sustainability of CFM projects has proved difficult to assess. Some project strategies assume that a natural forest managed for production by a community, is also effectively conserved compared to a legally strictly protected forest where it may be impossible to avoid illegal logging due to weak enforcement. Every case should be carefully analyzed in this respect.
- Most CFM/CFE projects have no quantified baseline information on the pre-project situation. This makes it very difficult to evaluate project impacts; especially those related to natural forest management, restoration of degraded forests, tree planting, and agroforestry activities.
- Project sites should not generally be located in very distant areas. As ITTO projects are intended to be demonstrative, they should be developed in readily accessible areas, where possibilities for success exist and where the ground-level results can be seen.
- Lack of trained human resources at several levels and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures frequently lead to significant delays in decision making and implementation. This can be associated with the lack of interest, commitment and capacity of other line ministries to support project implementation.
- Study tours to community projects in other countries in the region are extremely useful in informing community leaders and other project participants.
- Project proposals on NTFPs need explanation on the species used, economic feasibility and social livelihood dependence to enable assessment of meeting the project objectives. Proposals focusing on management of NTFPs that fail to show relevance to SFM should be reoriented within the context of forest sustainability and the ITTO Objective 2000.
- Research-to-impacts should be outcome oriented. If the focus is on outputs, only I under-achievements occur. Research should consider that new technology has to result in livelihood and income positive impacts and that accessible demonstration plots are most useful.
- Technical and market knowledge is necessary but not sufficient condition for success. Other critical elements may include entrepreneurship development, micro-credit facilities, market linkages, but these may be difficult to integrate in targeted CFM projects.
- In protection forests, benefits through community management are often largest in sustainable use of buffer zones and biological corridors between protected areas.

Project implementation

- Awareness raising and organization of community members is often unproductive unless there is already a tradition of working in groups. However, it is possible to make people understand that their livelihood depends on forest protection, tree planting, and finding suitable alternatives to be adopted within a short period. It can, however, be difficult for local beneficiaries to accept that they must work without being paid for a long-term objective, even when they recognize that it is for the benefit of the community.
- The generation of project outputs and results does not necessarily imply achievement of development objectives. Failures in this respect can be due to: (1) project design errors, especially overly ambitious objectives related to available time and resources and inappropriate strategy; and (2) low quality of some key products, results and outputs, such as forest plantations that die after planting or grow below expectations and management plans that are useless and cannot be applied. A clear symptom of the unsuccessful achievement of development objectives can be the abandonment of essential forest activities such as planting and replanting, nurseries, weeding, pruning, thinning, and fire control as soon as the project ended or when resources to pay for services became unavailable.
- A serious problem in CFM projects involving natural forest management has been the low quality of forest management plans.
- Local communities understanding of the need to organize themselves through a forest committee is essential in order to ensure their full participation in the achievement of project objectives.
- The time constraint of project implementation is often the cause of serious mistakes. Usually a full year is necessary for a CFM project to become fully operational (The second year is used essentially to initiate operations and training. Therefore, it is impossible challenge for any forest project to produce significant additional income for the community (apart from wages) before the end of the third year. In tree planting and other restoration activities projects, the minimum time period is usually five years.
- In many community-managed reforestation projects there have been serious errors in site and species selection. Maintenance and silvicultural treatments (weeding, fertilization, thinning, pruning, and fire control) have sometimes been lacking, especially after project completion. Most forest nurseries are abandoned immediately after projects ended. The main reason for the halting project activities has been the "lack of financial resources".
- Two major reasons can lead to failure of CFE wood production and processing projects: (i) the community around the factory cannot simply be changed from primary and subsistence farmers to industry operators; and (ii) the technology introduced may not be compatible with traditional livelihoods.
- Implementation of sustainable livelihoods activities within the framework of a community managed conservation projects requires a broad range of skills that may not be present within the project teams.
- It is very important for project teams to be based in the project area in order to be able to make frequent contacts with communities and local partners and thus ensure relevance of the activities.
- Support to livelihoods activities can often be channeled through specialized local NGOs as medium and long-term partners of the Executing Agencies, using a focused village planning and corresponding business plans.

Sustainability

- Substantial contribution to livelihood improvement of the poor communities as well as to forest protection and biodiversity conservation are critical for sustainability, particularly if the results can be sustained without outside subsidies and are replicable. Without provisions for sustainability upon the conclusion of the project the local population will be disappointed.
- Economic sustainability must be addressed separately for natural forest management projects and for forest plantations, as their realities are quite different.

- Sufficient time is needed for social processes for developing adequate approaches and ownership by the beneficiaries and partners. For this reason a minimum duration of three years should be planned for CFM projects. The initial plan should already give consideration for how the follow-up activities can be sustained.
- Successful CFM and CFE models may also serve as a basis for development of the legal framework (new forest law and regulations) especially as related to participation of the local communities in the decision making process related to the use of natural resources.
- Strong leadership and competence of the technical team and the preparedness of the recipient CFE are important for project sustainability. Strong commitment and good professional skills of the forest administration staff are also required.
- Access to financial capital often leads to success, otherwise CFE projects easily get bogged down with the first difficulties in business development and the accumulated social capital is lost.

4. GOOD PRACTICES

Project design

- An early clear commitment by the government enables effective development of community forest management and enterprises.
- Participatory planning can be successful if based on the priorities and needs of communities and rely on bottom-up approach.
- Provision of adequate information to communities and their formal commitment to implementation in the design phase helps successful implementation.
- Addressing the actual problems in the field orients preliminary analyses on strategic options; in general blueprint solutions have limited value due to diversity of local conditions.
- Establishing economic feasibility of the planned approaches from the perspective of community members based on a cost-benefit analysis is useful for identification of successful project strategy.
- Early consideration of benefit distribution, gender and socio-cultural aspects helps avoid confusion and conflicts during implementation.
- Adequate baseline information on the resources and socio-economic conditions is necessary for planning and to allow assessment of impacts.
- In countries with no or limited practical experience in community forest management, a national strategy would be useful.
- Formal commitment to the project implementation by partners and relevant stakeholders during the design stage can ensure effective implementation.
- Clarification of the tenure and legal access by communities to the forest resource and their right to use the resource avoids designing unfeasible projects.
- Confirmation of the government capacity to effectively apply the forest legislation and to process authorizations of forest use is also a good practice.

Technical aspects

- All forest goods and services including non-timber forest products, fauna and environmental services merit consideration at the planning stage.
- In restoration projects of secondary and degraded forests, appropriate use of low-cost natural regeneration can be feasible.

- In plantation projects, critical elements have been species selection to local conditions, seed availability to meet demand, quality of planting material, as well as phasing of targets to ensure continuous flow of benefits in the long run and to learn from experience.

Economic aspects

- Incentives can be effective if they provide tangible benefits for the community during the whole cycle of the operation and beyond.
- Community forest enterprises need to be oriented for profit generation.
- Engaging those community members who are committed to work for community forest enterprises can ensure efficient operations and targeted results.
- Engagement of the private sector as commercial partners is often highly desirable to have access to market, technology and finance.
- Cooperation between communities can ensure sufficiently large supply capacity to customer demand for products.
- Wages paid in community forest management and enterprises need to be considered costs, not benefits.
- Mitigation of economic risks of the community forest enterprise requires specific measures.

Social aspects

- Consistent effective participation of communities can be ensured by adequate prior consultations, continuous information flow, as well as transparency on project implementation arrangements and financial flows.
- Appropriate sharing of benefits, including to the poor members of the community, helps broad support to economic activities based on forests.
- Continuous monitoring of the gender aspects helps ensuring participation of and benefits for women.

Capacity building

- In addition to technical skills, business management and organizational capacities need to be built up.
- The approach of lead/promotion producers can be useful for effective grassroots level dissemination of results.
- Training needs to be demand driven and practical but carefully planned. Target groups of the training strategy need to cover all the actors, not only technical staff or community leaders.
- Production of adequate tools for implementation (guidelines, manuals and technical packages for community forest management and enterprise) in local language(s) contributes to the project's broader impacts.
- In natural forest management projects, relevant training covers planning (inventory work, environmental impact assessment, other studies, identification and assessment of strategic options, elaboration of management plans), production (particularly reduced impact logging), commercialization of products, and organizational aspects.

Dissemination and mainstreaming of experience

- Broader application of key success factors, lessons learned and constraints requires their proper interpretation in the local context to allow general conclusions.
- Various dissemination mechanisms (e.g. community visits, community business forums) can ensure effective sharing of experience.
- Community networks are highly useful for dissemination.

- To remove the constraints encountered in community forest management the project's policy recommendations need dissemination to decision-makers and follow-up.
- In order to gain broad acceptance for CFM/CFE as a development strategy, effective communication can ensure awareness on the credibility of communities as responsible stewards in the sustainable management of their forests

Implementation arrangements

- To ensure accountability and capability of non-governmental intermediaries need careful assessment (including, among others, technical knowledge, social organization, associated transaction costs, sustainability of commitment, capacity to continue support after project termination).
- Adequate field presence of project staff is necessary in CFM/CFE projects.
- Ownership and management of project assets after termination (e.g. nurseries, vehicles, laboratories, etc.) need to be clarified early in the project planning.
- Community engagement in monitoring and evaluation during and after the project is useful and cost-efficient.

Sustainability

- Linking with national forest programmes and similar initiatives can help ensure post-project government support.
- Engagement of commercial partners can ensure post-project revenue generation.
- Linking the project with micro-credit, seed financing and credit schemes can help ensure post-project financing.
- Phasing of project interventions is often advisable to keep specific project objectives attainable.
- Specific exit strategies need consideration already during the planning stages and their finalization is necessary well before the project completion.

SOURCES

This thematic summary is based on the ex-post evaluation reports of the following projects:

PD044/99 Rev.2 (F)	IMPLEMENTATION OF A MANAGEMENT PLAN BY THE CHIQUIACA AND OROZAS COMMUNITIES IN TARIJA, BOLIVIA
PD021/97 Rev.2 (F)	DEVELOPING TROPICAL FOREST RESOURCES THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED FOREST MANAGEMENT, NUEVA VIZCAYA, PHILIPPINES
PD 15/96 Rev.2 (M,I)	UTILIZATION, COLLECTION AND TRADE OF TROPICAL NON-WOOD FOREST PRODUCTS IN THE PHILIPPINES
PD 24/00 Rev.1 (I)	PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE UTILIZATION OF RATTAN FROM PLANTATION IN THAILAND
PD014/92 Rev.2 (F) I	A DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM OF SUSTAINABLE UTILIZATION OF TROPICAL FORESTS BY MEANS OF DIFFERENTIATED MANAGEMENT IN HAINAN ISLAND, CHINA - PHASE I
PD026/92 Rev.2 (F,I)	DEVELOPMENT OF METHODS AND STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINED MANAGEMENT OF MOIST TROPICAL FORESTS IN CAMEROON
PD033/93 Rev.1 (F) I	CONSERVATION, MANAGEMENT, HARVESTING, AND INTEGRATED SUSTAINED USE OF FORESTS IN THE CHIMANES REGION, BENI, BOLIVIA - PHASE I
PD018/94 Rev.1 (F) II	PARTICIPATORY FOREST DEVELOPMENT IN THE ALTO MAYO REGION FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF MOIST TROPICAL FORESTS
PD037/95 Rev.2 (F)	MANAGEMENT OF CATIVO FORESTS AND NON-TIMBER PRODUCTS WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF RURAL AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, DARIEN, PANAMA
PD013/96 Rev.1 (F)	MULTIPLE-USE MANAGEMENT IN THE MACAJA NATIONAL FOREST BASED ON RUBBER ESTATES - PHASE I: DEVELOPMENT OF MASTER PLAN TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION
PD010/97 Rev.1 (F)	A SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT MODEL IN THE IWOKRAMA RAIN FOREST
PD014/98 Rev.1 (F)	SUSTAINABLE USE AND REFORESTATION OF AMAZON FORESTS BY INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES
PD038/99 Rev.1 (F,I)	DEMONSTRATION COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT IN THE NATURAL CLOUD FORESTS OF THE URUMBA BASIN, SAN IGNACIO
PD049/99 Rev.2 (F)	PILOT PLAN FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF 10,000 HECTARES OF SECONDARY FOREST IN SAN LORENZO, ESMERALDAS
PD289/04 Rev.1 (F)	MANAGEMENT OF THE EMERALD TRIANGLE PROTECTED FORESTS COMPLEX TO PROMOTE COOPERATION FOR TRANSBOUNDARY BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION BETWEEN THAILAND, CAMBODIA AND LAOS (PHASE II)
PD 58/99 Rev.1 (I)	INTRODUCTION OF A VILLAGE INDUSTRY IN THE COMMUNITY AROUND AN INDUSTRIAL FOREST PLANTATION IN INDONESIA