While awareness and support for community forestry in Cambodia have broadened over the past several years, national policy for community forestry has not yet been formalized. The recent murder of a community forestry activist demonstrates that community forestry is not just about tools and processes but intrinsically linked to power, control of resources and evolving civil society institutions which can take on these interests.

Cambodia is under considerable pressure from international organizations and donors to reform and improve forest policy and law. Community forestry advocates are active in forest policy dialogue, seeking to ensure that community forestry is recognized and integrated within broader forest policy and law, as a means for promoting community forestry.

Recent violations of a recognized community forest in Kompong Thom province by local ‘powermen’ and business interests highlighted conflicts between local communities and outside interests, and helped draw public attention to local dependence on forests. The murder of a local NGO activist who was advocating for the local community in Kompong Thom province was publicized in November by the Phnom Penh Post, a twice-monthly national newspaper. In this situation, in which the threat to the forest came from outside the forest sector, the local community, CF advocates, and the national Forest Department shared the objective of preventing the forest encroachment. The Forest Department wrote to the Prime Minister, opposing the forest encroachment. The provincial Governor wrote to the Prime Minister in support of the encroachment on the basis it represented “development” for the province, but failed to acknowledge the impact on and opposition by the local people. The outcome of the dispute is pending and is being watched by community forest advocates.

Community Forestry Coverage in Cambodia

The actual forest area under collaborative forest management (community forestry) with institutional support in Cambodia is still small. But it is significant for two reasons. First, it is the only forest in Cambodia that is actively under forest management, and stands in especially stark contrast to the millions of hectares of forest that have been allocated to forest concessions. Second, community forestry projects are spread around the country in a variety of social and environmental contexts, with support from different government levels and agencies and a number of international donors and NGOs, and thereby demonstrate the wide applicability and broad cooperation that is possible in community forestry. These projects are loosely networked through a national network, and some are more closely linked through a CF Working Group and through various advocacy efforts. It's not only NGOs, and not only national level. For example, the CBNRM project is not NGO, and the NTFP project in Ratanakiri is not national level, but both are important in advocacy. So while it would be nice to mention CONCERN, it might over-emphasize the role of CONCERN to mention only it, yet it is complicated to describe the 'various' actors beyond a very generic level.

CF policy development in Cambodia

The need for an enabling policy for community forestry is widely recognized, but the mechanisms and leadership for formulating a broadly-supported policy is not yet clear. Efforts to formulate a national policy have stalled over differences among government agencies and other community forestry advocates. Differences have arisen primarily over authorities and roles of different agencies and organizations in relation to community forestry.

In 1998 a joint government-NGO working group drafted and proposed a community forestry policy that provided for the participation of different government agencies responsible for forests and rural communities and a wide range of other organizations which are supporting community forestry development. This draft policy was modified by the MAFF to vest sole authority for community forestry in MAFF. The resulting criticism of unilateral concentration of authority by community forestry advocates, led to a reassessment of the draft policy the policy is still at the Council of Ministers and has not, to my knowledge, been officially withdrawn, my
understanding is that MAFF is not trying to move it forward

In 1999-2000, an ADB-supported technical assistance project undertook a second effort to draft community forestry policy, based partially on CF Guidelines that it drafted. However, the project failed to inform or consult the government or other stakeholders regarding this policy drafting initiative. In turn this resulted in confusion, negative reactions, and eventually a rejection of the draft policy by all stakeholders including the government. While this was an unfortunate setback for constructive policy development, it demonstrated that there is wide consensus for a pluralist process in developing community forestry policies and guidelines.

Draft Guidelines for *Community Forestry in Cambodia*, prepared last year (2000) with consultation by all major stakeholders, are now being further developed into an operational format and field tested by a CF Working Group. Based on practical experience in Cambodia, the draft *Guidelines* contain both institutional and procedural approaches to community forestry that may be informative to national policy for community forestry.

Planning for a national workshop on community forestry is underway. It is anticipated that this workshop will provide another opportunity to develop a shared vision for community forestry development, and thereby contribute to formulation of a broadly supported national policy.

Dialogue and formulation of community forestry policy is taking place in conjunction with efforts to prepare and pass a new comprehensive Forest Law. This and other policies and laws on natural resource management that are currently being developed relating to land, fisheries, government decentralization, rural development, and local (commune) elections are part of an effort to improve governance in Cambodia. While there is relatively little integration of these different processes at the national level, how these policies are interpreted at the provincial level - which most directly influences what happens at local level - is the most crucial aspect of policy and governance reform. The article from Ratanakiri (page 20) illustrates the success of the integrated approach to planning development activities and the successful efforts of the Som Thom Commune to gain recognition to manage their local forest area (see page 12). It is also a rare example, but provides a way for to demonstrate how policy formulation can learn from provincial and local level experiences.

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