Supporting forest policy reform

Thailand has one of the most vibrant democracies in the region and the new constitution enacted in 1997 is providing the space for greater participation in policy-making processes in many sectors. The new constitution stipulates the need for the participation of communities and local organizations in natural resource management as well as the right of indigenous people in management of natural resources (item 46).

Unfortunately, there has been no official recognition of the various community approaches to forest management. National policy and regulations, reflect a western approach to conservation which has alienated the majority of rural people and led to increasing conflicts over natural resources. For the last ten years, an alliance of NGOs, local community networks and academics have been working to ensure greater transparency and participation in forest management.

Forums on forest policy reform

Since a workshop in 1999, the national Community Forestry network has designed and organized people forums on "Forest Law Reform" in all regions of the country. The forums were designed to analyze problems, issues and conditions from experimentation of existing forest laws which effect local people. The forums also sought recommendations for the new forest policy. The results of these consultations were incorporated into the people's draft version of the CF Bill. These forums were collaboratively organized by the NGO-CORD, local organizations, academics, RECOFTC and King Prajadhipok's institute. Many issues were discussed in the forums, including: local definitions, classification and utilization of forest; roles and responsibilities of related agencies and other actors; tenurial systems in tenure in forest management; administrative and organization management systems and structures (both local and national); and monitoring and evaluation systems.

- That developing a national policy which incorporated concerns from different regions and contexts is challenging. Because there is great cultural and ecological variety within Thailand, there are many different ideas and approaches regarding issues such as land-use planning, benefit sharing, group organization.
- Thus, there is a need to develop a policy which is flexible to allow for diversity, but also one which is still enforceable, ensures transparency and clarifies roles and responsibilities.

Supporting "Peoples' version" of the CF Bill

In early March, a "People's version" of the Community Forestry Bill was submitted to the Thai Parliament after the collection of 52,698 signatures of Thai citizens. In July, the parliament initiated a commission consisting of 27 members (see Thailand Country Update for more details). Dr. Pearmsak Makarabhirom, the Head of Thailand Outreach Program, was nominated as commission member by the government to represent the people's version. During the commission debates, Dr. Somsak Sukwong made a presentation to commission members. Furthermore, TOP staff spent a great deal of time developing information materials on community forestry to send to media outlets to provide better information to citizens.

Some lessons learned in this process included:

- A community forestry bill alone is not enough. All acts and policies relating to forest and natural resource management need to be overhauled to create the necessary space for community's to effectively manage forest resources.
- Only one member of the commission represented the peoples' version and the others came
government agencies and political parties. Thus, many of the commission had very little understanding on community forestry issues.

- More national oriented organizations argued submitted a petition to carefully consider where communities' should be allowed to manage forest area because they believe that "forests are for the nation" and not just one group.

**Public forum to discuss rural issues**

On 17 August 2000 the country's first-ever public forum was organized at Thammasat University. The forum was initiated to discuss Issues regarding land rights and participation of local communities in natural resource management. The forum allowed both government and the Assembly of the Poor (AoP) representatives to defend their positions and proposed solutions to the public. The aim of the forum was not to reach concrete solutions, but rather inform the public about the progress of events. It is hoped that the forum will be a catalyst for more participatory processes in policy formulation. The debate focused on land, water and forest issues and was televised nationally. The consideration of setting up a neutral committee to develop recommendations to solve these issues was also raised. The new government which was formed in January has been more proactive in attempting to resolve many of these issues, however, no concrete resolutions have yet emerged.

**TOT on developing CF management plans**

From 2 to 6 June 2000, TOP staff facilitated a training course on "Developing CF Management Plans" for villagers in Northeastern Thailand. The workshop was organized in Ubon Patchathani Province by NGO-CORD of Northeast. The course provided conceptual input into CF planning processes and an overview of participatory rural and forest resource assessments. The participants have continued to work in their communities, with support from local NGOs and technical assistance from TOP.

The number of participants was quite large and much was learned from this type of collaborative training. On the one hand, holding training courses or workshops of this size creates a bigger multiplier affect, but there is also a need to use a range of different strategies to sustain discussions and ensure all participants are actively participating. Thus, it was necessary to have smaller groups with a more facilitators (which means more coordination before and after sessions). Another lesson learned was that there needed to be more concerted follow-up by facilitators and support groups and a need to observe and learn from what happened when the villagers go back home. In the long run, the training helped RECOFTC get a clearer picture of the content, issues, and processes needed to develop a curriculum for this type of course to be held at the national level.

**Mangrove ecology seminar**

On 9-12 July 2000, the National Mangrove Resource Committee, National Research Council of Thailand organized the 11th National Seminar on Mangrove Ecology at Trang Province. The objectives were: 1) To disseminate research outcomes and new silvicultural techniques on mangrove management, 2) To share viewpoints and problems on mangrove policies and management, and 3) To search for solutions that respond to existing problems and needs of society. The participants were academics, researchers, mangrove fieldworkers, school teachers and communities. About 35 topics of research work were presented including the exhibitions of mangrove related project from different projects, communities and institutions. Most presentations were the outcomes of scientific research for example, forest biology, forest silviculture, fisheries and geo-informatics. The rest were about the environmental education and wastewater treatment for shrimp farming.

The Director General of Royal Forest Department (RFD) participated in the seminar and made a presentation on national mangrove management policy. He mentioned the National Environmental Committee approved the newly drafted mangrove management policy on May 19, 2000. The policy focuses on moving mangrove settlers and other human activities out of the forest. For settlers who lived in the forest before July 23, 1991, they will be allowed to stay there for 15 years. After that, they have will have to move.

**Community-based involvement in fire management**

Over the last two years, TOP has been working with NGOs and forest department staff to improve national forest fire management strategies and demonstrate the effectiveness of community-based approaches to fire management. From April 20-28, 2001 TOP staff and on regional staff member, in collaboration with Thailand's Royal Forestry Department (RFD) and the Northern Development Foundation (NDF), facilitated field based
training on community-based fire management for ten staff from the Lao Fire Control Unit in Sayaboury Province. The course was unique in that it was specifically designed to demonstrate the effectiveness of local communities in planning and managing their own forest fires regimes. The main objective of this training was to help the Fire Control Officers feel confident to work with the communities in developing community based fire management regimes back in Laos.

The course was held in Doi Inthanon National Park where there has been many debates about the use of conventional fire management techniques versus local fire management regimes. This allowed course participants to perform a series of community assessments, facilitate field processes and learn from directly working with communities. The training used a five-step process:

1. Fire ecology and regimes in dry dipterocarp and mixed evergreen forests: This focused on the role of fire in forest ecology and how communities have managed fire within this type of ecosystem.
2. Stakeholder analysis: Participants learned how to determine to what extent or degree each stakeholder group is affected by fire, both positively and negatively, and to what extent these groups have the power and influence on the way fire is managed. This allowed participants to understand the relationships between different actors and their interests in managing fire.
3. Analyzing the resource, political and socio-economic environments. Participatory approaches such as key informant interviews, and participatory mapping and data collection were used to better understand the community-based fire management regimes.
4. Integration of assessments into an operational plan and working tools for community based fire management. Participants learned the critical components of an operational plan, how to facilitate this process with local organizations, and the incentives needed to ensure planning actually leads to implementation. In addition, participants gained insight on the importance of networking between communities for effective fire management on a wider landscape level.
5. Technical aspects of implementing operational plans: Community-based techniques for fire management and fire control were introduced as well as how to adapt these techniques to the participants' context in Sayaboury.