COMMUNITY FORESTRY
in Koh Kong Province
by
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1. Introduction

The inception of community forestry in Cambodia in the 1990's was a result of a concern for forest loss in Cambodia at a rapid pace in the recent years. Lack of local community participation in forest management is a factor in forest resource decline. A local community's demand for forests gradually increases. In order to manage the existing forests, to use them in a sustainable way, to reforest in degraded areas, and to involve local communities in forest management, NGOs and other international organizations are working with local communities and the Royal government of Cambodia at all levels to establish community forestry projects. This is a solution to the local community's demand for the present time and for the future, in some areas of Cambodia. The current practice of community forestry project in some places increases interest of other communities.

The understanding of community forestry by local communities helps us to plan, carry out, and get support from them in the future. A community forestry team is established to support and to share information, to get cooperation among all interested groups at a national level, and to facilitate understanding and help among communities to support the ongoing project.

It is important that a community forestry team conduct a study of Cambodian community forestry best practices to understand the practices of community forestry, and to establish a based information. The community forestry team studied five provinces. They are Seam Reap, Ratanakiri, Kampong Chhnang, Svay Rieng and Koh Kong that these provinces are carrying out community forestry programs.

The Sustainable Management of Resources Project in the Lower Mekong Basin (SMRP-MRC/GTZ) provided financial and technical support for the study.

2. Goal and Objectives

The objectives of the study of Cambodia community forestry best practice are:

- To document the practices of community forestry by the Royal government of Cambodia, Non governmental organizations and monks in cooperation with local communities.

- To identify problems and to look for the solutions that is best to support and develop the programs in community forestry in Cambodia.

- To strengthen research capacity and to document information for staff of relevant governmental institutes that are involved in the community forestry projects.

- To build relationships among the national, provincial and grass root levels, in order to set up a management mechanism for Cambodian community forestry in the future.

3. Methodology

In this study, the team was divided into two groups, the core and the field research groups. The core group
was responsible for organizing the study, providing technical support and ideas. The field research group was responsible for conducting the field study, methodology, information gathering, analyzing, and reporting. The team was comprised of staff from the Department of Forestry and Wildlife, the Ministry of Environment and the Royal University of Agriculture, Phnom Penh.

In order to obtain positive results in the study of Cambodia community forestry best practice, the team organized a consulting group that consists of expatriate staff who are very experienced in community forestry. All groups discussed and set up methods for the study including making questionnaires, and providing interviewing techniques with local people. Provincial government and NGO staff were also included in the field research group to supply information and document areas, to support the study through cooperation, involvement in discussions, approaches to study areas, scheduling for the study implementation and so forth.

After informing local people of the purposes of the study and the presence of the field research group, each group was split into smaller groups to conduct semi-structured interviews, semi-structured walks, and direct observation. The groups interviewed small groups of local people or individuals, within the time constraints given.

4. Results

4.1 Geographic Location

AFSC is planning to have a community forestry project in 12 villages in Sre Ambel and Kampong Seila districts of Koh Kong province. Sre Ambel is about 142km from Phnom Penh and is located in the southwest of the country. It is covered by evergreen, deciduous and mangrove forests. Four villages were chosen for this study among the twelve AFSC targeted project sites. They are Thmei, Samdech Ta, Thaong and Krang Chaek.

4.2. Socio-economics

4.2.1. Population

The AFSC project is in two districts, Sre Ambel and Kampong Seila. There are 9,702 families with 48,514 people. Among of this population there are 12,831 males and 26,683 females. Each family has an average of five members.

4.2.2. Education

I Not only in the study villages but also in development project villages; communities do not have a school. Poverty of villagers makes them unable to construct a school in their village. To have children attending the school is not easy as schools are far away from the villages. Roads are bad and no transportation is available. These problems result in a high rate of illiteracy. At present, AFSC is planning to administer an informal schooling program to help illiterate people in its project sites.

4.2.3. Customs, Traditions and Beliefs

All villagers in the project sites are Khmer. They are Buddhist, celebrating ceremonies such as Buddhist Praise Ceremony, Meak Bochea, Khmer New Year, Plowing Day, Pchum Ben, Kakthen Tien, Water Festival, Bon Chlomg Phum and so on. Kakthen Tien is a Buddhist ceremony where laymen and laywomen offer monk's clothes, contributions, or build a pagoda. At the Pchum Ben festival, people take food to the pagoda so that the monks can pass the food to their ancestors. Bon Chlomg Phum is a form of religious ceremony where people pray for happiness and peace in their village.

At present, there is no pagoda in the communities. People cannot afford it due to poverty, poor infrastructure and remoteness from town. However, people build cottages for monks so people can celebrate Buddhist holidays.

People in the area also believe in Saen Naek Ta ("saen" is the act of offering to the spirits who take care of land and forest). Local people here also practice the custom of Chole Mrup (enter into the shade). This is when a young lady stays in the house, out of the sun for up to several weeks or months, depending on local
customs and/or her parents, in preparation for her wedding. This custom is to prevent other young men from becoming interested in her as she has been committed to one already, and it is also intended to brighten the complexion of her skin. She can come out on her wedding day, when her and the groom's families throw a huge celebration to mark her wedding and the beginning of her womanhood.

4.2.4. Health and Sanitation

There is no health center in any of the twelve villages in Sre Ambel and Kampong Seila districts. The treatment of a patient depends on available resources in each family. This means if a person is sick, they are referred by their family to a district hospital, a hospital in Phnom Penh or to a private clinic. For those who are unable to use traditional medicine plants or pray to the spirits to cure patients. AFSC assists in health care by providing mosquito repellent liquid, clean well water among others.

4.2.5. Livelihoods

Besides permanent cultivation and swidden agriculture, people do some other professions to supplement the income that they make from rice production. Their subsidiary professions are:

- Collecting non-timber forest products such as lianas, resin, rattan, bamboo, bamboo shoots, traditional medicine plants, mushrooms, wild fruits, wild vegetables, wild potato, honey and hunting so on.
- Doing handicrafts to make woven mats for sale.
- They raise chickens, pigs, cattle, and buffalo for sale.
- Growing long-term and short-term crops in their yards such as jackfruit, cashew, rambutan, durian, sugar cane, mango, orange, grape, banana, coconut, sweet tamarind, papaya, pineapple, groundnuts, potato, pumpkin, watermelon, and other vegetables.
- Seasonal work such as farm worker, motorbike taxi driver, movers and others

4.3. Land Tenure Status

4.3.1. Private Lands

Land for House Construction

This is land that people use to build their houses on and to grow vegetables. Some people inherited land from their family, while some others obtained land from the local authority. Village and commune authorities recognize this type of land. However, they do not have a license for this land. They can transfer their lands to their descendants, sell it, or transfer the right to use of the land to other people.

Swidden Farm Land

This is land where people cut forest for farmland. On this land, they plant jackfruit, coconut, mango, banana, potato, durian, sugar cane, orange, cashew, and other vegetables to supply the household. The local authorities and villagers recognize their right to use the land, but legally they are not issued licenses to tenure the lands. If the land is abandoned for three years, other people can use the land without permission from the owner or the local authorities.

Paddy Fields

This is fields that are in nearby villages. Each family owns about 0.5-2 ha. The people can grow rice only in the wet season, as there is no water available in the dry season. Generally, rice production is between 1 and 2 tons per ha. Some people inherited the land from their family while some other obtained it from clearing forest. The village and the commune heads recognize the ownership of the land of villagers. The people have the right to use the lands or transfer to the right to their relatives and descendants, or to sell it.

4.3.2. Public Lands
Land for School Construction

This is land in villages used for public purposes. The land is recognized by the people and the local authorities in the village and in the commune.

Free Ownership Land

These are lands that are available along streams, in natural fields and in forestland. There is no ownership yet because villagers do not have opportunities to encroach on it. This land is productive. They can cultivate rice two times a year. This type of land is under the jurisdiction of villages.

Forestland for Community Forestry

This is land located in mountains, islands, and community farmland. This land harbors several species of vegetation. They are Neang Noun (Papilionacees Dalbergia bariensis), Baeng (Caesalpinees Pahudia cochincheninsis), Thnung (Papilionacees Pterocapus pedatus), Kor Koh (Caesalpinees Sindora cohincheninsis), Ko Ki (Dipterocarpacees Hopea sp.), Dung Chaem (Sterculiaicees Terrutia javanica), Trasaek (Caesalpinees Petlophorum ferugielum), Sra Laov (Lythracees Lagerstremia sp.) Trach (Dipterocarpus intricatus) Ta Traov (Loganiacees Fagraea fragrans), Cheu Teal (Dipterocarpus alatus), Thlong (Dipterocapaceae Dipterocarpus tuberculatus), Tbaeng (Dipterocapaceae Dipterocarpus obtusifolius), Smach (Myristicacees sp.), and mangroves.

Non-timer forest products that are available in this land are lianas, resin, rattan, bamboo, traditional medicine plants, mushrooms, wild fruits, bamboo shoot, wild potatoes, honey and so on. Moreover, wildlife such as elephants, tigers, bears, leopards, gaur, banteng, sambar, muntjac, wild pigs, macaques, loris, flying squirrels, porcupines, civets, squirrels, mongooses, pangolins, monitor lizards, snakes, cobras, green pea fowls and jungle fowls exist in this forest.

In addition, this land supports several species of fish living in streams and lakes that people use daily. Size of the land varies in each village. They have not been registered yet. Even though the land has not been recognized by the local authorities, people can access natural resources in the area for household consumption. So far, there has never been a conflict or a problem arising from using the resources in the area.

4.4. Organization and Management of Self Help Groups

4.4.1. Farmers Development Groups and other Institutions

Farmers Development Group

3efore the presence of AFSC in the community, people could access resources as much as they wanted. Their livelihood completely depended on the natural resources in the area. After the government issued a policy banning logging activities, some people, who did not have farmland, had problem sustaining their livelihood. Being aware of the community's problem and wanting to restore the forest in the degraded area, the local authorities cooperated with AFSC and planned to establish community forestry to ensure sustainable use of forest resources in the future.

At the first stage, AFSC gathered people whose far lands share borders together to establish a farmers' development group, women's group, and small family group, representing a group of 7-17 families. Each group has a chief, a deputy chief, a secretary, and a treasurer. Villagers said that each candidate had to be qualified, for a representative must have broad knowledge, be active, social, and trustworthy. Once someone is qualified, villagers elect representatives to fill the following positions.

Chief

He is responsible for directing the group, working with organizations to extend programs, such as development and other techniques.

Deputy Chief
He is responsible to assist the chief and represent the chief in his absence.

Secretary

He is responsible to assist the chief and deputy chief in reporting and document keeping.

Accountant

He is responsible for preparing documents related to rural credit programs, and loan collection.

Other Relevant Institutions

At present, there is no governmental organization involved in AFSC’s development programs. But it has counterparts from the Office of Forestry and Wildlife in Koh Kong.

- SC has developed human resources, assisted in planting techniques, planning of planting, literacy programs, health care, digging wells, and in providing food, equipment, and seeds.
- WFP provides labor cost in food through AFSC

4.4.2. Policy of Farmers Development Program of AFSC-ISLP

AFSC has established an agreement policy, which contains rules and regulations governing the management of rural credit programs and equipment supply. In the agreement, AFSC agrees to provide seedlings of fruit trees, animals, and rice to those who participate in plantation, making irrigation channels, reforestation of species which improve soil quality, planting species that protect from soil erosion, making seed beds, multiple cultivation, and making compost. These programs alleviate the villagers’ poor livelihood for a while during which villagers are free and are waiting for the harvest seasons. The programs ensure the progress and the stability of the rural credit program.

4.4.3. Farmers Development Program Plan

AFSC has planned a strategic plan for a three-community forestry program. The plan is outlined below:

The plan for future survival has important components such as community development, literacy program, health care, agriculture, digging wells, etc. The plan supports and stabilizes the communities’ livelihood so that they can further establish the community forestry project. Natural resource management plan (community forestry).

First year:

AFSC will conduct PRA, establish counterparts from the Office of Forestry and Wildlife, contact and discuss with village officer about community forestry, and explain to villagers about the importance of community forestry.

Second year:

AFSC will establish a farm development group, a neighboring group, and a women's group. AFSC will support the three groups at the first stage, and then it will establish a committee for community forestry in the next step.

Third year:

AFSC will request relevant authorities to establish the community forestry project, and will carry out the project.

4.4.4. Action Plan

AFSC has begun the development program since September 1997. However, the program will expire by the year 2003. So far, AFSC has implemented the program for about one year. It is in the first stage of the
Self-Support

At present, AFSC provides training programs in human resources development techniques, plantation techniques, planting plans, etc. AFSC has conducted rural appraisal, has collaborated with counterparts from the Provincial Forestry Office, has discussed with village officials about community forestry, has educated communities about importance of forest and has organized farming development of each group. AFSC has reforested a swidden agricultural field of one hectare for a model permanent agriculture.

4.4.5. Benefit Distribution

There has been no benefit distribution of forest timber and non-timber forest products among communities yet, since the community forestry project has not yet been established. In addition, the law and constitution about community participation in natural resources management and benefit sharing have not been made yet. However, people can collect timber and non-timber forest products for household purpose. However, people are not allowed timber for large-scale exploitation. The Office of Forestry and Wildlife in Koh Kong will stop those who try to commit this activity.

4.4.6. Conflicts and Resolutions

AFSC has not yet established community forestry in its programs. Nevertheless, there are some problems in establishment of the project in the future. They are:

- The level of community awareness of community forestry is too low
- People are very poor
- Some people lack skills in reforestation
- The relationship between the communities and the local authorities is not good
- The relationship between relevant institutions and donors is not good
- The land for community forestry project has not been registered yet.
- Some families are planning to move out

However, AFSC has solved some of these problems through the self-support programs. In the program AFSC administers rice credit, seed banks, food for work, training in plantation techniques, well projects, animal care, education, and health care during inter-phase before they can have community forestry project in the future.

5. Analysis

5.1. Impact on Household Economy

Before the existence of the self support programs in the four villages in the development program, the people used to indiscriminately collect natural resources in their area as, either for household consumption or for sale. Their livelihood depended on the resources. After the government issued a policy banning timber extraction, the people were worried about their livelihoods, as they did not have any other professions. Some
families in the development project have move out because they lost their jobs, which directly depended on forest resources as they did not have farm lands.

Being aware of the community's problems at the present time and in the future, AFSC administers a self-support program to alleviate their problems. In the program, there are rice credits, health care service, livestock vaccination, animal banks, and seed stock banks. The program intends to help and to improve the community's livelihood. It also intends to change the minds of those who want to move out from their residences and make them feel that their livelihood could be maintained in the future without depending solely on natural resources.

5.2. Impact on Equal Access and User Rights to Natural Resources

At present, the communities in the four villages of the AFSC project do not have community forestry yet. Current practice of non-timber forest products in the community forest follows their traditional habits and is intended for household purpose only. The new governmental policy does not allow them to log forest for timber without a license. Before the new policy came into action, illegal logging had severely decreased the forest. The resources lost in the community is a factor that had severely impact communities' livelihood.

After AFSC launched a self-support program, AFSC helped communities in human resources development, natural resources management, small credit, seed banks, animal banks, clear water and making compost. The program alleviated the communities' livelihood and stopped the people from encroaching on the forest. Nevertheless, AFSC helps communities know how to reforest in their private lands, in villages and communes in order to restore lost forest. In addition, the program also helped communities to know how to use the resources in a sustainable way in the future.

5.3. Impact on Natural Resource Status and Its Sustainability vis-à-vis Biodiversity and Productivity

Part of AFSC's program entailed an improvement of plantation techniques. Training in reforestation for protection from soil erosion, fences, soil quality improvement, construction, and agro-forestry, helped to support and improve the community's livelihood. Reforestation also reduced forest encroachment for farmlands and restored forest in private and public lands. This activity increases natural resources, biodiversity and productivity potential in the area. Furthermore, reforestation creates a beautiful landscape.

5.4. Impact on Cooperation Between the Community and the Government

At the beginning of the project, AFSC did not seek much cooperation from other relevant institutions and the local authorities, as the project was in a trial stage. At this stage, the project is hoping for community cooperation, so that the community can gain experiences in key issues. During this trial period, the project aims to achieve a reduction of forest encroachment for shifting agriculture, to restore forest in old farms that people have abandoned for long time, to grow fruit trees that can improve the livelihood of the community. Community participation in clean water programs, rice banks, seed banks, and animal banks makes their livelihood better before harvesting season comes. In the future, the living standards of the community will be better and they will learn a lot from day to day.

5.5. Impact on the Status and Effectiveness of Local Institutions

The establishment of farm development project under support of AFSC is a result of the community participation. Community vote to select their representatives in each group. A qualified candidate must have broad knowledge, be active, sociable, trustworthy and must protect the assets of the community. The various self help groups that has been established are recognized by other fellow villagers, outsiders, and local authorities. These self help groups will eventually form the basis of a community forestry management committee, when AFSC launches the community forestry activities in mid 2000.

The group will already have learned some management and planning skills, and will have some team work experience to generate a strong inspiration for the community.

5.6. Impact on General Community Development

The establishment of farm development group has changed some community traditions. For example, people changed from swidden cultivation to permanent cultivation of long-term crops, from single to multiple purpose crops, to an increase of production seasons, and also made changes in animal raising. AFSC provides seed stock of high productivity through the self-support program to ameliorate production yields and livelihoods.
The stability of community livelihoods will assist them in establishing community forestry so that forest will be restored to meet their daily demands.

5.7. Impact on Adjacent Communities

The farm development project did not appear to affect the neighboring villages since the project was on project village or lands. The farm development group provides a model for their neighbors to learn how to utilize natural resources in a sustainable way and to use land more effectively in production by using compost. In addition, they will learn to use manure in high yield and short-term vegetation. The project will improve the family economy stabilize it so that people will be involved in reforestation in the future. A good model for self-support programs makes neighbors see the benefits of the program and request AFSC to administer this project in their villages.

6. Conclusions

Although community forestry has not yet been established in the twelve villages under the support of AFSC, the self-support program strengthens the solidarity among the community in the projects and ensures good cooperation between the communities and the local authorities. It also improves the knowledge of the villagers in agriculture, health care, animal husbandry, and the importance of natural resources. The project has made people take greater interest in well being of their communities and environment, stop from cutting the forest, and participate in forest protection. The project gets support from communities and the local authorities. The rate of participation was high in all of the villages studied. There is an election process in selecting representatives of each group based on the constitution of AFSC program.

There is no problem or conflict about land as each village has land for house construction, farming and forest. The local authorities also recognize these lands. However, there are some problems in implementing the project. For example, people have limited knowledge about community forestry. The local authorities do not cooperate well with the communities, and some families want to sell their high value lands and want to move to live in other areas. All of these problems may have negative effects on education, technical and professional training in the future to achieve community forestry by the participation of the communities.

7. Recommendations

In order to achieve community forestry in the future successfully, AFSC in cooperation with relevant institutions and local authorities should remedy the following gaps.

- Continue to support self support programs
- Help to build small-scale irrigation so that the people can increase their production, especially during the dry season
- Help to build infrastructure in villages
- Continue to build community trust so that more people participate, cooperate and finally establish community forestry successfully.
- Strengthen the cooperation between organizations and relevant institutions Help to build human resources in the communities.
- Demarcate boundaries for community forestry.
- Demarcate swidden agricultural fields by cooperation with relevant institutions to ensure rights of land use of the communities.
- The government should adopt the community forestry law as soon as possible so that community forestry succeeds as it has a strong legal basis.