

Sustainable forest management

How can it be achieved through community forestry?

Policy Brief



Women in Jepara's teak forest area harvest ground nuts, Central Java, Indonesia
Photo by Murdani Usman/CIFOR

Overview

- * Governments are under increased pressure to ensure their nation's forests deliver environmental, economic and social outcomes.
- * Community forestry allows governments to attain multiple benefits simultaneously due to its cross-cutting nature as an environmental, economic, social and cultural initiative.
- * The potential benefits of community forestry can be significantly and cost-effectively scaled up if governments: 1. increase the area of good quality forests under community management, 2. revise the regulations to enable communities to benefit from their tenure and 3. ensure that communities have access to information and technology that would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of forest management.

Introduction

Throughout the Asia-Pacific region, governments are under increased pressure to ensure their nation's forests deliver numerous benefits to its stakeholders. These include providing economic benefits including generating income for the national budget, environmental services such as water quality and biodiversity and social impacts such as poverty reduction, and providing subsistence products for many rural households. The challenges that governments face to manage these forests are numerous and seemingly overbearing. Those most adversely affected when the forests are not managed in a sustainable manner are those living in and around the forests, the same people that have the least capacity to adapt to the loss of forests. Community forestry provides a solution to these challenges, allowing governments to attain multiple benefits in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

This policy brief from RECOFTC - The Center for People and Forests discusses ways for governments to support community forestry, based on the understanding that it can provide numerous economic, environmental and social benefits. The brief also highlights the challenges facing community forestry throughout the region and then outlines recommendations for governments to further support community forestry as a pathway to inclusive development, where communities participate in decision-making and get equitable benefits, based on the principles of participation, non-discrimination and accountability.

In many places throughout the region community forestry is the most appropriate option for the sustainable management of forest resources, as well as for addressing the wide set of economic, environmental and social objectives (box 1). Evidence in the recent report *Community forestry in Asia and the Pacific: Pathway to inclusive development* by RECOFTC shows that community forestry in the region:

- enhances livelihoods and covers subsistence needs of households (firewood, fodder, timber etc.);
- reduces deforestation and improves forest conditions and quality (wood volume, stem density, vegetation cover and biodiversity);
- strengthens governance and rural people's political rights.

By investing in community forestry governments can engage with local communities in inclusive development, based on participation, that goes beyond sustainable forest management (see box 2).

Box 1. What is community forestry, and why is it important?

Community forestry includes all aspects, initiatives, science, policies, institutions, and processes that increase the role of all local people – including women, youth and disadvantaged groups – in governing and managing forest resources.

Community forestry is important because it facilitates the incorporation of different interests and values in decision making for forest management. This is based on the understanding that those living in and around the forests are best placed to manage these forests in a sustainable manner, not least because they have the most to gain, such as escaping poverty, from the sustainable management of these forests, and most to lose, including loss of access to subsistence forest products. As those that are most affected, as well as knowing more about the forests, it is fundamental that they are included in decision making processes. This is underlined by the fact that forests are a safety net for many of the 450 million people that live in and around forests in the region¹.

¹Asian Development Bank. 2003. Forest policy. Working Paper June 2003. Manila, Philippines.



Scaling up the benefits of community forestry

The potential benefits of community forestry can be significantly and cost-effectively scaled up if more communities are given tenure to their forests. This is important as tenure provides security to the community, encouraging investment in the forests with many implications including for forest quality and the community's livelihoods.

Communities with tenure to their forests could increase the forest's contribution to their livelihoods if:

- Forest departments grant communities tenure rights to forests that can provide income. Currently communities are often granted tenure to highly degraded forests or barren forestland, severely limiting the potential of community forestry to contribute to poverty reduction.
- Regulations that govern communities' interaction with their forests are revised to ensure that the communities are able to make a living from the forests. The original intention of these regulations was to protect the forest, in fact many of these are counter-productive. Complex and rigid regulations for communities abound around timber harvesting, possessing or operating forestry equipment and machinery, transporting logs and processed timber, forest management planning, and technical and financial aspects. These barriers result in the loss of potential revenues for the state, as well as encouraging illegal logging as they make the legal logging of timber uncompetitive.

Further, developing the capacity of communities through improved access to information and technology could help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of forest management, enabling them to maximise the income from the forests in a sustainable manner.



Details of bemban mat edges. West Kalimantan, Indonesia
Photo by Ramadian Bachtiar/CIFOR

Box 2. Why should community forestry be central to government agendas?

Community forestry enables governments to:

- Respond to environmental objectives such as slowing deforestation, and conserving biodiversity.
- Contribute to decentralization, which is important as it gives local people more control over their lives with the result being that they are more able to take advantage of opportunities and deal with adversity.
- Meet global commitments such as on addressing illegal logging and reducing carbon emissions.
- Attain wider development goals through community forestry. Examples include climate change adaptation and mitigation, improved governance, recognition of indigenous peoples, gender equality, protection of human rights, development of grassroots democracy and poverty reduction.



Recommendations

Community forestry has been recognised in many places throughout the region as the most appropriate modality for sustainably managing forests, but it has not become the primary modality nor been fully mainstreamed in most countries. There is still significant potential for further development on which central governments can wield significant influence. When supported by governments together with other key stakeholders, community forestry can be a powerful pathway for inclusive development.

RECOFTC, together with our partners, call on governments to strengthen their commitment to community forestry through:

- Expanding, strengthening and respecting community tenure rights by making community forestry the main forest management modality, requiring that community rights are incorporated in all relevant legislation, that government staff are obliged and trained to support community forestry development, and through the institutionalisation of grievance mechanisms. This will lead to security for communities.
- Enabling communities to actively manage their forests. This will be achieved through the removal of regulations that greatly limit communities ability to profitably manage their forests.
- Making community forestry a foundation for all forest policy initiatives (e.g., Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), Payment for Environmental Services (PES)) and in wider development initiatives (e.g., on gender). This will ensure that community forestry is institutionalised.
- Coordinating activities of the forest sector by bringing together line ministries, departments, local governments and other stakeholders. By doing so this will reduce the contradiction and complexity in many of the laws and regulations that communities must adhere to in management of their forests.
- Signing up to relevant international treaties and ensuring that national policies and legislation are promulgated to implement them.
- Collaborating on an international level through renewing their commitment to regional networks such as the ASEAN Social Forestry Network (ASFN) and GREEN Mekong with the aim of promoting good policy and practices by sharing knowledge and experiences among key stakeholders.

RECOFTC's mission is to enhance capacities for stronger rights, improved governance and fairer benefits for local people in sustainable forested landscapes in the Asia and the Pacific region.

RECOFTC holds a unique and important place in the world of forestry. It is the only international not-for-profit organization that specializes in capacity development for community forestry. RECOFTC engages in strategic networks and effective partnerships with governments, nongovernmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, local people and research and educational institutes throughout the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. With over 25 years of international experience and a dynamic approach to capacity development – involving research and analysis, demonstration sites and training products – RECOFTC delivers innovative solutions for people and forests.

For more information, see *Community forestry in Asia and the Pacific: Pathway to inclusive development* report available at www.recoftc.org.

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