GOVERNMENT POLICY ON FOREST RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

By: Hang Sun Tra

I. Introduction

This forest of Cambodia are a significant economic renewable natural resource for the country, and cover more than about half of the total land area. The forests plan an important role in protecting the environment, and are of paramount importance for socio-economic development. They are a major source of wood products, and also provide fodder, protein, fruits, gums, resins, dyes, mushrooms, medicinal plants and much other non-timber forest products. The forest ecosystem is rich in biodiversity as attributed by species richness and endemism. Protected areas comprise approximately 3.2 million ha of forests, leaving an area of about seven million ha for production forestry. Concessions constitute about four million ha of forests managed by twenty-one companies.

II. Description of the Forestry Sector

Forest cover

The forest cover totaled over 13 million hectares or over 72% of the country's total land area until the 1970's. Current estimates of forest cover as per GTZ/MRC Forest Cover Monitoring Project based on 1996/97 satellite imageries is 10,535,763 ha or 58% of the total land area. The forest cover figure of 58% is very deceptive and can lead to complacency on forest resources conservation. Large proportions of the forests are degraded beyond redemption and are no more amenable for sustainable forest management. The reduction in forest cover during the last two decades is about two million ha, which in percentage terms is about 0.56% per annum compared to about 1% average for neighboring countries.

Deforestation

The forests are increasingly at because of expanding demand for agricultural lands, timber, and fuel wood caused by accelerated development programmes and increase in population. The principal direct courses of deforestation and degradation in Cambodia are agricultural expansion, encroachment, fuel wood gathering, and commercial logging, driven by economic, social and political forces. These forest manifest themselves through market, planning and policy failures, population pressures, and poverty.

Reforestation

Reforestation started in 1985 by the Department of Forestry and Wildlife. Due to the limited national budget supply, by the year of 1999 the total plantation area is around 5000ha. In compliance with the existing Forest Timber Licenses and the Investment Agreement, most of concessionaires pay US$
2.41/m$^3$ of annual log production to the government coffer for the purpose of reforestation. However, only small amount of this revenue has been used for reforestation activity outside concession and none of them has been used to replanting in concession areas where there are degraded forest land need to be replanted.

**Wood energy**

Nearly 92% the Cambodian population use firewood and charcoal, as their main or only source of household energy. Population pressure and inefficient fuel wood use have led to chronic supply shortages in the non-forested provinces of densely populated central and southern parts of Cambodia. The annual consumption of fuel wood is estimated as seven million m$^3$ in 1996 based on an estimated average of 0.6m$^3$ per person per year.

**Shifting cultivation**

In the Northeast, the forests are home to many hill tribes and ethnic minorities, who have made their living in and around the forest for centuries, clearing the forest for farming and collecting subsistence products such as fuel wood, medicinal herbs, food, and construction materials. The way of life for these minorities is threatened with the rapid commercial development and destruction of the forests. The consequence of increased land pressure, especially in the uplands, is short fallow period and the loss of soil fertility and yields.

**Biodiversity**

The wildlife population is under threat from loss of habitat caused by deforestation, hunting, trade and possibly landmines. Deforestation and resulting forest fragmentation is threatening many valuable plants and wildlife species with extinction, which would lead to loss of biodiversity and genetic diversity. The flash floods in the recent years. The main cause of which is excessive precipitation within a short time span, too have been partly attributed to deforestation and excessive logging. Selective felling concentrates in removal of a few commercially desirable species that has resulted in the following species becoming endangered: Afzelia xylocarpa, Chukrusia species, Pterocarpus macrocarpus, Dalbergia species, Dipterocarpus species, and Xylia xylocarpa.

**Demand and supply**

Cambodia's population is set to double in the next 25 years, and the March 1999 census gives a figure of 11.43 million growing at 2.4% per annum. There have been no studies on market for wood products or wood consumption in the past. Domestic consumption of timber in round wood is estimated as 174,000m$^3$ per annum. A number of wood using industries are operational with an annual round wood demand of 1.0-1.5 million m$^3$.

**Policy and legislation**

Lack of coherent forest policy coupled with inappropriate management of the country's forest resources has led to degradation and losses of forest resource base productivity over the last few years. If the recent level of wood removal continues the country would become wood deficient from a wood surplus position with adverse socio-economic political consequences.

A WB/UNDP/FAO Forest Policy Review Mission highlighted the need for forest policy reform in
early 1996 and made recommendations aimed chiefly at improving concession management practices. As a result, the government established a National Steering Committee to manage and execute national forest policy and undertook four important forestry studies (forest concession management, forest policy reform process, logging control and logs verification, and legal counsel assignment) with WB assistance. The government has accepted major findings and recommendations of the studies with a pledge by high level planners and policy makers to implement the recommendations.

The importance of the forest resources in protecting the environment, in meeting the socio-economic needs of the population, and its renewable nature dictates the necessity for the country to enunciate and adopt a national forest policy. The policy should set out clear goals for the development of the forestry sector, supported by required institutional set up, legislative framework and well defined programmes to achieve the set goals.

A clearly defined legislation with provisions for ensuring permanent land allocation to forestry, adoption of sustainable forest management practices, community participation, environmental impact assessment etc. needs to be approved by the Council of Ministers and passed by the national Assembly. The ADB assisting the RGC in preparing a forestry legislation that would be completed by mid 2000.

**Concession and sustainable forestry management**

Timber exploitation at present is usually undertaken by long term logging concessions, in which selective felling instead of clear cutting is practiced for environmental and regeneration reasons. Only the best, commercially valuable desired tree species are removed resulting in the depletion of these species in the long term. The harvest both legal and illegal is believed to be above annual yield thus jeopardizing sustainability with disastrous consequences on sustainability and environment. The RGC with ADB assistance is carrying out a performance review of all the concessions, for the purpose of improving concession management practices. Twelve concessions totaling two million hectares were cancelled recently for violation of concession agreements.

With increasing population, prosperity and rise in expectations, the demand for industrial wood will steadily increase. Introducing effective forest management is the utmost priority at present in Cambodia. For achieving the goal of sustainable forest management the requirements are many forest resources data, policy legislation, institutions, complete protection from illegal felling, human resources development, community participation in protection and management of forest resources, and funds.

National forest resources data is necessary to understand the spatial distribution of forests by quality and quantity, for making forest policy decisions and to facilitate macro-level forestry planning. The information is a prerequisite to set aside adequate areas of forestlands as permanent forest estate to meet the production and the environmental goals, classify the permanent forest estate into production and protection forests, and estimate the annual allowable cut from production forests. Protection of
the forests, and assuring balanced use of forest resources are of paramount importance for the country's socio-economic advancement and environmental conservation.

**Community forestry development**

Community forestry is a new concept in Cambodia. The present law decree No. 35 for forest management, which was adopted in 188, consisting of no provision of community forestry. Though there were some practices in a numbers of provinces, the national planning did not include the community forestry in its programs due to lack of community forestry policy. In the new draft policy paper there are clear stated of its goals on community participation in forest resource management, thus opportunity has been made for local communities to access and manage forest resources. The ADB PPTA will develop community forestry program in a numbers of selected provinces. Aside from forest concessions and protected areas, the total degraded forest areas of about more than 3 million ha, is available for community forestry development.

**Training and extension**

There are 765 and around 1000 personnel staff working at the central department and the provincial forestry offices respectively. These numbers are adequately developed for both central and provincial level. However, some them show limitation in their duty discharging performances due to lack of experiences.

Capacity building to national staff is in a very small scale and can be made only when there are project supported. There are some extension programs conducted by DFW in close collaboration with supported international agencies.

**III. Country Strategy**

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) gives high priority to the forestry sector aiming at rational and sustainable development of forest resources to meet the socio-economic and environmental goals. Currently, the RGC is endeavoring to implement the recommendation of the four WB assisted forestry studies, which were completed in 1998. As a follow up to these studies, the ADB is carrying out a performance evaluation of all concessions, is developing Community Forestry Programs for non-concession, concession, and protected areas and is draft Forest Legislation and Forest Concession model Contract. The WB assisted Forest Concession Management and control Pilot Project is being formulated in a number of provinces to introduce satisfactory concession management. The RGC has due to bad performance. A Forest Crime Monitoring and Reporting project with funds from Department for International Development of the British Government and Australian Government has been approved by the RGC and is under operation.

The Special Programme for Support Policy and Programme Development (SPPD) has identified sustainable management forest resources, as the central programmes that can reverse the process of
deforestation and degradation and improve the balanced use of the forests. The programme requires qualitative and quantitative data on forest resources for policy decisions and planning. Under this program, a project proposal for Forest Management by people participation in three selected provinces has been drafted and committed to support in part by UNDP. Additional financial support is being sought to fill the gap.

IV. National Forest Policy

The RGC is engaged in preparing a National Forest Policy to direct the development of the forestry sector in an orderly manner. The management of the country's forest resources depends strongly on availability of national forest resources information as exemplified by the objectives and the guidelines of the National Forest Policy.

National Forest Policy Statement

Policy objective

Objective 1: To dedicate adequate forestlands as permanent forest estates to be safeguarded and managed, for posterity with particular reference to:
- Conservation of biodiversity, soil, and water
- Assurance of traditional rights and privileges
- Sustainable supply of forest products for socio-economic development

Objective 2: To assure and enhance the contribution of forestry to:
- The welfare of the population
- Strengthen the national economy, with special attention paid to equity and economic development consistent with government policy

Objective 3: To promote greater participation of local communities in:
- The protection and management of forests, and
- Community forestry programmes

Permanent forest estate

- Forest resources are considered as national assets and will be protected and managed for continued existence of important ecosystems, and the flow of forests products and services to generate economic, social and environment benefits.
- A appropriate forestlands will be set aside as permanent forest estate to satisfy the environmental and production roles including the socio-economic needs
- The extent and the location of permanent forest estate will be determined to attain an optimum land use for the country.
- The state will assess, from time to time, the land use needs and may re-institute optimum land use for the country.
**Classification of forests for meeting management objectives**

- The permanent forest estate will be classified into protection forests primarily for conservation and environmental benefits, and production forests for generating economic benefits.
- Forests will be allocated as production forest, only if environmental and the social objectives are satisfied.
- The management objectives of the classified forests are determined to attain an optimum balance among economic, social and environmental benefits at national level.
- The management objectives of classified forests will consider trans-boundary mutual impacts for advancing and benefits.

**Concession management, marketing and wood industries**

- The state may enlist private sector to manage an extent of production forest with adequate regulation and control, under a transparent concession forest management system, determined and controlled by state.
- Concession forest management is considered a national matter and shall be controlled centrally.
- The business of production and sale of wood and other forest products will be tread in par with any other legal business in the country.
- Royalties to be levied on concession timber will be decided between the concessionaires and the state according to an agreed system.
- State will not impose restrictions, which may distort the free market condition, on forest related business.
- The establishment, management, and harvesting of industrial forest plantation by industries and others in the private sector will be promoted.

**Community forestry management**

- State may allocate the management of production forests where appropriate to rural communities living in or in the vicinity of forest, or/and participates in the management of such forests, primarily to maintain their substance or/and to protect and rehabilitate such forests.
- Community forestry will be promoted at provincial level in integration with other state programmes aimed to improve rural economy.

**Institutional support for forestry development**

- Legislation will be prepared, amended and revised, as necessary to support the implementation of the forest policy.
- Forestry sector institutions will be reoriented and strengthened with appropriate capability and specific authority to protect, regulate and manage the forest resources.
- Forestry sector institutions would function under the laws and related sub-decrees and administrative circulars.
- Forestry education, extension and research will be coordinated and supported to facilitate the implementation of the forestry policy.
The National Forest policy will be kept consistent with the policies of the other sectors

V. Conclusion

Base on this draft policy, community participation in the protection and management of forest resources, protected areas, concessions and non-concession, will be promoted through education and extension campaign promotion of protection, reforestation programs, and management of forest, with active participation of people, particularly the rural communities including NGOs will be undertaken on a larger scale to have a positive impact. The necessary provisions that are required for motivating community participation such as long-term land tenure and sharing of benefits of forest produce will be incorporated in the new draft forestry legislation. To meet these government endeavor further support from donor agencies is crucial.

Refer to concession and sustainable forest management, introducing effective forest management is the utmost priority at present in Cambodia. For achieving the goal of sustainable forest management it is required to ensure the quality of forest resources data, policy, legislation, institutions, complete protection from illegal, human resources development, community participation in protection and management of forest resources, and funds.