

# **Social Forestry and Community Based Forest Management: Impact Beyond Forests**

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In most countries with tropical forests, much of the naturally grown forest resources continue to be owned by the state. In order to achieve the objective of conserving forests and benefiting from them at the same time, however, forestry needs to be freed from its sectoral and institutional isolation and to be brought back into society as a factor for development.

This requires cooperation and partnership between governments and other stakeholders, with the people living in and around forests playing a pivotal role.

From this perspective, participatory types of forest management, that is “social forestry”, community based forest management, co-management etc, stop being a mere counter-model to the classic state-oriented forestry and become a key element of change in the continuous challenge of building *pluralism* in forestry. They represent an important step towards extending the capacity of both the state and civil society to manage forests in a sustainable manner (thus conserving their ecological functions), towards increasing value-generation from goods and services from forest and towards sustainable (rural) development.

## **I The impact analysis**

The basis of this analysis is an examination of experience gained in projects of German bilateral technical co-operation. The scope was consciously not regionally restricted and includes projects which aim to enhance the development of communal forestry and participatory management in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania.

I would like to thank a number of projects for their support and their readiness to engage in discussions, for their comments and for providing access to

documents. Special thanks must go to the ‘Gambian German Forestry Project’ (GGFP) and the sister projects CRDFP<sup>1</sup> and URDFP<sup>2</sup> in The Gambia who made an in-depth empirical study possible.<sup>3</sup>

In order to grasp the specific significance and potential impact of participatory forest management and projects in support of it and furthermore to gain insights into how this potential can be put into practice, we need to consider the following questions:

- What constitute ‘critical’ conditions of success of participatory forest management? I.e. issues concerning economic viability, the political and legal framework, the degree of institutionalisation etc., that is, circumstances to which special attention must be given in the run up to projects in support of community based forest management, in their conception and implementation.
- Where do ‘typical’ problems and weaknesses in the approach and conception of such initiatives lie?
- What strategies are developed to deal with certain negative conditions (for example the absence of a beneficial political and legal framework)?
- What strategic insights can be gained for the specific problems of projects in support of participatory forest management?
- What consequences should be drawn for the design of *impact analysis* and ‘*monitoring and evaluation*’ procedures?

Before some of the findings are presented, it seems useful to take another look at the conceptual framework within which the need for a change of roles in forest management is grounded.

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<sup>1</sup> Central River Division Forestry Project (Financial Cooperation /Technical Cooperation)

<sup>2</sup> Upper River Division Forestry Project (EU)

<sup>3</sup> All three projects are being carried out by the DFS Co. Ltd. in cooperation with the European Volunteers Programme/German Development Service.

## II The call for “social” forestry

The starting point for the endeavour to develop “social” forestry in countries with tropical forests is a given situation in which the state has a monopoly in the management and conservation of forest resources. Of twelve projects in twelve different countries, which were included in the study, the concept of ‘the forest as the responsibility of the state’ was the core policy principle for all of them with one exception, namely Fiji.

The roots of this concept of the forest as a state domain lie in feudal Europe. The term “forest” originally a *legal* term: it referred to a woodland area or to resources within it, which were reserved for the king’s use. *Inforestation* was the action of restricting forest use to the king or those favoured with a royal charter (foris, forestare = Latin for ‘outside’, ‘no access’)<sup>4</sup>. Control of the forest and the game living within it, and later also timber supplies, was thereby placed within the domain of the central governing authority.

The transfer of this concept to tropical forests is usually of colonial origin<sup>5</sup>. Enhanced by the prevailing political, administrative and economic conditions<sup>6</sup>, it has resulted in the basic principle of a forest policy almost totally divorced from the social context of forest use and control by the adjoining farming population, i.e. the traditional users and owners of these resources.

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<sup>4</sup> A comprehensive account of forest legislative history on ‘forest’ and ‘woods’ from the Middle Ages until the turn of the century can be found in *Weber, H.* Handbuch der Forstwissenschaft, Bd. 4: Forstgeschichte, Forstliche Rechtskunde, Forstpolitik, Tübingen 1927.

<sup>5</sup> This transfer was characterised mainly by the repressive and authoritarian elements of European Forestry. The liberalisation of forestry from the turn of the century onwards was not passed on to the colonies.

<sup>6</sup> An important factor in the post-colonial retention and expansion of this system in well forested countries was the hope of economic growth fuelled by the export of tropical timber. See *Clément, J.*, The development of ideas and programmes for tropical forestry since 1946, in: *Bois et Forests des Tropiques*, 1997, Special Issue.

To this day, in spite of all changes in forest policy discourse, the state-controlled forest model has remained the predominate system in tropical forest countries. 'State crises' and 'forest crises' are thus intimately linked. The conflicts and problems inherent in the insufficient societal integration of the state manifest themselves particularly plainly in the forest sector: the chronic ailment is a deep rift between forest authorities and rural populations, the acute illness are the assaults upon state-controlled forests which constitute a "No!" to the system they represent; and the structural malaise in which forests become irrelevant through under-use, or are destroyed by wanton exploitation. Forest degradation is therefore connected to four principle problems of the classic statist forestry:

1. The causes of forest degradation extend far beyond the forest sector itself. Classic attempts at solving the problems remain within the sector and treat only the symptoms. Corresponding concepts of forest resource management and conservation consist primarily of sectoral responses, while the pressure on forests is usually of trans-sectoral origin.
2. State structures lack the capability to do justice to their claim to a monopoly over the management of forest resources. Their capacities do not suffice to guarantee monitoring and management, leading to the widespread phenomenon of the 'state forest' as an area *de facto* free of legal constraints and control.
3. By divorcing forest management from the established social structure of local users and traditional owners, a crucial stock of capital for sustainable forest use and management is lost: social control, commitment and the binding force of local institutions. State-controlled forests are the extreme case: as a 'social no-man's land', they become the preferred terrain for encroachment and illegal uses.
4. Forest output and value generation in forestry is mainly absorbed on the national and international levels and has only a minute local or regional impact. Regional development effects through forestry and concessions remain negligible. Nor is there any impetus for the development of functional management structures on site. Value generation also remains far short of its potential because it is based on a resource that is for the most part not

controlled and that is monetarily undervalued as a result of nearly total open access. The losers in this process are rural areas as producers, and the forests themselves, which remain unattractive as a form of land use.

### **III First steps for relinking the forest to civil society**

The first attempts to re-integrate forestry and forest value generation back into (civil) society, i.e. to honour claims on forests and to mobilise management capacities beyond state administrations, date from the 1970s.

The focus of these efforts lay at first in drier zones and in areas that were ecologically particularly sensitive, the main goal being to secure the ecological base that sustains the rural population. The key activity area was comprised of afforestation measures bound up with an approach that placed “communality” and subsistence orientation (i.e. *village* afforestation programmes) at the fore. The issue of the management of *natural* forest resources, with some few exceptions, continued to be ignored. *Community forestry* (1970s/FAO), *social forestry* (1976/India) and finally *farm forestry*, which focused more particularly on the interests of individual enterprises, constituted important stages in terms of strategy.<sup>7</sup>

Widespread deficiencies of these early community oriented approaches to social forestry were:

- the presence of conflicting goals among the respective ecological, social and income-generation objectives, which affected implementation;
- that quantitative goals with their related incentive systems (e.g. food for work) ended up in becoming ends in themselves;
- that ‘community’ orientation was accompanied by underestimation of the potential for conflict among interest groups and by insufficient consideration of land and tree tenure issues;

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<sup>7</sup> See FAO, *Community forestry, ten years in review*, CF Note 7, Rome 1992.

- over-emphasis was put on the ‘subsistence’ factor, which was accompanied by timidity in regard to dealing with the economic interests of rural resource users and in regard to developing commercial forest production by farmers, coupled with a tendency to underestimate market economy aspects;
- there was a tendency to create a dichotomy between classical ‘forestry’ – “bad” on the one hand and ‘social forestry’ – “good” on the other.

A noticeable reorientation with regard to the management of *existing, natural-growth forest resources* only began in the mid-80s in a climate of growing international debate over the issue of tropical forest depletion. This reorientation experienced a boost in the 1990s, which in turn received international support through UNCED and the process following in its wake.

In regard to strategy development, the new orientation of the 1980s was accompanied by a shift from a predominantly *sectoral* perspective to a *trans sectoral* perspective: management and conservation of forest resources came to be seen within the larger context of sustainable management of *natural resources* as a whole, and particularly, in view of the direct competition between agricultural and forestry interests for available land, the sustainable management of land resources.

And furthermore, the evolution of strategy was placed within the broader context of *rural development* and the *economic* and *social viability* of sustainable forest management, not only as a consequence of confronting the issue of poverty-induced overexploitation, but also in view of an increase in the value of the “standing forest” to those living near it – e.g. in terms of gaining sources of income from the nearby forest, which increases the attractiveness of sustainable forest management as an alternative form of land use.

- ‘*Integrated forestry*’, ‘*joint forest management*’, ‘*collaborative forest management*’ and ‘*forestry for rural development*’ are the cornerstones of this new orientation:

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- *Integrated forestry*: In ‘classical’ forestry co-operation, attempts to cope with the failure of existing strategies for tropical forest conservation led to the concept of ‘*integrated*’ forestry projects being developed in the 1980s<sup>8</sup>. Without going so far as to question the state monopoly over forests, integrated forest management aims to reduce the deficiencies of previous approaches by integrating the economic and social functions of forests, by placing greater emphasis on the significance of value added locally, and above all by employing a more trans-sectoral approach in order to confront the growing pressure on forest resources and forest land by adjoining resource users.
  - The concepts of ‘*joint forest management*’ and ‘*collaborative forest management*’ are another matter. These became significant primarily in the 1990s. *Structural changes* in forest management are sought chiefly by means of changes on the level of the *actors*. The goal is management co-operation between the state and civil society, in which the rural population, user groups, NGOs and the private sector all act as responsible participants. This co-operation posits as a premise that all sides participate in the management and conservation of the forest resources and in the (economic) benefits as well as the burdens.

A key factor in this concept is the acknowledgement that important potential for the development, implementation and control of management agreements and thus for supervising the use and exploitation of forest resources and forestland lies with the users and adjoining populations themselves.

Other recent and relevant concrete implementation approaches are, for example, *contract management* and *nature conservation by agreement*, which are founded on multilateral agreements between, for example, the state or forestry administration on the one hand and rural communities or user groups on the

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<sup>8</sup> First examples of this type of project can be found in the late 1970s, that is at a time when the World Forestry Conference on ‘Forests and Peoples’ initiated the international discussion calling forestry to contribute to *rural* development. Of more interest in this paper, however, is at what point a project type became more broadly ‘established’.

other, or between a combination of the state or forestry administration, rural communities or user groups and the private sector.

## **The 1990s**

If the paradigm shift in forestry gets bogged down in a dichotomy between classical forestry on the one hand and isolated instances of ‘social’ or participatory forestry on the other, it will remain insignificant as a foundation for the broader improvement of forest resource management.

A significant impact on management structures and institutions as well as on the forested area itself will only be possible if we succeed to move from isolated solutions to a pluralistic kind of forest management in which the supervisory and management potential existing outside of the public sector are brought into play effectively, comprehensively and on a permanent basis.

With the question of how much institutionalisation “social” forestry would need in order to significantly tap its performance potential, the focus is brought back to the framework for such a change in terms of forest policy, legislation (forestry law, land legislation, financial and administrative legislation...), economic conditions, etc., which prepare the ground for new actors to come into play.

In fact, the scope for implementing a participation-oriented or community based management of forest resources remains limited. Even where it is already a stated policy goal, a favourable environment remains to be developed for the blossoming of management capacities outside of the public sector. The dialogue among the participants concerning a redistribution of management tasks and rights in regard to forest resources and also concerning the creation of appropriate framework conditions is thus of great significance for both the present and the immediate future.

## **IV What does the ‘social’ in social forestry mean?**

If one poses anew, with this background in mind, the question of what “social” forestry is, it is clear that it actually covers a number of “social” dimensions.

These ‘dimensions’ are relevant to all projects of this type, though to varying degrees and with differing challenges in their concrete implementation.

- "Social" forestry is "social" in the sense of seeking to achieve *local development effects* by generating value from forest resources, whilst at the same time addressing of the social viability issues raised in ecologically sustainable forest management:
  - through *direct participation* by the adjoining rural communities *in forest output*
  - through integration of the *resource use interests* of the adjoining population
  - through *expansion* of the adjoining population's scope (legal, economic) to engage in sustainable, forest-resource conserving forms of land use.
- Social forestry is ‘social’ in the sense of being socially-integrated: key functions in relation to forest resources and forest products such as
  - *control and decision-making authority*
  - *management and conservation services*
  - *know-how and service tasks*
  - *investment and output*

are not concentrated in the hand of a state institution or a private concessionaire, but are in part or totally transferred (back) to civil society (e.g. to user-groups, communal resource management institutions, service NGOs etc.). Management potential and productivity dormant within civil society are thus mobilised.

- Social forestry is ‘social’ in the sense of being ‘*socially configured*’: that is, adaptable, dynamic, responsive to the context and social environment. “Social” forestry takes varying forms depending on the particular (political, economic, cultural, ecological) environment, and remains flexible because of the "social creativity" of the participating interest groups shaping it. Social viability and social integration as described above can, besides, only be

forthcoming when social forestry reacts flexibly to the development of new constellations of interests, to alterations in the pressure for exploitation and to changes in framework conditions.

- Finally, it is social in the sense of being by itself '*socially constructing*' and contributing itself to social change:
  - Participation-oriented forest management constitutes an important area for the concrete implementation of reform processes: decentralisation, institutional pluralism, etc., in the sense of a renegotiation of rights, mandates and responsibilities for both the state and civil society. The close links between forests and the structural problems of the state, in conjunction with the potential that forestry has to substantially restructure relationships between the state and civil society, make them a key sector for social processes of reform.
  - Social forestry projects thus always have a *political dimension*. They can be important impulses for effective, that is, substantive decentralisation, in that they introduce "decentralisation content" in a very concrete manner through the reconfiguration of resource management. Such projects can, besides, make important contributions to pragmatic, application-related policy development and then draw the benefits from the resulting policies themselves.
- It always includes a *conflict management* and *harmonising of interests* dimension (resource users  $\Leftrightarrow$  state or private sector; user groups among one another), since it grows out of the negotiation and agreement processes of various interest groups under changing conditions and provides an impetus for redistribution processes related to access and control over resources.
- It always has, besides, implications in regard to changes in *society's institutional landscape*', that is, participation in resource management can only be effective ecologically if it goes hand in hand with the (further) development of appropriate management institutions and organisations.

- It always has an *economic dimension*: Participation in management of forest resources does not stop with the forest. In order to be ecologically relevant, it must be echoed in sales structures and product chains; that is, the new managers need to make a place for themselves as a new force in the management system as a whole.

### **Risks and ‘side’ effects**

"Social" or pluralistic forestry contributes to a multiplication of the number of legal players involved in forest resource use. If it is not to increase the risk of contributing to non-sustainable forest use, it must also involve the development of conservation and exploitation agreements that include an element *of social commitment* by the participants, as well *as functional monitoring procedures and instruments*.



**Photo 1:**  
**Conventional logging in this forest in Malaysia damages the forest ecosystem irretrievably**

A key requirement for the emergence of this kind of binding character is that the *mandate* for the management of forest resources does not only come

\* from the *top down*, that is from the state to civil society, but also

\* from the bottom up

that is, from the resource users to "their" management organisation.

If this mandate "from the bottom up" is not forthcoming, these institutions will not be in a position to fulfil their role and will remain for their part ineffective as regulating and monitoring instances for resource use.

This "issuing of the mandate" by resource users is not necessarily based on the legitimisation patterns usual in western culture, such as the "democratic election" of a "management committee" or a "village forest committee". It will rather draw its effectiveness from whatever variety of legitimacy is integral to the culture of the resource users. Two aspects deserve particular attention in this respect:

- Firstly, the *potential of the informal legal system and institutions* in resource utilisation. Depending on the cultural context, *informal legal systems* such as traditional tenure can constitute an important foundation for the legitimacy and social acceptance of management institutions (this impact analysis would suggest that this is particularly significant for Africa).
- Secondly, well-known key terms such as *participation, process orientation, impact monitoring* take on their own particular meaning during the formation of social commitment, legal accountability and of control mechanisms for management agreements.

## **V The projects**

An overview of the projects in the impact analysis shows that all of them have flanking activities related to nearly all of the dimensions mentioned above, i.e. activities

- related to framework conditions
- related to social and economic viability

➤ and related to the fields of conflict management and institution building.

At the same time, they cover a wide spectrum regarding objectives, approaches and ecological location, being situated in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania.

According to their *objectives*, the projects may be roughly divided into two separate categories:

1. Projects that have *forest conservation itself* (and/or sustainable management) as their primary goal and which promote participation-oriented management primarily as an *instrument* employed for the development of sustainable management
2. Projects that do not promote forest conservation and sustainable management of forest resources by the population as an independent goal, but rather as a *contribution to the improvement of livelihood* and to *stabilise the ecological situation* of rural areas.

The line between the two categories is fluid to the extent that participation-oriented management is and must be directly linked to the interests of the actors: As an "instrument" for developing sustainable forest management, participation-oriented management can only be effective if investments in sustainable use and management are attractive and at least viable economically for the participants in terms of their various benefits. One important prerequisite for "attractiveness" are for instance long-term guaranties in access to rights and benefits.

Differences among the projects in both categories emerge along methodological lines, that is, with regard to the importance attributed to trans sectoral issues or the role ascribed to the promotion of non-forest sources of income.

In the project approaches, furthermore, a series of *impact assumptions* come to apply - explicitly or implicitly. As working hypotheses, they play a key role with regard to the success of the respective approach.

For example:

Assumptions about *interest in sustainable use*, e.g.:

- “If access and rights of the local population over natural resources are secured in the long term, people will be motivated to use these resources on a sustainable basis and to apply forest-conserving land-use methods.”
- “A return of state forests to the hands of the population raises their interest and engagement in forest conservation and sustainable management.”
- “Active participation of the population in the management of public forests increases the sustainability of utilisation.”

Assumptions made on *conservation and management capacity*.

- “If the adjoining population is involved in the use and management of forests it contributes actively to their conservation.”
- “Conservation and management capacity will be improved by including non-governmental players (adjoining population).”

Assumptions made on the *sustainability of afforestation measures*, e.g.:

- “Privatisation increases the sustainability of afforestation measures.”

Assumptions made on the *reduction of pressure for exploitation*, e.g.:

- “Increase of income from other sectors leads to a reduction of income generation based on illegal or unsustainable forest use.”

The step of addressing such (implicit) impact assumptions of "social" forestry and community based forest management by means of indicators and/or by systematically documenting the experience and observations made with it is not yet a matter of course in all projects. However, a clear shift to critical monitoring is becoming apparent. Projects are increasingly implementing systematic impact observation with regard to ecological and economic effects, and are applying concrete managerial indicators whilst doing so.

The following three areas were notable as *frequently recurring problem areas* for projects in support of "social" forestry and community based forest management:

## **Challenge I**

### **Dealing with detrimental political and legal framework conditions**

The political will of partner countries to permit and implement a redistribution of power and legal entitlements is a key question for participation-oriented projects.

Until now, most projects have operated under state forest policies and legislation where no conclusive answer to this question has emerged. Wherever state regulations have already been reformed, implementation is mostly nascent, and runs counter to classic distributions of roles among the administration and the population. Often it does not converge with the interest of individual decision-makers. Over-regulation and other bureaucratic hurdles as well as the lack of appropriate financial facilities create important additional barriers.

It is essential to take this into consideration when designing the project. Overly ambitious targets and tight schedules are poor starting points for a realistic support strategy. The same applies to the criteria for discontinuing a project when the political will for implementation is really absent. If these criteria are formulated in a strictly formal fashion ("amended legislation", "granting of pilot status", ...), they can easily lead projects into a conceptual dead end in their function as a back up for the process of reform.

Widespread deficits are:

- Too little light is cast on the issue of political and legislative framework conditions, and the issue is not really addressed.
- The forest administration's acceptance and readiness to implement are optimistically overestimated in their relevance for new participatory approaches.
- Consequently, too ambitious objectives are set
- Conditionalities for donor support are often defined on a strictly formal basis ("granting of pilot status for the project", "change of legal framework"), whereas "softer" process indicators which could guide successful co-operation are left out (i.e. indicators documenting

institutional change in terms of increasing commitment and reliability of relevant co-operation partners, e.g. on the basis of functioning agreements on co-ordination and co-operation on different and increasing levels of technical and administrative competence).

Nonetheless, examples in which projects have successfully helped to shape enabling framework conditions do exist in Africa as well as in Latin America and in Asia. These, too, were examined in the impact analysis.

Several factors for success emerged. Of course they do not constitute a blue print of elements that can simply be extracted from their respective context and applied elsewhere at will. They do give, however, an idea of which kinds of strategy orientation the projects adopted and what consequences this can have for the planning and monitoring of "framework-relevant" projects. Success factors worth mentioning in this context are, e.g.:

- the very close linking of lessons learnt from the field (field experiences) to the substance of policy advising (micro-macro-continuum)
- good communication work by using existing forums and committees and integrating wider policy processes, e.g. the implementation of international conventions on the national level or the framework of national forest programmes (NFP) or poverty reduction strategies
- a facilitator strategy that is suited to integrate relevant stakeholders and to encourage them to become active players in the search for solutions (in a process-supporting rather than a pre-programmed way)
- a diversification of partners in implementation (NGO co-operation, etc.) - not in order to oppose the government partner, but rather to support that partner, that is, consistently integrating and calling upon and referring to the state mandate and responsibility
- a consistent attempt to make sure project agreements and bilateral governmental agreements are actually kept

- co-operation along the lines of "soft" and "multiple" process indicators: that is, by means of indicators that allow a constructive approach to assessing co-operation progress that goes beyond the strictly formal level of legally based changes, etc., and in which multiple security is strived for. Multiple security with binding, multilateral agreements on various vertical and horizontal levels - that is, for example, various levels of hierarchy, various levels of centralised or decentralised / local authority, various levels of technical responsibility and services, partners from various sectors (private, NGO, GO), etc.
- and finally, taking into account the observation that community based forest management needs an "initial success" - e.g., that *pilot* approaches be concentrated in locations with a relatively high probability of success, linked to corresponding impact monitoring, or by addressing particularly sensitive issues (e.g. participatory management of state forests) after initial successes in less critical areas have been jointly experienced by the actors involved.

## **Challenge II**

### **Participation under uncertainty**

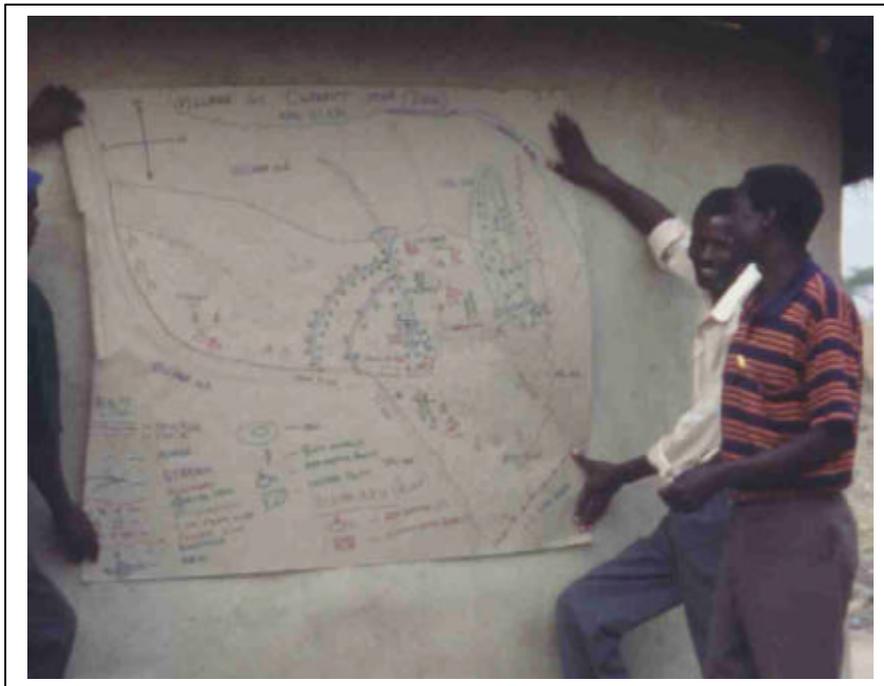
Participation of local people in the management of forest resources is not a simple top-down transfer of rights and management tasks. Just as important is the nature of the process by means of which this transfer takes place: it enables the local actors to make competent use of the new scope for action. It also enables government services to redefine and embrace their role in the altered management constellation. And, finally, it permits the private sector and non-governmental organisations to enter the process with their specific inputs.

Projects often find that their scope for qualified support to such a process is not clearly defined. They often lack a clear mandate to negotiate avenues and solutions which depart from given government stipulations.

The impact analysis revealed three basic types of strategy by which projects deal with such situations: 1. An 'avoidance strategy', 2. a 'risk strategy' and 3. a 'negotiation strategy in small steps'.

The main characteristic of the ‘avoidance strategy’ is that projects restrict themselves in their approach to the formal aspects of participation while politically sensitive issues are circumnavigated. ‘True’ participation of resource users in planning and decision-making is postponed to some later date when decisions are implemented. Dialogue and negotiation are substituted by a socio-economic study. Instead of working together with stakeholders to elaborate goals and contents, which prepare the ground for designing the most suitable management organisation, the establishment of numerous ‘forest committees’ is initiated. (Function follows form.) Classical inventory and forest planning is implemented in place of a dialogue-oriented development of management agreements.

The advantage of this strategy is that, even under difficult circumstances, it rapidly produces presentable results. The main disadvantage is that the associated problems emerge later: The so established “forest committees” lack a true mandate and social acceptance, the forest management rules thus stipulated have no effect. Important stages of the process then need to be reworked. Rapid initial results notwithstanding, the ‘avoidance strategy’ can entail major losses of time and impact.



**Photo 2: Designing the future: Participatory land use planning**

The *risk strategy* tends to first ‘establish facts’ - for example by supporting investments by adjoining residents in forest management activities (conservation activities, enrichment plantings, ...) *despite* the lack of secured rights – with a view of an accompanying or subsequent positive influence on the relative framework conditions.

Advantages: a few success stories exist.

Major disadvantages are the real risk this involves to the concerned farmers and the danger of knock-on problems at various levels of co-operation with governmental and other partners.

In contrast, the ‘negotiation strategy in small steps’ has the important advantage that it promotes the commitment to agreements and changes and their sustainability. Emphasis is laid on supporting dialogue, reciprocal compromise and guarantees among the participants, with the project assuming the role of a facilitator.

Contradictory to widespread criticism, this process-oriented strategy is in fact particularly efficient. If ‘well done’, it is possible to keep external interventions to a minimum, by making maximum use of the dynamics and inherent energy of the process of change. A key advantage is the encouragement of viability and thereby of lasting agreements and changes.

Disadvantages: The fact that ‘presentable results’ are more ‘strenuous’ and ostensibly take longer to achieve, combined with the uncertainty involved in when and what outcomes will materialise, means that projects are often put under severe pressure to justify their approach. If done amateurishly, there is also the risk that flexible steering is substituted by a black box approach of spontaneous reaction.

### **Challenge III**

#### **Economic viability**

Issues of economic viability and of finding a balance between ecological goals and the improvement of living conditions are a further conceptual challenge for

projects, especially whenever the economic potential of forest resources is small or only takes hold in the long term. The latter is the case for a large percentage of projects, the majority of which operate in locations:

- that suffer from severe degradation
- that have depleted stocks because of previous concessions
- where state management or development co-operation activities have already visibly failed.

Farmers wishing to make use of the new forest management possibilities, thus frequently find themselves in a situation in which, instead of managing forest resources, it is necessary to restore them first. Even breaking even is often a distant goal. Closely bound up with this is the problem of the conflicting goals of poverty reduction and forest conservation. Only in particularly favourable sites is it possible for participation-oriented forest resource management to make a significant contribution to the improvement of income. More often, investments in sustainable forest management, on the one hand, and individual income needs and/or investments in "development" on the other compete with one another

A serious *structural* handicap to the achievement of economic viability is the problem of a systematic and global under-valuation of goods and services from forests. It severely undermines a successful anchoring of sustainable management in the economic setting. Without effective answers to this problem on local, national and global levels, rural areas will not be able to draw substantial benefits from their outstanding role in providing environmental goods and services.

Participation-oriented management can be only effective as a tool of sustainable forest management if investments yield commensurate benefits to participants and are at least economically viable. However, and this is illustrated in the example of The Gambia (see below), such benefits are not restricted to direct income gains: Immaterial and indirect social, political and cultural effects, such as regaining control and decision-making authority over resources or achieving long-term security in the access to rights and goods play an equally important role in the overall calculations of the participants.

In a number of regions the management of forest resources is not the concern of the "poorest" or the "landless" anyway. Often (as, for example, in a number of places in Africa) this concern may be based on a mandate derived from traditional ownership of land. In these cases, participatory forest resource management does not assign the key role in the establishment of sustainable management to the landless or immigrant settlers but rather to the old-established land-owning families. Furthermore, value generation and benefits accruing from 'social' forestry do not have a generalised local impact, but rather relate to specific groups. The integration of differing and often conflicting group interests (e.g. use interests of immigrants) and also the issue of the balance between interests of particular groups and the 'public' interest thus constitute an important factor within the broader issue of socio-economic viability. Again, different strategies have been developed by the projects to deal with this, including the 'advocate strategy', the 'reliance on local arbitration mechanisms' or even the conscious acceptance that a certain degree of conflict potential and social differentiation is simply inevitable.

In those approaches that focus in the first instance on the improvement of the standard of living in rural areas, there is a further tendency to view the objectives of resource management and development as *separate objectives*. In practice, this can lead to a concept similar to a 'hawkers tray', which puts forestry activities side by side with socially oriented activities, without any causal connection between them. This dual orientation in the allocation of project resources is a hindrance for

- the full utilisation of the potential within participatory forestry for development and value generation
- a realistic assessment of the limits to this potential.

In the latter case, this increases the risk that local investments in a sustainable management of forest resources are only made as long as additional subsidises to non-forestry activities are provided.

These are some of the recurrent challenges faced by projects which support participatory forest management. The potential *impact* of such a project can be seen in the example of The Gambia.

## **VI Impact of forest management by communities in The Gambia<sup>9</sup>**

The small West African state The Gambia lies in the ecological ‘buffer zone’ on the edge to the Sahel. Its own remaining dry forest resources are themselves threatened with severe degradation. As a consequence of the lack of success of previous approaches, the concept of community-based management of natural resources has come to be a key element of national policy (‘Gambian Forest Management Concept’). This step was accompanied by comprehensive changes in forest policy and legislative and institutional frame conditions.

The concept and its implementation is now integrated at a national level. Due to initial positive results from the concept, and in order to overcome a geographically island-like solution, the potential for an expansion of the concept for the whole Sahel sub-region is being discussed.

The ‘Gambian German Forestry Project’, was in its 19<sup>th</sup> year when the impact assessment was carried out and was actively involved in this process of change. It influenced it firstly as a field project and later with an additional mandate for policy advice. It is now in its final phase. Financial assistance (EU, FC funds) was found for the nationwide implementation of the concept developed in this project and the development of community forestry is now supported throughout The Gambia.

The exceptionally broad impact of the project and the duration of the experiences gathered in implementing community forest management, made it interesting to have a closer look into effects achieved.

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<sup>9</sup> See the contribution by the project in this booklet

The analysis concentrated on the following issues:

1. Interaction and synergy between the field project and national policy
2. Evolution of project approach, concept, advisory services, target groups, communication and co-operation links
3. Management co-operation between public sector and resource users
4. Ecological, socio-economic and institutional effects.

The analysis was based on conversations with participants in the partner agencies and in concerned villages, a series of local studies covering specific social and ecological effects of community forest management, other relevant local and national documents, 'participatory observation' of on-going activities and finally, on an aerial survey of the forest area. The outcome is a qualitative impact analysis that combines a retrospective bird's-eye-view with the viewpoint of actors and outsiders. It shows the various impact levels and the main impact tendencies. Instead of being the result of systematic monitoring itself, it suggests potential focal points for an effective mid- and long-term impact monitoring and locates issues which would need further cross-checking in the future.

## **VI.1 Impact trends**

Given the size of The Gambia -11,295 km<sup>2</sup> - even small additional areas of forest land (in absolute figures) placed under effective community management exert a significant degree of influence on overall forest management, with effects on the price structure of forest products, marketing structures, behaviour patterns of users and consumers, etc. At the same time, the specific conditions of The Gambia contribute in several respects to a favourable environment for the development and institutionalisation of community based forest management, and they foster the comparatively rapid evolution of verifiable effects: The administrative apparatus is quite small and comprehensible, and the conditions characterising communication density and decision-making channels would under most circumstances be described as a "well-decentralised environment". Ecological conditions in locations across the country are comparatively

homogenous. The same can be said for the cultural environment surrounding forest and land use. A powerful commercial logging lobby is lacking. The repeated security problems in neighbouring Senegal (Casamance) not only seal off a potentially important and competitive (because open-access) source of forest products but also increase the readiness of commercial users to enter into negotiations with local forest-owning communities in The Gambia and to pay the higher price of a controlled and sustainably managed product.

## **Effects and impact tendencies**

### **1. The framework for forest resource management**

- The Gambia is relatively advanced in the development of favourable conditions for community forest management (forest policy and implementing instruments). This is due to a particularly close interaction between experience gained ‘in the field’ and policy design. The starting point, after a long phase of state-oriented co-operation, was successful pilot cases of community forest management. This then led to the expansion of the project mandate to include policy advisory services.

### **2. National conservation and management capacity**

- Since 1991, an additional 16,000 ha of forest area<sup>10</sup> has been placed under management or conservation by means of ‘management agreements with communities’ (*‘Preliminary Community Forest Management Agreement’*, PCFMA, and *‘Community Forest Management Agreement’*, CFMA). In the beginning, the most important silvicultural instrument was forest rehabilitation by effective fire protection. For the communities, the main incentive was that they regain long-term control over the forest resources in their area, vis-à-vis the state as well as vis-à-vis external users.

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<sup>10</sup> Compared to 12,000 ha under effective state management.

- In addition to the direct local conservation effects on the community forests themselves, an indirect conservation impact on neighbouring forest and bush areas can be noted. These so-called state forest reserves were previously neither under an active forest management nor under any kind of conservation measures. With the development of community forests, they also benefited significantly from a sharp drop in the frequency and scale of forest fires since 1995.
- Transfer of management responsibilities to local communities has set in motion a diversification of management institutions. It activates hitherto dormant local control and management potentials in resource use (e.g. via the traditional land-owning lineage networks) and develops them further. With the formation of two Community Forest Associations, development has begun of secondary organisations with medium-term potential to play a part in monitoring, conflict management and advisory services.
- On the level of the forestry administration itself, an expansion of its range of services also took place in the wake of the redefinition of its roles and functions. Besides territorial and monitoring tasks, advisory services in community forest management constitute a new key function for forestry authorities. Supported by the project, non-forestry advisory services are performed here in co-operation with non-governmental organisations.
- Within the context of the development of the *Gambian Forest Management Concept* with community forestry as the key instrument, the role of classified state forests (*forest parks*) has been redefined. Instead of the previous definition as a ‘state forest reserve’, they are now used as a centre for practice-oriented silvicultural training and research (e.g. for community forestry organisations in villages).

### **3. Impact on the forest resources**

Fire protection not only acts as a conservation measure in the direct sense, but is also an important instrument for forest rehabilitation by activating the capacity for natural regeneration of the dry forest. By safeguarding and encouraging the natural

regeneration of important tree species (bombax costatum, pterocarpus erinaceus, khaya senegalensis, borassus aetiopium, ...), this can lead to a visible improvement in the condition of the forest and can reduce fire risk.

#### **4. Economic impact - Macro-level**

- As the portion of forest resources coming under effective control grows, the economic value of those resources increases. Formerly, the dealers' costs in marketing forest products, especially firewood, were essentially limited to exploitation and transportation costs and fees or "taxes", so that access to the resource itself was *de facto* free of cost. Here a change has taken place, and in regions relatively close to urban centres (Banjul and Serrakunda) and with a high density of community forests, dealers marketing dead wood must now, for the first time, address themselves to villages with community forests and pay for access to this resource<sup>11</sup>.
- With the reduction of the economic undervaluing of the resource and the correspondingly higher local output, an initial contribution is made to revalorising the role of the rural areas in the production of forest resources and products and to reducing the de facto structural subsidising of the town by the countryside.
- Reduction of losses caused by fire makes an enhanced economic exploitation of the productivity and output potential of existing forest resources possible. This is particularly so in the case of fuel wood and forest pasture (year-round forest pasturage, brushwood use).
- In the long-term, a higher resource value in conjunction with access to long-term security of usage rights and benefits (ownership) provides an important incentive for the readiness to invest in the management of forest resources and the production of forest products.

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<sup>11</sup> On the consumer side, the higher fuelwood prices are compensated by switching to cheaper branchwood, which has only become available since the improved fire control.

## **Micro-level**

- At a local and regional level (because of indirect conservation effects), community forests play an important part in the stabilisation of the resource base for various livelihood activities: year-round forest pasture; use of branch wood as fuel both for household needs and, in favourable locations, increasingly as a new income source for women. The latter have begun successfully to tap urban fuel wood markets, a domain formerly dominated by men.
- Community forests have stimulated the development of new income sources in upstream sectors (e.g. the establishment of private nurseries)
- Impulses have been created for the development of new marketing structures and for gaining access to new sources of income by new interest groups (particularly women, see above)

## **5. Resource utilisation**

- Forestry as a form of land use is for the first time offering the rural population a monetary return and can thus compete with other forms of land use.
- On the part of the resource users, an increased readiness for investment-based management rather than purely extractive forest use was observed; hand in hand with increased readiness for investment in the protection of resources (controlled burn-off, mobilisation for fire-fighting).
- Hand in hand with a developing sense of ownership over the forest, the users also developed an awareness of the value of this resource.

## **Other social effects**

Of course, there are also impact trends with possible negative effects:

- A renegotiation of rights and regulations has begun in regard to access and monitoring of forest resources as well as a renegotiation of ownership structures. Conflict potential and conflicts are both increasing in the process.

Besides, questions of medium-term access of individual groups to benefits and yields have not for the most part been clarified to date.

- A process of marginalisation of certain user groups has begun (e.g. of immigrant Fulbe, for whom fuel wood trade was an important source of income). It is leading to a shift of exploitation pressure to areas free from effective management.
- The workload of certain groups has increased, in connection with a growing seasonal competition between agriculture and forest management for manpower.

## **Outlook**

The vast majority of positive effects in the example set out above were only made possible upon successful accomplishment of the first step from the project stage ('intensive care stage') of participatory forest management to its institutionalisation: In The Gambia, participation-oriented forestry has become a core element of national forest policy.

If, in contrast, the new management approaches get stuck in a setting polarised between classic forestry on the one side and islands of community based forest management on the other, no significant effects can be expected either in the forest or outside it. In the dialogue on pluralistic, sustainable forest management, challenges will thus remain. These concern not only the design of an enabling national environment and issues of partnership and co-operation with the private sector, but also include regional and supra-national perspectives. The current approaches on the certification of sustainable forest management show that if pluralistic forest management is embedded in an appropriate supra-national if not global context, new avenues to effectively link social, economic and ecological sustainability open up.