

RECOFTC

1987- 2007

The first 20 years



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Dr. Somsak Sukwong: Our founder's vision

Dr. Somsak Sukwong's introduction to community forestry came while listening to a visiting lecturer at Kasetsart University's Faculty of Forestry – and it was to change his life.

"This idea of helping people living in the forests inspired me," said Dr. Somsak, who was Dean of the faculty at the time.

His enthusiasm led to the development of what was called a "social forestry" curriculum in the faculty. Supported by the FAO, it was the first of its kind for the forestry profession in Asia.

But that was just a beginning. In 1986 Dr. Somsak was summoned by the president of the Asian Development Bank and asked whether he would like to establish a community forestry training center for the region on the Kasetsart University campus.

He accepted immediately and was appointed Executive Director, a position he was to hold as he guided RECOFTC through its formative years.

"At the beginning we were just thinking of running the center as a small project attached to the university," he said.

A water tower stood on what is now the main building site and buffaloes worked in the surrounding paddy fields. Waist-high floodwaters greeted one visiting lecturer in the center's temporary quarters.

"We didn't know much about community forestry or how to teach the certificate course in those early years," said Dr. Somsak. Instruction was based on texts from the library.

But things moved rapidly. "We didn't just intend to hold training classes. My vision was that RECOFTC would be a regional think tank for community forestry."

Twin buildings, financed by the Swiss government through the Asian Development Bank, were inaugurated by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn in July 1991.

Life for RECOFTC still had its challenges. As Cor Veer, an early colleague of Dr. Somsak, wrote: "Increasingly there were signs that, though we did now know how to make community foresters, we did not quite know how to make community forestry work or become more widely adopted."

And there was also political pressure. "Community forestry got resistance from many government agencies, and RECOFTC was the target," said Dr. Somsak. "That was a difficult period for us, to make it grow."

Community forestry is a strategy to solve so many issues. We are not talking about a quick fix. Community forestry is not only about protecting forests, but also about democracy, strengthening local institutions, benefiting lives of rural people and managing the environment.

– Dr. Somsak, 2001



1987 – Birth of RECOFTC. The first international RECOFTC seminar identified the role of community foresters, and RECOFTC established the Regional Community Forestry Certificate course.



HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and Dr. Somsak, Inauguration Day - July 1991.

The answer was to bring in new staff to improve the quality and relevance of training. "To establish the courses we invited people who had really implemented community forestry in the field, to shape the way of community forestry training and education," said Dr. Somsak. "We learned a lot from those people, and after five years things were better."

In 2000, RECOFTC formally gained the full status of an international organization with its Charter signed by six Mekong countries and Switzerland. A Board of Trustees was established a year earlier with Dr. Somsak as its chairman. RECOFTC now had new, broader horizons.

"In the past we focused much more on field-level processes and building the capacities of field workers to work with local people," said Dr. Somsak. "Now the issue is how to institutionalize all this learning and experience through supportive policies and changing how governments perceive and support community forestry."

Dr. Somsak retired in 2002 but still retains an office at RECOFTC, the organization he fathered 20 years ago.



1991 – RECOFTC’s first building, funded by the Swiss government, was inaugurated on land donated by Kasetsart University on its Bangkok campus.



Few people get a chance to witness the emergence of a sweeping movement like community forestry, see it take form as a regional training center, and help guide its development over two decades. For Mr. Cor Veer and Dr. Donald Gilmour, experiencing the birth and growth of RECOFTC has left personal insights into its origins and its future direction.

Mr. Cor Veer: Birth of a movement

"I first understood the need for a process like community forestry from the situation in Europe where the state had conquered the forest, of the silly situation where the bureaucracy acted as landowner," said Cor.

Did he then know what community forestry was? "No, and that was rather nice, because we had a clear task. We saw that as our job: to bring together experiences and people and thereby be involved in the definition of community forestry and its different aspects."

Cor was around when RECOFTC was set up and, even though he "wasn't the midwife," he became deeply involved with it later. "We were aware of the difficulty of knowing just what defined community forestry, and by saying, 'What is it, and can it be developed further?', we turned that problem into an opportunity for RECOFTC."

There were projects looking for an organization like RECOFTC to explain community forestry in terms of training – a clear demand and a clear task.

"The difficult stuff would be done by the projects – convincing the government the ideas were good, dealing with corruption, whatever," said Cor.

The RECOFTC ambition was that community forestry start small and gradually spread. "After about 10 exciting years, we found it didn't seem to move so well, fuelled in part by the political uncertainty in Thailand at the time of the Forestry Bill," said Cor. "There was a frustration in that we couldn't just train; we had to make community forestry work and be accepted."

In the late 1990s, RECOFTC and its supporters found there were other very strong interests in the forest. "The farmers, on whom we focused, weren't the only interest group there. We weren't taking notice of the contested nature of the resource."

Today the task is to look at community forestry in that context. Dealing with this challenge will take very strong mechanisms of cooperation with the powers that be, and those that challenge them.

Mr. Cor Veer has worked with RECOFTC as head of its Collaborative Country Support Program and as a consultant.

Dr. Donald Gilmour: The later years

"Has RECOFTC changed over the years? Quite significantly," said Dr. Gilmour.

"In its early years, RECOFTC was focused on conventional teaching. Now that focus has moved substantially, to capacity building."

Dr. Gilmour said that countries in the region now have their own agenda. One change is that they want training tailored to their own needs. "The issue has gone from generic training to country-specific training."

Another change, according to Dr. Gilmour, is a move towards a broader vision of community forestry and a desire by RECOFTC to be an intellectual base for forestry thinking. RECOFTC can provide a regional core of knowledge and expertise to influence CF by engaging in policy dialogues and discussions, as well as in practical issues.

Dr. Gilmour said that RECOFTC's future has prompted much speculation in recent years. People have asked: "Once there is adequate understanding and adequate capacity in the region, will RECOFTC then have completed its mandate and should it shut its doors?"

Dr. Gilmour responded: "Community forestry is a shifting target. The original notion of training people to implement certain modalities was okay in the '80s and '90s. But the agenda has shifted. A lot more focus these days is on poverty alleviation and our role in community-based resource management, contributing to carbon sequestration and provision of environmental services."

"Community forestry has broadened with time", said Dr. Gilmour, "and consequently RECOFTC's mandate and role in community forestry has also changed."

Dr. Donald Gilmour was Vice Chairperson of the Board of Trustees until 2002 and served as Interim Chair in 2006-7.



1992 – A structured program is established with finance and administrative units, a regional training program and Thailand outreach programs.

Why should communities become involved in managing their forests?

Nine good reasons....

- 1. Proximity:** Local populations are the immediate custodians of the forest. They are the stakeholders in closest touch with the forest and they are dependent on it in a range of ways. Hence, they are best placed to ensure its effective husbandry.
- 2. Impact:** Their livelihood activities likewise have a very direct effect on the condition of the forest; thus, their involvement in its management makes sound practical sense.
- 3. Equity:** Community-based forest management may be expected to increase the resource flows to rural populations, leading to important effects on poverty alleviation and income distribution.
- 4. Livelihoods:** Local needs and interests should likewise not be ignored, particularly where forest products provide key elements of livelihoods or (as is often the case with non-timber forest products) important safety nets. Community involvement in forest management is likely to lead to substantial changes in the ways forests are managed, ensuring the safeguarding and/or diversification of their multiple benefits. The social security component of community forest management may thus be significant.
- 5. Capacity:** Community roles in forest management have been well documented in the past; equally, there is evidence from recent experience of community involvement that this can substantially improve the quality and condition of the forest, over and above the levels that governments are able to establish independently.
- 6. Biodiversity:** Because of their interests in multiple-purpose management, local users are likely to be much better conservers of biodiversity than either single-interest industrial concerns or the interests that serve them. Biodiversity may well be enriched instead of diminished by the activities of forest dwellers.
- 7. Cost effectiveness:** Even where public sector management is feasible, the costs of exclusive direct management by the State may be prohibitively high, and local management may be an important way of cutting costs.
- 8. Adaptation:** Growing recognition of cultural and livelihood diversity encourages an approach centered on local participation and contextual adaptation. Almost by definition, flexible and adaptive management cannot be delivered centrally, and local pressures and interests must be brought to bear.
- 9. Governance:** Involving communities and community institutions in forest management (a sector often noticeably lacking in good governance) may help to introduce discipline into the management of the sector and offer significant checks and balances on otherwise unregulated public services.

Adapted from David Brown, 1999, *Principles and Practice of Forest Co-management: Evidence from West-Central Africa*. London, ODI.



1992 – Regional outreach (with FAO's Forests, Trees and People Program) began work with institutions and field project operations in 10 Asian countries.



Eyewitness to the first 10 years

RECOFTC's first decade has been called "the years of hope and innocence." Ms. Somjai Srimongkontip, one of RECOFTC's longest serving staff members, recalls those first 10 years...

In a small upstairs office that is now overshadowed by the RECOFTC complex, Khun Somjai shared the birth of RECOFTC. In 1987 she joined Dr. Somsak, his secretary, an American technical adviser, a couple of drivers and a cleaner, as the general administration officer for the Regional Community Forestry Training Center in the Forestry Faculty, Kasetsart University.

The team was small, but it had big ideas and ambitions, and began designing its first project, the International Training Certificate Course on Community Forestry. "Can you imagine a course six months long!" said Somjai.

Funds came through, the staff grew, work began on the head office complex, and RECOFTC's role developed as the sole training center in the region devoted to community forestry development.

Somjai was called on to work with the field adviser team as an assistant to support participants during the fieldwork. "I was born in Bangkok, and all this was new to me: the dependency of rural people on forest resource, natural resources management by government and local people."

The experience changed her life and career as she took up a Netherlands government scholarship to study a master's degree in forestry for rural development.

Among the most exciting events for her in those first 10 years was seeing Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn inaugurate the RECOFTC residential complex. "It was like a blessing on whatever we would do in the future."

What was the biggest change in the first decade? "The appointment of a new director – a non-Thai – which meant a new environment for the Thai staff," said Somjai. "When you change the boss, you change the direction of the organization and its working style."



RECOFTC's fledgling staff 20 years ago. Several of these earliest staffers are still with RECOFTC today.

*Somjai Srimongkontip (CABS)
Boonruen Mataeng (FAHR)
Vinai Im-em (FAHR) and
Prapai Sikram (FAHR)*



1994 – An international seminar on 'Community Development Biodiversity Conservation Through Community Forestry' recognized that reconciling development and conservation goals is difficult.

RECOFTC's second decade: A senior staff member recalls

Ronnakorn (Ron) Triraganon has been with RECOFTC for exactly half of its 20 years – the second half.

When he arrived in late 1996 as program coordinator, the organization was at a crossroads and management recognized new strategies were needed. But it did not have many staff to implement or guide them.

"There were only three international training courses and one RECOFTC trainer," he said. "We had to invite experts from places like Reading University in the UK, Kasetsart University's Faculty of Forestry and the WWF to help us out."

RECOFTC set up a training team of Ron and two colleagues and began thinking hard about where the organization was going. "The big gap," he said, "was in capacity building."

RECOFTC responded by recruiting professional staff, combining more relevant training with capacity building and action research, exploring new strategies, and launching joint programs at national level in Nepal, Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand.

Ron lists the Thailand Collaborative Country Support Program as the standout success of these later years. He is satisfied with the way challenges like capacity building at the national level have been solved, and how training and its goals are now more clearly defined, particularly the link with an overall capacity building program.

"There will be challenges always, today and I assume tomorrow – challenges like the promotion of community forestry and community-based natural resource management at the national level, challenges of policy in other countries. They can be solved," Ron said.



In the field, it pays to tread softly

Attjala Roongwong spends much of her time in poor rural communities. Even after 10 years, she still finds each experience a learning one, mixing and living with the people her program was set up to help. "It's like a university or college that's never ending, in which both parties learn from each other," she said.

Attjala is project coordinator with the Thailand Collaborative Country Support Program, under current manager Khun Somying Soontornwong. Set up in 1993, the program currently works in six Thai project sites and a range of new areas, often with other NGOs, government officials and local communities. The ThCCSP is also supporting community forestry networks through training and technical support.

Attjala's first experience with RECOFTC was as a 4th year forestry student at Kasetsart University when, as a trainee, she helped RECOFTC organize a youth camp studying buffer zone management.

When the Thai outreach program was launched, the approach to rural people was tested. "We had to enter ourselves in the community and get to know them, trying to build a trust with them," said Attjala.

Some villagers in field sites had previously had bad experiences with outsiders. "So for me it took at least two years to let them know our intentions and our objectives, so that they really believed we had come to work with them and were trying to learn with them and were sincere with them."

1997 – The international seminar, 'Community Forestry at a Crossroads,' acknowledged that not all was going well with community forestry.



The RECOFTC checklist –

20 years as the region’s leader in community forestry training

RECOFTC has spent two decades promoting community forestry by propounding, explaining, and demonstrating its values.

1. RECOFTC serves as a platform for exchanging information and building knowledge on community forestry.
2. Since 1988, RECOFTC has been a vehicle for learning about issues and challenges facing development, especially problems in the management of forest sectors and their possible solutions through exchange of experiences and lessons learned in different parts of the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Over the years, RECOFTC has facilitated numerous international conferences, workshops, training courses and study tours on a range of themes and topics.
3. International training courses involve topics and themes such as the following:
 - International Training Certificate Course on Community Forestry
 - Community Forestry Extension
 - Marketing of Non-Timber Tree and Forest Products
 - Participatory Management in Protected Areas
 - Conflict Resolution in Forest Resource Management
 - Participatory Forest Resource Assessment and Planning
 - Community-Based Tourism for Conservation and Development
 - Ecotourism
 - Small-Scale Tree and Forest Product Enterprise Development
 - Facilitation Skills
 - Conflict Resolution in NRM
 - Case Study Writing
 - Forest Governance
 - Decentralized Forest Management Planning
 - CF: Principles and Practices
 - Participatory Action Research
 - Enterprise Development and Livelihoods
4. International conferences that deserve mention here include:
 - Community Development and Conservation of Forest Biodiversity Through Community Forestry, 26-28 October, 1994
 - Income Generation Through Community Forestry, 18-20 October, 1995
 - Community Forestry at a Crossroads: Reflections and Future Directions in the Development of Community Forestry, 17-19 July, 1997
 - First Regional Community Forestry Forum Meeting: Regulatory Frameworks for Community Forestry in Asia, 24-25 August, 2005
 - Second Regional Community Forestry Forum Meeting: Benefit Sharing Arrangements in Community Forestry, 21-22 March, 2006
 - Poverty Reduction and Forests: Tenure, Market and Policy Reforms, scheduled for 3-7 September, 2007
5. The themes and topics of the above conferences and training courses reflect the issues current at the time that have helped the concept of community forestry. In addition, RECOFTC collaborated with other international and regional organizations, such as FAO-RAP, WWF-International, the World Conservation Union (ICUN) and ITTO, in many international events on thematic issues.
6. RECOFTC has attracted over 3,000 participants from across the region and beyond.
7. Finally, RECOFTC has a formal and informal network of individuals and government and non-government institutions operating in the region that are concerned about sustainable forests and related natural resource management.



Alumni stories

The list of RECOFTC training courses over the past 20 years is long and impressive, but how beneficial has this training been? Two alumni share their memories....

From Cambodia...



Cambodian **Ken Serey Rotha** had just completed his university degree when he was invited to join a three-week training event on 'Marketing of Non-Timber Forest Products' at RECOFTC in 1995, his first international course.

"I didn't speak much English at that time," he said, "but I learned a lot from that course: marketing strategies, non-timber forest products, linkage of NTFPs and livelihoods – and English!"

Ken went on to apply his new skills in Canada, where his joint proposal on medicinal plants was approved by the IDRC for implementation in the first government project on community forestry. He became project manager, working with staff from the National Department of Forestry and Wildlife.

In 1996 Ken attended two more RECOFTC courses, on 'Participatory Management of Protected Areas' and a four-month Certificate on Community Forestry.

"The experience and knowledge gained from such courses have been shared with my colleagues and the community," he said. As a result, hundreds of community forestry, community protected area and community fishery projects and initiatives have been promoted and established. Some are government projects, and others are community and NGO initiatives.

"I learned a lot from the different RECOFTC courses. They were a worthy investment in time and resources. They helped to build my confidence and make my profession possible."

Ken Serey Rotha is Executive Director, CBNRM Learning Institute, Cambodia, and a member of RECOFTC's Board of Trustees

And from Nepal



In the mid-1990s a young Nepalese agronomist named **Brahma Dhoj Gurung** heard his colleagues in the field talking about a concept that was new to him – community forestry.

Mr. Gurung was intrigued and signed

up with RECOFTC for a four-week Community Forestry course in Bangkok. The training built up his confidence in community forestry, and he also gained a new perspective on his own country. "Participants from many countries were asking me about community forestry in Nepal, and they encouraged me to get further involved in it," he said.

Returning to Nepal, he went straight back to working with communities in remote hill areas. "People there were poor, very poor, not well educated and with little transport. They relied heavily on forest products for their survival."

Today they are part of a program so successful that rural communities now manage over one-quarter of Nepal's national forest.

"Community forestry is becoming the entry point for rural development programs and opportunities, whether by the government or donor agencies – contributing much to the development of rural areas," said Mr. Gurung.

Community groups are supporting these programs by providing scholarships, training, and loans and grants to improve livelihoods. Some have allocated forestry land to the poor to earn money from it.

In 2005 Mr. Gurung returned to Bangkok for another course in 'Conflict Resolution in Natural Resource Management.' "And that course," he said, "was even more helpful than the first."

Brahma Dhoj Gurung is Planning and Monitoring Coordinator, Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project

1999 - RECOFTC charter for an international organization is signed by Thailand (host country), Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam and Switzerland.



Community-based forest (natural) resource management: A path to sustainable environment and development

Lessons from three decades of experience and future challenges

Yam Malla

Community-based forest management (CBFM) or community forestry (CF) is now becoming a global phenomenon. Bull and White (2002) report that globally some 420 million hectares (ha) (11%) is now in some form of community managed or administered system. The proportion of community-owned forest in developing countries is reported to be around 22%, and with the current trend the figure is expected to reach 45% by 2015. Of the 370 million ha of forests conserved by indigenous communities worldwide, almost half, 170 million ha, is in Asia (Molner et al., 2004).

National governments all over the world have either revised, or are revising, their national forest policy and legislation with a provision for involving local communities in the management of their country's forest resources. Many bilateral and multilateral development agencies and private organizations have supported, and some are still supporting, field implementation of new policies.

Important Lessons

Based on the experience of some countries, this paper points to lessons learned as well as future challenges and opportunities.

Local communities can manage large forest areas, including forests of high biodiversity value

Local communities have demonstrated that they can protect and manage large contiguous tracts of forests and regenerate degraded forestlands. Today, we can witness that hundreds of thousands of hectares of previously degraded forestlands all around the world have regenerated with forests and trees, returned wild animals and birds, improved watersheds and landscapes, and a flow of benefits to rural households.

CF may have even contributed, in places, to reversing the forest degradation trends. One recent study (Oli and Kanel, 2006) records that forest areas in the hills and mountains of Nepal have increased from about 3.58 million ha to over 4.01 million ha (16.5%) between 1985 and 1996, whereas in the lowland plain areas (including the inner lowland) where CF implementation is being resisted by major stakeholders, forest area has declined from some 2.03 million to about 1.82 million ha or 12.7% in the same period. Overall, the forest cover of the country has increased by nearly 4.0%.

Similarly, there is evidence of local communities protecting and managing large contiguous tracts of high value biodiversity conservation areas. Some one-third of the 370 million ha of community-managed forest areas is reported to be of high biodiversity value and that is comparable to 470 million ha of public (or government) managed protected areas (Molner et al., 2004).

CF programs can progress with supportive policy and legislative frameworks

A sense of forest ownership, or secured use rights to forests, is critical for active engagement of local communities in forest resource management (Ellsworth and White, 2004; Gilmour et al., 2005). CF programs have progressed rapidly in places where community use rights to forest resources are secured through a well designed and executed legal framework. Furthermore, the legislation, once in place, has been translated into simple language with a guideline that describes how a process should be developed to assist government and NGO staff in their work with local communities. This guideline includes steps for negotiating institutional arrangements, an outline of roles and responsibilities, the preparation of management plans for simple and easy implementation by local communities, provision for forest product harvesting, sharing of these and other benefits, and so on.

Community managed forests (existing and/or potential) can serve as an important source of investment

Compared to developed countries, overall government spending is low on public protected areas in developing countries, and the cost to manage existing public protected areas and/or to expand these or to create new ones is increasing. A 1997 study of 123 conservation agencies in 108 developed and developing countries (comprising 28% of all public protected areas) records US\$3.2 billion in annual budgets or US\$893 per square kilometer overall, but only US\$10 per square kilometer in the developing countries studied (Green and Paine, 1997). Furthermore, 60% of sample parks which are in developing countries received only 10% of the total capital expenditure budgets provided to all parks (Molner et al., 2004).

Nonetheless, local communities have spent significant amounts of time, labor and financial resources on forest management and conservation activities, estimated at US\$1.2 – 2.6 billion per year (Khare, 2003). This is about the same as the annual budgetary allocation of the developing nations for their public protected areas system, and two to three times the annual allocation of all overseas development assistance for the conservation of public protected areas worldwide (Molner et al., 2004).

Forest user organizations, networks, federations and global alliance are essential

In almost all places where a CBFM or CF program is in advanced stages, the formation of local forest organizations has been critical to the program success. Indeed, Pretty and Frank (2000) estimated that between 1990 and 2000, some 320,000 community natural resource management groups with over 10 million people were formed to manage watersheds, forests, microfinance and pest management. In Nepal, since the concept of community forest user groups was first introduced in 1987, there exist some 11,858



2000 – The RECOTFC bill, formalizing RECOTFC's status as an international organization, is passed by the Thai parliament and a Board of Trustees is selected.

groups, involving nearly one-third of the country's 24 million people and more than 850,000 ha of forests (Bhattarai, 2005). In India, some 84,632 joint forest management groups are managing more than 17 million ha (Saigal, et al., 2004), and in the Philippines there are 5,500 people's organizations involving 5.97 million ha of forests (Pulhin et al., 2005).

Often local community members themselves have formed their own organizations to manage forest and related natural resources – generally referred to as indigenous or local system management. In other cases, especially under the government CF program, an outside agent, such as an NGO or government agency, played a catalytic role to form the organizations, building on the existing use rights to forests. The community organizations enabled people to negotiate with government officials and provided a forum for presenting many, and often conflicting, needs of the people dependent upon the forest and related natural resources. The community organizations would agree and form rules and plans to enforce the agreements.

As CF programs expand and local communities gain experience, forest users find it much more convenient and effective to exchange experiences and learn from each other, and even form their own associations. These associations play an important role in supporting forest users and negotiating on their behalf with government agencies and industries to ensure that their user rights to forests and other benefits are not undermined.

One such association is FECOFUN, the federation of CF users of Nepal. Formed in 1994, it is today the country's largest civil society concerned with forestry and local communities, mobilizing one-third of the country's 24 million people. More recently the FECOFUN, together with forest user federations, associations, networks and civil societies from Latin America, Africa, the Pacific, Europe and North America, initiated a Global Alliance for Community Forestry (GACF). Thus, the seeds that were sown in pilot project sites in the early 1970s have grown to become a movement for a nationwide program in the 1990s, which is now beginning to take the shape of a worldwide social movement.

Government forest agencies can change

Another important lesson is the degree to which government forest agencies in some countries, commonly viewed as top-down, insensitive and corrupt bureaucracies, have been able to change themselves and respond positively to new and changing demands. Every government forest agency usually has innovative leaders within its ranks who, at the field level, were inventing approaches to serving both the needs of the villagers and the agency's conservation and production mandates; and who at upper levels, were prepared, when given outside assistance, to lead the process of change. Indeed, in the 1970s and early 1980s, without such 'champions' of change within the government forestry organizations, it would have been almost impossible to initiate CF in India, Nepal and the Philippines – the countries where CF programs have advanced faster than in other countries in the region.

With most forest agencies the change process has been slow, however, generally taking 10 to 20 years to have a significant impact. In addition, the process required that government forest authorities/leaders remain open to changing and evolving needs of the villagers and societies in general and be willing to adjust

accordingly to policies, administrative procedures, personal training and monitoring and evaluation of the CF programs.

A range of knowledge, skills and perspectives is necessary for CF program planning

In most cases, CF programs have been developed by government agency personnel in close collaboration with field foresters, community leaders, NGO representatives and academics/researchers with social science backgrounds, and with funding from an outside donor agency. Community leaders were helpful in describing their village situation, patterns and history of using forest and related natural resources and problems and needs, and possible solutions for meeting these needs. The NGOs were critical to providing an understanding of social structures and underlying socio-economic and cultural issues facing the people and ways to develop community organizations and respond to people's needs. Academics were important in analyzing issues and providing a flow of information about the effects of village level interventions. Foresters contributed by providing knowledge and skills of growing, using and managing forests and trees. Senior government officials were crucial to changing government policy and procedures. Thus, collaboration by these different groups resulted in a combined set of knowledge, skills and perspectives required for designing a relevant program that was acceptable to community members.

Donors' commitment and willingness encourages constructive collaboration

CF programs in developing countries have received support and grant assistance from various bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, as well as from private organizations. The most effective outside support to CF programs comes when concerned donors have encouraged collaboration among local communities, government forest agencies, academics and NGO representatives. In many cases, the donor representatives and expatriates employed by them have interacted formally and informally with these different interest groups, separately and together. Most important of all has been their commitment and willingness to stay with the change process from one-and-a-half to three decades; this has allowed policies, institutional capabilities, attitudes and norms to evolve based on experience. Examples of such unique donor relations can be observed in the Nepal Swiss CF Project, the Nepal Australia CF project and the Livelihood and Forestry Program, all in Nepal.

Cash income from CF can be used for village / rural development

In Nepal, local people have started to accrue a significant amount of cash income from their community forests, and the fund generated is being utilized for a range of village development works. For example, a rapid assessment of forest product utilization, income and patterns of expenditure of 1,788 forest user groups from 12 hill and lowland districts was carried out in 2002 and extrapolated to all forest user groups in Nepal (Kanel and Niraula, 2004). The results showed that the total annual cash income from the sale of forest products from the community forests was 747 million rupees (more than US\$10 million). This amounts to almost 42% of the annual budget of the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation. At the present time, 100 % of the income is going to the forest user group accounts.

To this figure can be added the cash equivalent of subsistence forest products and other income generated by the user groups, which was estimated to bring the total income to 1.8 billion rupees (almost US\$24 million).

2001-04 – RECOFTC changes from a Thai to an international organization. Dr. Yam Malla assumes the Executive Director's post in November 2002.



Some 36% of the income from CF was reported to be used for village development activities, including schemes for installing drinking water, irrigation and electricity; for building schools and roads; and for supporting income-generating activities by creating revolving funds. (Kanel and Niraula, 2004).

Key Challenges and Opportunities

It is important to build on these lessons learned as forest communities face the future. Some of the key challenges and concomitant opportunities in community forestry are discussed below.

Scaling up of the CF program

With the exception of a few countries, advancing CF beyond the 'pilot' project sites remains a major challenge. One reason for this is a gap between national forest policy and national regulatory framework. Many countries have progressive forest sector policies and strategies that promote CF, but in many cases national laws have not been reformed to implement these policies (Moore, 2005). Without a supportive regulatory framework, CF programs can go up to a point, but no further. Another reason is that government forest officials tend to transfer responsibility for forest protection, but without authority (Gilmour et al., 2005), and allow only limited utilization of forest products – mainly for households' subsistence needs. This does not attract for local communities to invest human and financial resources in forest management.

Equitable distribution of benefits

CF programs have been introduced as part of the solution to deforestation and increasing supplies of forest products, especially fuel wood, to rural households. Moreover, earlier forest policies that excluded local people from the resource upon which they depend seemed unfair and inappropriate to many CF advocates. As CF programs progressed, issues relating to benefit sharing within and between the communities started to surface. Field studies have reported that CF programs have not benefited the poorer local community members as much as they could or should. For example, of the US\$10 million cash income generated from the community forests in Nepal, only 3% has been targeted to pro-poor activities (Kanel and Niraula, 2004). There is therefore a need to pay close attention to such inequities and find ways to mitigate them while preserving the positive effects of CF programs.

Forest product market

To date, CF programs have generally concentrated on activities relating to regeneration of degraded forestlands and/or protection of existing natural forests. Earlier CF programs were designed in response to deforestation and improving forest product supplies for household needs. Hence, overall, community forest management has emphasized limited utilization of forest products – generally only for household subsistence needs. A general perception is that once a forest is open for commercial use, it will lead to overexploitation.

Meanwhile, markets for forest products (both domestic and export) have expanded in recent years, with a significant increase in the number of small-scale forest-based enterprises (Molner, et al, 2006). In response to the market demands, private tree growers have responded by growing more trees on their land and the state forest agency has independently been signing agreements with forest industries for harvesting wood and other raw materials (generally from outside the community forests).

A passive, or lack of a proactive, response from the CF program means that only the state and/or private tree growers (who are often large landholders) can benefit from opportunities provided by the market. Local people – many of whom are poor, landless or small landholders who depend on and manage community forests – cannot take advantage of the opportunity. This serves as a disincentive, rather than an incentive, for CF (Malla, 1992).

Power relations and issues

CF is fundamentally about devolving authority and responsibility for forest management to local communities. While remarkable progress has been made in enabling representatives of these organizations to negotiate with government forestry agencies for forest management authority and responsibility, responses by different interest groups within and outside the community group, including those at national and international levels, have given rise to a range of new issues. For example:

- **Community/village level:** Different interest groups operate at the local level and they all have some stake in the village forest. Powerful male local elites are often reported to dominate forest management committees, and the wealthier households often seem to corner for themselves most of the community forestry benefits (Malla, 2000). As villagers increase sales of their timber and non-timber forest products, they encounter local powerful sales agents who jealously guard their own market. All this suggests that a supportive policy and legislative framework is an important but not a sufficient condition for effective CF programs (Malla, 2001; Capistrano and Colfer, 2005). Creating space for the poorer, less powerful groups, and within them, for women and other disadvantaged people, is important.
- **National level:** Major interest groups at the national level include the state (government), forest industry, tourism industry (especially ecotourism), environmentalists and NGOs / civil societies concerned with local communities' use rights to forests. Forest industry owners push for agreements for opening forests and felling areas for industrial use, environmentalists press for more forests to be included under the protected area system, and ecotourism operators declare forests as national parks. The NGOs and civil societies that advocate local communities' perspectives are probably the weakest of all these major groups. CF programs should support the existing, or help form, forest user associations / federations, with guidance for strategically lobbying for the local communities' case.
- **International level:** Some major driving forces include the expanding market for forest products (mainly arising through the recent economic growth of some Asian countries), international policy regimes/initiatives such as the convention for biodiversity and the convention for climate change, tropical timber trade agreements, moves for forest product certification, etc. Environmental NGOs are pushing to bring more forestlands under the public protected area system, whereas industry owners are pushing for agreements that would ensure regular supplies of wood and other raw material from the tropical forests and NGOs such as the Forest Stewardship Council are pressing for the trading of certified forest products. Again, very few NGOs and civil societies concerned with the local communities' perspectives operate at this level, and they have little influence on the outcomes of international meetings. Support is needed for these



NGOs / civil societies and the recently initiated GACF to be more strategic and influential in future meetings.

Impact of CF programs - livelihoods, forests and forest governance

The recent increase in attention to bigger social and environmental issues, such as poverty, global warming and poor governance, has further added to CF challenges. For major, long lasting impact, CF programs must contribute to poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability and improvement of forest sector governance.

- **Poverty alleviation:** Hundreds of millions of people live in and around the forests; many of them are very poor and depend solely on the forests for their livelihoods. While CF programs have generally benefited poor community members, they have not benefited the poorer members as much as they could and should. A specific pro-poor strategy is needed for CF to effectively contribute to poverty alleviation.
- **Environmental sustainability:** Most CF programs have been reasonably successful in rehabilitating degraded forestlands and managing existing natural forests. However, these community-managed forest areas, although substantial in size when combined, are too fragmented and scattered to have any major impact on the overall land use system. For CF programs to have a major, lasting impact by effectively restoring and managing large tracts of forest areas and by contributing to the environmental sustainability goal, they need to link their approaches to those proposed for ecosystem forestry or EF (Sayer and Maginnis, 2005). CF and EF can be complementary, as the former focuses on forestry activities on the ground through grassroots-level institutions, while the latter helps to scale-up forestry to the landscape level.
- **Forest sector governance:** The CF program has had some successes in developing a system or process for forest governance at the community level that is fairly inclusive, transparent and accountable. Government forest agencies are a major player at the national level and often they tend to act almost independently in forming policies related to the country's forest resources. In recent years, many issues related to forest governance have arisen, including policies and laws for decentralization, forest product trade and certification, illegal logging, increasing protected areas for biodiversity conservation, etc. Powerful interest groups representing industries and environmental activists try to influence the national policy processes. It is critical that forest user federations have space in such national forums, and that perspectives of local communities are well articulated and their use rights and other benefits from forests are considered.

Financing CF programs

Donor funds – from bilateral government programs, multilateral agencies like development banks, and private companies and organizations – have helped both initiate and expand CF programs. However, in recent years the overall availability of funds from these donors to CF programs has reduced significantly.

The CF program, with the exception of a few countries, is still in its early stages of development (Arnold, 2001), with some governments still revising their forest policies. These countries will take time before accepting CF as a mainstream national forestry program. Moreover, CF programs will need a longer timeframe to have positive, long lasting impact on social and environmental objectives such as poverty alleviation and climate change, and to mobilize

forest users associations and federations. Therefore, donors' support is still required to advance CF nationwide, as well as across the region and the world, and to contribute positively towards addressing bigger social and environmental goals.

However, in the long run, other sources of funding must be found. Among the various possible sources are forest industries, which could finance CF programs for supplying raw material but could also support forest communities as part of their corporate social responsibility. Another source is 'payment for ecosystem services' or PES – a concept that in recent years has drawn the attention of academics, environmentalists and donors alike, although it is unclear how this will benefit local communities for their services to forest resource protection and management. In some places, people are reported to have started experiments with such sources as water charges to downstream users, with the income applied for restoring forests that would in turn help steady water flow in the dry season. Another possibility is to tap into new funds being made available by government and private companies for tree planting in response to the threat of disruption to the earth's climatic pattern through excessive levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Securing funds through such varied sources for support to CF programs will be difficult, but necessary.

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2005 – RECOFTC becomes a member of the Civil Advisory Group of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), Yokohama.



What others are saying:

Tributes from longstanding friends and supporters



Dear Dr. Malla:

On behalf of Kasetsart University, I would like to offer my heartfelt congratulations to RECOFTC on completing its second decade of working – through community forestry – to reduce the region's poverty and conserve its environment.

The association between our two organizations has been a long and satisfying one, reaching back to the very birth of RECOFTC 20 years ago, to the vigorous region-wide debate on how to define community forestry in terms of training.

Dr. Somsak Sukwong, Dean of our Faculty of Forestry, was involved in early discussions for a regional training facility, and he designed the first Regional Community Forestry Certificate Course.

In 1987, our links became stronger as he became the organization's first Executive Director, transferring from Forestry to guide RECOFTC through its early years, including the building of its headquarters on land donated by Kasetsart University.

Since then ties between Kasetsart and RECOFTC have remained consistent and cordial – through our permanent member on your Board of Trustees, the exchange of ideas in frequent seminars and fora, your high profile on our campus, and the experience offered to student interns.

Again, congratulations to RECOFTC on reaching this 20-year milestone, and we look forward to many more years of a mutually rewarding association with its potential for helping so many.

Dhanirat Santivatr, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
President of Kasetsart University



Dear Dr. Malla,

In 1999, I was privileged to be involved in one of the high points of RECOFTC's now 20-year record. In that year the RECOFTC Charter was signed, a Board of Trustees was appointed and I was asked to be its first Chairman.

Twelve months later, the legal agreement enabling RECOFTC to officially operate as an international organization under Thai Law was signed. The Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific had come of age.

My appointment was personally satisfying because, as President of Kasetsart University, I was familiar with the institute's role in nurturing the nascent RECOFTC from a small unit in the Forestry Faculty to its present international status. I had seen long-term partnerships begin to develop strategies to address the changing needs and issues of local people's access to and control over forest resources.

During my term as Chairman, we realized many challenges lay ahead with the rapid development of community forestry. The answer was RECOFTC's Strategic Plan and Three Year Program, which recognized the need to move beyond regional and selective national level training and similar events, towards pursuing a more comprehensive and strategic set of regional, in-country and capacity-building activities together with national government and non-government organizations.

My congratulations on this latest well-earned achievement.

Dr. Thira Sutabutra
Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives,
Thailand
(Former President of Kasetsart University
and first Chairman of the RECOFTC Board
of Trustees)

Congratulatory Message from the Secretary-General, Commission on Higher Education, Thailand on the 20th Anniversary of RECOFTC's Founding

It is with great pleasure that I join with my colleagues in the Commission on Higher Education, Ministry of Education, in extending our sincere congratulations and best wishes to the Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC) on this, the 20th anniversary of its founding.

We are particularly mindful of our early endorsement of your training center and have watched its development over the past two decades with satisfaction and pride.

The Government of Thailand's confidence in your organization was perhaps expressed most clearly in 2000 when Parliament passed the RECOFTC Bill, formalizing its status as an international NGO.

Throughout the past two decades we have watched with interest RECOFTC's development, first as a training center and later the expansion of its programs to include networking and regional and in-country field activities. Today RECOFTC plays a leading role in promotion of community-based management of forest resources throughout the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

The center's hosting of international forums, including seminars, conferences and training courses, and the provision of technical assistance have brought credit on Thailand and highlighted a national commitment to sustainable development through effective management of forest and other natural resources to help both the poor and the environment. We are pleased to be a part of the building of an organization such as RECOFTC.

More challenges remain, but at this 20th year mark, RECOFTC and its staff and partners have fully demonstrated their abilities and sense of purpose in meeting the hurdles facing both their organization and community forestry.

Congratulations again on two decades of achievement.

Krissanapong Kirtikara, Ph.D.



**2005 – The First Regional Community Forestry Forum
reviews the regulatory frameworks for community
forestry in Asia.**

The Ambassador of Switzerland



Dear Dr. Malla,

On behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, it gives me great satisfaction and pleasure to extend my sincere congratulations to the Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC) on the 20th anniversary of its founding.

FAO's relationship with RECOFTC goes back to a point even before the center was born – to the support we gave its founding Director, Dr. Somsak Sukwong, as he planned a "social forestry curriculum" at Kasetsart University in the mid-1980s. This pioneering course was to eventually develop into the Regional Community Forestry Training Center, now an international organization celebrating its 20th anniversary.

Since its founding in 1945, FAO has focused special attention on rural development and improving the food security, livelihoods and opportunities of the world's poor, while protecting the natural resources so vital for current and future generations. Consequently FAO values highly the opportunity to work in partnership with organizations such as RECOFTC that share similar goals and objectives.

I could cite hundreds of examples of the outstanding collaboration and partnership between FAO and RECOFTC over the years. One of the most noteworthy aspects of our partnerships was RECOFTC's valuable collaboration with FAO's Forests, Trees and People Program. Spanning nearly a decade, with projects in 10 Asian countries, the program helped solidify both of our organizations' reputations as champions of "people-oriented forestry."

So it is with particular pleasure that we congratulate RECOFTC on reaching its 20th anniversary and we look forward to continued collaboration in the future.

He Changchul
Assistant Director-General and
Regional Representative,
FAO – Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

Dear Mr. Executive Director,

Global temperatures, water usage and tree farming are all related to healthy forest management by man.

Where forest exploitation has become excessive or damaging, woodland is under threat and, as a matter of consequence, the future of humans is at risk.

Switzerland and the Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC) have been active partners since the foundation of the center 20 years ago in Bangkok.

It means that Switzerland has been helping to provide professionals with new skills and capabilities to successfully implement community forestry in Asia and the Pacific.

From the start in 1987 to 2004, the Swiss input to RECOFTC reached 10.6 million Swiss francs (about US\$6.6 million). For the present period until 2008, Switzerland will add another 2.8 million CHF (or US\$2 million) as a strong involvement in this international organisation in which we trust.

Everyone knows that money alone is not the decisive factor of success. Moreover, training calls for competence and a long-term view, as trees require care and time to grow.

Above all the figures, the Swiss contribution to RECOFTC is a consistent undertaking: a pledge to sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, two regions where environmental issues, as elsewhere on the planet, are in fact linked to the economic blooming and cultural existence of local populations. It is a core issue for public policies and human life.

With RECOFTC, the international community has added an original instrument to environmental and development cooperation, as underlined in the 1999 RECOFTC Charter.

This Charter is more than an official act of mutual trust: it is the expression of a will to teach long-term sustainability and a belief in community-based forestry work against unevenness and fragility.

Our common goal is to improve the livelihoods of local people in Asia and the Pacific by creating greater access to and control over the forest resources on which they depend, by assisting them to exercise their rights and manage these resources in a supportive way.

I thank you, Mr. Executive Director, for your wise leadership at RECOFTC and wish you all the success in the search for new partners, including the private sector, ready to go along with the planned direction of RECOFTC in a changing world.

Rodolphe S. Imhoof

2005-06 – RECOFTC receives a formal mandate for operation in Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.



RECOFTC and community forestry: A shared journey

Context	General response	RECOFTC's response
1970s <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Energy crisis (fossil fuel) - High population growth and food shortage - Awareness of the limitation of top down approaches to development with focus on industries and capital cities - Deforestation and environmental impact (drought in Africa and flooding in Asia, shortage of fuel wood and other forest products) - Need for new approach to agriculture, rural development and forestry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programs for population control - Shift of focus to people's participation in agriculture and rural development, and tree planting for wood fuel and for prevention of soil erosion and landslides - 1973: India's National Planning Commission introduces social forestry program - 1978: Nepal introduces CF rules and regulations to the country's Forest Act 1961 - 1978: FAO/Sida convene expert group on forestry for local community development based on experiences of India (social forestry), South Korea (village woodlots), Thailand (forest villages), Nepal (village/ community forestry), Tanzania (village afforestation) and elsewhere - 1978: World Forestry Congress – Forests for People - 1978: FAO launches paper on Forestry for Local Community Development - 1978: The World Bank's new forest policy - 1978: Initiation of International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) - 1979: FAO Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development 	-
1980s <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater awareness of the impact of deforestation on environment and local people's livelihoods, and the lack of access to basic needs by rural people – drinking water, education, health facilities, etc. - Awareness of the important role of women in natural resources, and issues facing them and other disadvantaged groups - Awareness of local people's knowledge of natural resources and their effort to manage these resources - Awareness of limitations to earlier rural development and forestry approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initiation of IRDPs (integrated rural development projects) with emphasis on basic needs – agriculture, livestock, forestry, soil conservation, drinking water, irrigation, health, education and others - 1981: UN Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and the FAO Fuel Wood Map, which focus on energy needs - Community Forestry Unit is set up within the FAO's Forest Department - 1982: The Philippines initiates Integrated Social Forestry Program - Forestry field projects with emphasis on reforestation and creating new village level resources to meet subsistence needs and develop forest products - Like most agricultural and rural development projects, most forestry projects allocate massive budgets to train field staff in community forestry in their own countries and abroad, and to involve women and other disadvantaged groups in forestry activities - Support to create new training division within the existing forest ministries and educational institutes - 1985: FAO explores forestry education institutes interested in serving as a regional training center for community forestry in Asia and approaches the then Dean at Kasetsart University's Forestry Faculty in Bangkok, Thailand - India: Joint Forest Management Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1987: Regional Community Forestry Training Center (RECOFTC) is set up for training field project staff in community forestry - 1989: Introduces a six month Certificate Course in Community Forestry, with focus on skills in participatory approaches to forestry
1990s <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic growth of some developing nations, especially China, Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia, and their impact on the global economies - Awareness of the bigger environmental issues – loss of biodiversity, global warming, and the importance of tropical forests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1992: World Convention for Environment and Development – environmental issues arising from global warming and loss of biodiversity - International Conventions on Biological Diversity and Climate Change - Funding shift to gender programs and to tropical forest countries, with focus on biodiversity conservation and establishment of protected areas (World Heritage forests, national parks, etc.) - Structural adjustment program to reduce government spending - Initiation of Global Environmental Facility and National Forest Program - FAO Forests, Trees and People Program (FTPP) in Africa, Asia and Latin America for networking with field projects and dissemination of lessons learned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RECOFTC takes charge of FAO's FPPP for South East Asia and starts a Documentation Center for CF information dissemination - Initiates Thailand outreach program with support from Ford Foundation - Introduces a number of open subscription training courses, including



2006 – RECOFTC becomes a founding member of the international coalition Rights and Resources Initiative with CIFOR, IUCN and Forest Trends.

Context	General response	RECOFTC's response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness of the limitations of developing nations to pay back development loans - Awareness of the importance of NGOs, civil societies and the private sector in development and environmental programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1993: Nepal passes Community Forestry Act, recognizing forest users' rights to forest - 1997: The Philippines approves act for indigenous people's ancestral domain rights to forests - Field projects start to demand training beyond generic topics and themes. Courses that focus on specific issues are presented in individual countries and project sites using national languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> marketing of non-timber forest products, community forestry extension, protected area management, and conflict management in natural resources - Steps towards making RECOFTC an international organization (charter prepared and signed by 6 Mekong countries and Swiss government in 1998)
<p>2000s</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased awareness of the impact of the growing economies of China and India in the world market and environment - Increased awareness of the rapid growth of urban population, the widening gap between rural and urban areas and between poor and rich people, and the persistence of rural poverty - Further emphasis on climate change and other bigger environmental agendas - Feeling of increased human insecurity through wars with terrorists and natural disasters and diseases, such as tsunami and SARS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2002: World Summit for Sustainable Development, with world leaders endorsing the Millennium Development Goals to halve the number of people living below the poverty line and to ensure environmental sustainability by 2015 - In the forest sector, a general move towards multi-stakeholder and landscape level planning, and payment for ecosystem services - FAO focuses on sustainable forest management and closes its CF unit - More Asian national governments revise their national forest policy, with provisions for CF. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2000: Indonesia establishes a new regulatory process by which community ownership can be recognized - 2002: Cambodia parliament passes CF law - 2003: Vietnam approves CF legislation - 2005: Lao PDR introduces 20-year forest strategy, with village forestry component - 2006: India passes tribal bills to secure indigenous people's use rights to forestland - A global Rights and Resources Initiative on poverty and forests is established through informal coalition partnership of a number of organizations operating at national, regional and international levels in Asia, Pacific, Europe and South and North America - Increased preference by forestry field projects and donor communities to sponsor training activities at the individual country level - Initiation of Global Alliance for Community Forestry by forest user associations federations in Nepal, Guatemala, PNG, Costa Rica and a range of other civil societies and forestry networks in Africa, Europe and North America 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2000: Thai parliament endorses RECOFTC as an international organization - Transition of RECOFTC (2001-2004) from a Thai to an international organization, including leadership change in November 2002 - 2004: A five-year strategic plan with three major programs – regional analysis, capacity building services and country program support – and new teams - Policy to continue to remain focused on community-based management of forest and related natural resources, with emphasis on impact on forest and local people's livelihoods and partnerships with regional and international organizations - Steps to occupy regional space for CF and to fill the vacuum created by the closure of FAO's CF unit - Gains formal mandate to operate in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia and Vietnam; process underway in other countries - 2005: Initiates Regional CF Forum, takes steps towards in-country capacity building - 2006: Joins in founding the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI). Signs project agreements with ODI, IIED, Ford Foundation, DANIDA, WWF, RRG, UNDP and World Bank - Opens project offices in Cambodia and Indonesia - Initiates fundraising through the private sector

2007 – Second Community Forestry Forum reviews benefit sharing from community forestry. International conference on Poverty Reduction and Forests: Tenure, Market and Policy Reforms is held with RRI.



Dr. Yam Malla: A lifetime in community forestry

To RECOFTC Executive Director **Dr. Yam Malla**, community forestry is not just about engaging local communities in planting trees, protecting forests and training forestry field staff. So what is it?

Dr. Malla said that community forestry “is about local communities assuming the role of forest custodians, securing their use and access rights to forests, giving them a fair share of income from the forest product trade with industry and – of special importance – having them play more proactive roles in the overall governance of the forest sector, including the formulation of national policies and regulations.” All of this, he said, represents a huge challenge – and opportunity – for RECOFTC.

Dr. Malla’s role as an authority on community forestry is based on a familiarity with “forests and trees in villages and farmers’ fields” that began long before he studied forestry at an English university. A supportive professor guided him to a master’s program in agriculture extension and, more significantly, exposure to development and environmental problems facing emerging countries.

Working as a rural development adviser on a forestry project in Nepal first introduced him to RECOFTC. His relationship with one of the few organizations to offer courses on community forestry grew, and in 2002 he was appointed its second Executive Director.

The task was not easy. “Although RECOFTC had been declared an international organization, we had yet to find out what it all meant in practice. RECOFTC had served well as a community forestry training center until the mid-1990s. However, with increased attention to poverty and other bigger environmental issues, RECOFTC’s long standing clients, partners and donors had started to wonder about the relevance of RECOFTC activities. Many field projects and donors had stopped sponsoring participants to RECOFTC courses.”

Dr. Malla identified two challenges: ensuring RECOFTC was relevant and useful to clients and partners, and lifting its management and operations to the standard of similar organizations internationally. Solving these problems was to occupy him for the next two years, during which time he received full support from the Board of Trustees and the new program and support teams.

This brings us back to the opening question: the nature of community forestry. The fate of RECOFTC and the changing perceptions of community forestry were closely linked.



Dr. Malla has been watching the rise and fall of field projects over three decades and has found a significant shift in assumptions and approaches. In the 1970s, farmers were generally seen to be the main ‘cause’ of deforestation and the perceived solution was to ‘educate’ them about the importance of forests and trees and ‘motivate’ them to plant and protect the resource.

Today, we look up to local communities’ knowledge of forests, trees, and related natural resources for understanding resource use patterns and trends, history and ideas for future uses and for building partnerships to manage the resources in a sustainable way. In the 1980s deforestation and a shortage of forest products for rural households, especially in developing countries, were a major concern. Today, issues such as poverty and climate change have become the main global agenda items. While many countries have community forestry policies, there are few field projects to support implementation of the policies and legislation.

Meanwhile, rural poverty persists where government forest policies and regulations deny local communities the right to use forests and concession policies often lead to unsustainable use of forest resources, resulting in the loss of both biodiversity and community livelihoods. “I cannot foresee for another several decades an alternative strategy to community-based forest management, at least in developing countries,” said Dr. Malla.

Dr. Malla believes that it is time for RECOFTC to move beyond the narrow focus of training field foresters. Instead, RECOFTC needs to build capacities of both individuals and institutions, including government and non-government organizations, civil societies and community-based organizations concerned with forest and related natural resources; to play a more active role in policy processes; to establish links between local innovations and global initiatives for poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation; and to help present perspectives of local communities and forest users at national, regional and international forums.

“I believe RECOFTC is ready to take on these challenges. I am confident our strategic partners and interested donors will join hands to turn them into opportunities to make a difference,” he said.



2007 – This year Switzerland is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations with Laos and Cambodia.

Our support and where it comes from

RECOFTC is funded largely by monetary and grant support from multilateral and governmental agencies, foundations and institutions.

International and regional donors, sponsors and partners

Asia Foundation
AusAID
Denmark's International Development Assistance (DANIDA)
Department for International Development of the UK (DFID)
European Commission
Ford Foundation
East-West Center
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
Forest Trends
German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ)
Global Environment Facility (GEF)
International Agricultural Centre (IAC)
International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR)
International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)
International Model Forest Network Secretariat
International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)
IUCN-World Conservation Union
Japanese Social Development Fund (JSDF/World Bank)
Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
Kenan Institute
LTS International
Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme
Mekong River Commission (MRC)
The Mountain Institute
Non-Timber Forest Products Sub-Sector Support Project
Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
Regional Government Forestry Agencies
Rights and Resources Group
Royal Norwegian Government
Royal Thai Government
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
Toyota Foundation
United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
University of Reading's International and Rural Development Department
US Agency for International Development (USAID)
WWF UK

Bhutan

Helvetas - Bhutan

Cambodia

CBNRM Learning Institute
Community Forestry Alliance for Cambodia/Community Forestry International (CFAC/CFI)
Forestry Administration
Ministry of Environment

China

China Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Biodiversity Conservation (CIBIC)
National Studies on Community Development (NSCD)
Ford Foundation China
State Forest Administration

India

Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM)
Vasundhara
Winnock International India
WWF India

Indonesia

Ministry of Forestry
Ford Foundation Indonesia
LATIN

Lao PDR

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
National Agriculture and Forest Research Institute (NAFRI)
National University of Laos
SNV Laos

Nepal

Community and Private Forestry Division, Department of Forests
Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal (FECOFUN)
Forest Action
Institute of Forestry, Pokhara
Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project
Women Acting Together for Change (WATCH)

Philippines

Asia Forest Network (AFN)
International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR)
Training Center for Tropical Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability (TREES)

Thailand

Community Development Institution
Dhammanath Foundation
Forestry Industry Organization (FIO)
Joint Management of Protected Areas, National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department
Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme - Songkhram Lower Basin Thailand
National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department
Phu Khieo - EU Project, National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department
PTT Public Company Limited
Rak Thai Foundation (CARE - Thailand)
Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development, Chiang Mai University
Responsible Ecological Social Tour Project (REST)
Royal Forest Department (RFD)
Thailand Research Fund Regional Office

Vietnam

Extension and Training Support Project (ETSP)
Forest Department, Ministry of Agriculture and Development
Helvetas - Vietnam
SNV Vietnam
University of Forestry, Vietnam

On this promising occasion, 50 trees will be planted in RECOFTC project sites in both countries as a symbolic act of trust in the future of community forestry and as a contribution to a green planet for this generation and the generations to come.

Mr. Rodolphe S. Imhoof, Ambassador of Switzerland, Bangkok



RECOFTC's people 2007



Who designed RECOFTC's logo?

Ying-Yu Chen, a 14-year-old student from Taiwan, won a competition organized in 1987 (yes, 20 years ago) at the International School of Bangkok. Sixty entries were submitted, responding to a request for representation of the relationship between people and trees, and to include the concept of community in the design.

The winner explained: "Gold lines represent the international organization; the green tree in the center represents the source of life for all living creatures; people support the tree with true love (blue), and we support the world."

Our current logo, the gold figure 20 super-imposed on the original, is the work of Bede Key, RECOFTC's information technology manager.



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