BACKGROUND TO FORESTRY IN LAO PDR

Unlike most of its neighbours, Lao People's Democratic Republic still retains a relatively high proportion of natural forests. Sadly, these valuable resources are disappearing rapidly. In 1940 the country had 17 million hectares of forest, today, forest covers about 11 million hectares of the country.

However, recent changes in government policies, specifically the Forest Law of 1996, show a greater awareness and emphasis of sustainable management and biodiversity conservation. People are at last coming to terms with the potential negative impact of forest depletion on forest-dependent communities and conservation, as well as recognising the possible depletion of a source of economic well-being.

At the same time there has been a clear shift towards involving local people in the management of natural resources. Since the early 1990s the Government of Lao PDR has been allocating forestland to villagers for sustainable management.

WHAT IS FOMACOP

The Forest Management and Conservation Programme (FOMACOP) is a five-year programme run by the Department of Forestry, of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. It aims to promote sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation with the active participation of villagers and the efforts of provincial and district forestry staff.

In the short term (1995-2000) the goals of FOMACOP are:

- To develop and trial pilot schemes that improve the implementation of sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation systems.
- To strengthen villagers' and forestry staff's capacity to implement these systems, and to seek
VILLAGE FORESTRY IN FOMACOP

Village forestry refers to the process of villagers organising themselves and mobilising their resources and capabilities to manage the assigned forests sustainably in partnership with forestry staff. Villagers have an active role in decision-making in their forestry resource management. They are involved in all aspects of planning and implementation, making key decisions on benefit sharing, monitoring and evaluation. State forestry staff provide technical assistance, train and assist villagers in generating and assessing the different options, but the villagers themselves make the final decision within the given regulatory framework.

Developing village forestry for nationwide adoption is a complicated process involving continuous learning. The main stages of FOMACOP are:

| Initial development of the village forestry system and preparing for its implementation. |
| Training and application of the system components such as participatory demarcation of village boundaries, participatory resource inventory and forest management planning in pilot villages. |
| Improving the system based on the field experiences. |
In addition to technical aspects associated with forest management, special attention must be paid to organisational building and strengthening at the village and district level, as well as to entrepreneurial development of villagers.

The whole process of instituting village forestry, from first contact with the village, to conducting management operations that follow an approved village management plan is envisaged to take three years. (Flow chart)

FOMACOP's development philosophy is founded on the notion that in the face of poverty and increasing population pressure, forest resources can be protected only if they contribute to meeting villagers' basic needs and to the overall economic and social development.

Many community forestry projects have failed, because villagers have been allocated poor quality forests, or totally deforested land, that cannot support the population. In FOMACOP the forests that villagers are given responsibility for managing contain both valuable mixed deciduous hardwood forests and degraded dry dipterocarpus forest. They range in size from about 800 hectares up to 6,000 hectares. The forest which fall within their traditional (customary use) territories can be utilised sustainably by the villagers following an approved forest management plan. To work, the plan must provide for various household needs such as timber, revenue and employment. Religious, protection and conservation forests within village forest management areas will be identified and excluded from commercial utilisation.

Grants and loans also provided to address the basic needs of local people. Projects include improving the water supply and basic infrastructure of villagers. The revenue from sustainable forest management will also help to finance livelihood and income generating projects.

FOMACOP is actively trying to attract other organisations to start development activities in the districts and villages where village forestry is being promoted. This will ensure that development of various sectors will be balanced and consistent with villagers needs. From early 1998 onwards, it is expected that two NGOs will be working in the FOMACOP areas in basic health care and education.

**MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS IN 1995-1997**

FOMACOP's objectives are very ambitious. However, the first two and a half years of operation have shown promising results. The sub-programme has moved ahead on two fronts. Firstly, it has assisted the Department of Forestry in developing national guidelines and codes of practice, specifically, the National Village Forestry Strategy and National Code of Timber Harvesting Practice. FOMACOP has been an active participant in the drafting of forestry legislation, especially with regard to village forestry and sustainable forest management. These are important first steps to establishing widespread sustainable forest management.

Secondly, several key village forestry systems such as participatory delineation of village boundaries, village organising and participatory land-use mapping and forest inventory as well as management planning have been developed and tested in the field.

Training of trainers and field staff has been conducted at the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO), District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO) and at village level amounting to several thousand man-days of training.

This has allowed for initial steps towards implementation of sustainable forest management at the village level. In early 1998 the Forest Management Sub-programme was operating in 61 villages. PAFO and DAFO staff are already supporting village forestry implementation in the field, and beginning to report good results.
Villagers have shown great capacity to learn and perform the tasks successfully. Sixty-one village forestry core groups, with some 320 members have been formed. Fifteen core groups have evolved into formal village forestry organisations. Village teams, together with DAFO staff, have demarcated boundaries of 57 village territories, which have been approved by district and province administration. The total area mapped and inventoried by villagers with assistance from the state forestry staff in early 1998 was 145,000 hectares and 23,000 hectares, respectively; considerable achievements even in an international scale.

**FOREST MANAGEMENT SUB-PROGRAMME IN 1998-2000**

In 1998-1999 it is expected that the first batch of fifteen villages will start timber harvesting following a village-formulated, state-approved forest management plan. This will create a steady income for them, help them in meeting their basis needs, supply wood to forest industries, and generate revenue to the province and the national government in the form of royalty payments, on a sustainable basis. If this takes place as planned, an important milestone would have been achieved.

By the end of the FOMACOP project period in early 2000, it is expected that:

- About 80 village territories covering 100 villages will be covered by Village Forest Management Plans and Management Contracts between the state and villagers.
- About 50 villages will be managing forests following approved management plans.
- Village development activities such as improvement of access roads and water supply and other rural development projects will have been completed in selected villages.
- All the village forestry systems, guidelines and training manuals will have been developed, tested and consolidated into a Village Forestry Handbook.
- Legislation and instructions supporting village forestry implementation nationwide are in place.
- A National Village Forestry Strategy and Programme will be in place, and used to guide the expansion of village forestry and its variations to other geographical areas and forest categories.

**FOMACOP RESOURCES**

The total budget of FOMACOP from 1995 to 2000 is about 20.3 million USD. 8.7 million of which will come from the World Bank (WB), 5.0 million from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), 5.6 million from the Government of Finland (GOF), and 1 million from the government of Lao PDR. Jaakko Poeyry Consulting of Finland, together with Burapha Development Consultants and CARE International (an NGO), provide technical assistance for the forestry component of FOMACOP funded by the GOF. MIDAS Ltd. of Thailand is responsible for technical assistance in the conservation component funded by GEF. World Wide Fund for Nature and the World Conservation Society (WCS) co-operate with FOMACOP's NBCA Management Sub-programme in selected fields.

As of late 1997, FOMACOP's Forest Management Sub-programme technical assistance resources included three long-term international advisers and three long-term local advisors. The NBCA Sub-programme resources included two international long-term advisors, two development workers from the German Development Service and two volunteer from New Zealand Volunteer Service Abroad. Lao Project management and technical staff comprise 130 people, including project management in Vientiane and PAFO and DAFO field staff in the four provinces where FOMACOP is active.