Community Forest Management and
The Struggle for Equity

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Abstract

Our central thesis is that "sustainable forest management," including attention to human well being, cannot happen without increased flexibility for those working in the field.

The many national programs purporting to encourage "community management" are plagued by problems some of which derive from too rigid adherence to pre-planned implementation procedures. CIFOR's program on Local People, Devolution and Adaptive Collaborative Management of Forests (ACM) represents a value adding approach that focuses on stimulating improved collaboration among stakeholders in the forest, strengthened two-way communication links between communities and others, and group/social learning in pursuit of adaptive management, using participatory action research. To demonstrate the value of the kind of flexibility we urge, we document our experience with equity issues, specifically relating to gender and intra-community diversity. Field researchers in ten countries developed locally appropriate methods for empowering marginalized groups. These methods include, among others, training in transformative learning; devolution of community level authority to smaller groups; use of multi-stakeholder workshops; multiple stakeholder visioning exercises; collaboration with NGOs; boundary demarcation as a means to facilitate coordination among communities; and cross visits. We conclude with a plea for greater adaptiveness within forestry bureaucracies as they try to implement more truly devolved forest management.

Keywords: ACM, PAR, gender, diversity, Indonesia, Nepal, Bolivia, Zimbabwe, flexibility, trust

Introduction

The deteriorating conditions of tropical forests and of the conditions under which forest people live have become increasingly obvious in recent years, as has the urgency with which these problems need to be addressed. For the last two decades there has been a growing sense that the direct involvement of communities in forest management would contribute to addressing these problems. Some countries have had legislation officially devolving forest management to communities for some time; others have recently legislated opportunities for greater devolution; and some retain strong state control of forest management while experimenting with more devolved approaches. In all cases, reasonably enough, legislation and pilot projects include procedural interpretations that specify how management is to be

devolved (e.g, in Nepal, Community Forestry (CFM); in Bolivia, "Indigenous Community Territories" (TCOs) ; in Zimbabwe, a "Resource Sharing Experiment;" etc.).

Indeed, these procedural interpretations are necessary; they set out a clear series of steps for foresters to follow. The clearer the steps, the more likely it is that the particular "interpretation" (CFM, TCOs, etc.) will be successfully applied. However, with time and in confrontation with forest and human diversity, such procedural uniformity can become a serious liability for viable community forestry; procedures take on a life of their own, separate from the aim of devolving management ((Malla 2001); (Contreras forthcoming); (Ribot 2001)).

With these concerns in mind, CIFOR initiated a program, combining action and research in and with forest communities. We tried to develop an approach that would allow for procedural flexibility, while retaining paradigmatic and conceptual congruence with the underlying desire to devolve real management to communities. We hoped that by bringing together the best approaches, into an umbrella program, and evaluating what transpired as field teams implemented these approaches flexibly and responsively, we could both address these problems directly, and contribute to global, scientific management.

Here, we first present our approach, followed by some of the results obtained. We use the issue of equity in forest management to demonstrate the value of taking such a flexible, iterative approach. We then present some conclusions from our experience.

Materials and Methods

CIFOR's program, Local People, Devolution and Adaptive Collaborative Management of Forests (ACM)---now underway in ten countries in its full form[2]---has provided an umbrella conceptual framework, with the expectation that activities on each field site would develop along locally appropriate lines. We stressed participatory diagnosis of problems and opportunities and sought "embeddedness" by means of a series of context studies[3] and careful attention to "entry negotiations" for our facilitator/researchers. These facilitator/researchers---ranging from PhDs to high school graduates---worked with local communities (and others) to catalyze an adaptive, collaborative process to improve human and forest well being. The next step in a still emerging set of procedures is initiation of participatory action research (PAR) (Prabhu 2000). The communities then identify some action to undertake together and that they hypothesize might strengthen or improve underlying management or communication or collaboration processes. After further articulation and elaboration of this idea together, the group, or a subset thereof, acts or intervenes. A central feature of PAR is the direct and pro-active involvement of local communities in problem identification, planning, monitoring, and re-planning, in a cyclical loop over time (cf. (Greenwood and Levin 1998); (Fisher 2001)).

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[2] ACM main sites (numbering 30) are in four countries in Asia (Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Philippines), two in South America (Bolivia, Brazil), and four in Africa (Cameroon, Ghana, Malawi, Zimbabwe). Our selection criteria for all sites included existing local management, at least one other stakeholder, and a moderate to high level of conflict. We also identified analytical dimensions that we considered likely to be important in catalyzing an adaptive and collaborative management process: Devolution status, diversity of stakeholders, management goals, level of conflict, level of social capital, population pressure, and forest type.

[3] These included stakeholder identification, historical trends, policy, C&I assessment, and an assessment of existing levels of adaptiveness and collaborativeness.

> *CIFOR defines adaptive collaborative management as a value-adding approach whereby people who have 'interests' in a forest, agree to act together to plan, observe and learn from the implementation of their plans (recognizing that plans often fail to fulfill their stated objectives). ACM is characterized by conscious efforts among such groups to communicate, collaborate, negotiate and seek out opportunities to learn collectively about the impacts of their actions.[4]*

Throughout the research, we have tried to facilitate interaction and collaboration among stakeholders in and around each research site (a horizontal function); strengthen two way communication links between local communities and relevant hierarchies (a vertical function); and stimulate monitoring and social learning (a diachronic function). Most fundamentally the program has been designed to assess whether or not we can catalyze a process that will empower local communities in their interactions with others, in such a way that both communities and the environment can benefit. We have used a variety of tools (e.g., future scenarios, C&I monitoring, CORMAS, CIMAT, focus groups, pebble sorting, transects, and others),[5] to try to bring about the required collective action. And we monitor and evaluate our own activities to determine what works.

Results and Discussion

Here we take the question of enhancing equity in forest management---using examples from sites where equity was identified as central---to demonstrate the flexible, responsive approach we have tried to encourage. Longterm results cannot yet be known, but short term results have been impressive. These are some of the methods used:

1) *Training in transformative learning*. Because the Zimbabwe ACM team[6] concluded that the Mafungautsi communities were too passive, they opted for Training for Transformation (Freire and Freire 1994; Freire 1970). This approach maintains that education can either domesticate or liberate; and its proponents work toward inculcating an interest and ability in critically analyzing one's own conditions. Following the training, community members contributed their ideas about improving forest management more readily. Specifically, women's involvement in decisionmaking fora increased dramatically (Mutimukuru, Nyirenda, and Matose in preparation).

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[4] This definition was initially crafted by Ravi Prabhu (Prabhu et al. 2001), and modified by members of the ACM team in conjunction with a meeting of the program's International Steering Committee, in Manila, Philippines, October 2001. It differs markedly for instance, from Lee's (Lee 1999) views on adaptive management as a top-down approach---despite the strong influence of his earlier writings (Lee 1993) on our program's development.

[5] CORMAS is a multi-agent system based computer program designed to contribute to negotiation processes among stakeholders; and CIMAT is a CIFOR program designed so that users can adapt existing sets of criteria and indicators for their own purposes. Herry Purnomo has been a leader in developing CIMAT; and he works with scientists from the French CIRAD-Forêt in using CORMAS. See other tools described in (Colfer *et al.* 1999; Wollenberg, Edmunds, and Buck 2000).

[6] Led by Ravi Prabhu and Frank Matose, and composed, in this work, of Richard Nyirenda and Tendayi Mutimukura as ACM facilitators.

2) *Devolution of community level authority to smaller groups.* In Nepal, the ACM teams[7] found domination of community forest management by local elites, often in cooperation with DFOs (cf. (Malla 2001); (Malla et al. 2001); (Hobley 1996)). These communities are diverse, with up to 18 ethnic groups; and their 'Great Tradition' is explicitly hierarchical, making the involvement of marginalized groups unusually difficult. After a series of workshops focusing on criteria and indicators, the community groups decided to devolve some of the power from the central FUG committees to the hamlets (typically comprised of a single ethnic group). At hamlet meetings, people would discuss the annual Operating Plan for the community forest, for instance, and an elected representative would bring their ideas to the FUG committee. Field teams saw a real increase in involvement by women and stigmatized caste/ethnic groups ((Dangol in preparation); (Sitaula in preparation)).

3) *Use of multi-stakeholder workshops.* Just as our field team[8] in Pasir, East Kalimantan began their research, a process of official decentralization began, providing them with both problems and opportunities. In response to both the lack of power traditionally available to local communities, and governmental uncertainty about how to proceed under the new guidelines, the team convened multi-stakeholder workshops, specifically focused on planning. First, they developed a common vision for the future, planning joint activities to enhance forest sustainability in the area. With each meeting (interspersed with single-stakeholder meetings), community members exhibited increasing competence and officials showed greater receptivity. Particularly thorny issues were avoided at first, but by June 2002, the group addressed issues relating to conflicts between local communities and logging companies (Hakim 2002).

4) *Multiple stakeholder visioning exercises* (undertaken in Bolivia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi). Future scenario approaches were used in Bolivia (Wollenberg, Edmunds, and Buck 2000). Efforts to develop community management plans, in line with governmental requirements for an Indigenous Community Territory (TCO), had marginalized women. The community was broken into sub-groups, who imagined (and drew) a point five years in the future when their timber management plan was working perfectly. They described their households, communities, and forests, indicating changes and benefits. The groups then discussed their respective ideal futures, focusing specifically on benefits. The facts that women were interested in using community benefits for household improvements, and youth, for public meeting places, would not have been known (Cronkleton in preparation).

5) *Collaboration with NGOs.* Women, in Romwe, Zimbabwe, were having conflicts with local men about the use of resources in the area. Nemarundwe (Nemarundwe in preparation) found NGO support to be critical in making land formally available to women and increasing their voice in decisionmaking about garden lands. With the support of CARE International, a subset of women were able to get legal certificates to land, in contradistinction to traditional norms relating to land tenure. The women were also able to assemble as a group, centered on the garden, to confront an inequitable decision by the traditional leader (*sabuku*).

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[7] Led by Cynthia McDougall, Laya Prasad Uprety, and Netra Tumbahangphe, there were four principal ACM facilitators: Sushma Dangol and Mani RameBanjad, working with NORMS in the central part of Nepal; and Kalpana Sharma and Narayan Prasad Sitaula, working with New Era in the East.
[8] Led by Stepi Hakim, the ACM facilitators were Suprihatin and Amin Jafar of the NGO, Padi.

6) *Boundary demarcation as a means to facilitate coordination among stakeholders and communities.* In Malinau, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, where local communities have no legal rights to their traditional territories, the ACM group[9] helped map the territories of 27 communities. Part of the process involved facilitating agreements between adjacent communities about their common borders; these proved fluid, partial and temporary. Power relationships required a phased process that allowed layers of conflict and awareness of changing political conditions to unfold. Since many leaders were not accountable to their communities, encouraging participation and representation of weaker/disadvantaged group was especially important. Real gains were made, in empowering local communities in a process to assert claims and establish debate about rights---a process that communities, government and companies are now keen to complete (Anau et al. 2002).

7) *Cross Visits* (undertaken in the Philippines, Brazil and Bolivia). To help community members from Guarayos, Bolivia understand the implications of becoming involved in formal timber management, Bolfor[10]/ACM invited 10-12 people from each village (including at least 5 women each) to visit La Chonta, a well known and nearby example of community timber management. Women responded eagerly to this opportunity, since none of them had ever seen timber extraction. The women's participation provoked long discussions on topics ranging from sawyer efficiency and vine cutting to safety and controlling food use at the communities' logging camp. These visits were so successful that BOLFOR incorporated the practice as a standard extension activity for each regional office in other parts of Bolivia (Peter Cronkleton, personal communication 23/9/02; cf. experience in the Philippines (Arda-Minas 2002) and Acre, Brazil (Marianne Schmink, personal communication 8 May 2002)).

Conclusions

Our attempt in ACM has been to develop an approach to collaborative forest management that responds to local conditions and is responsive to local realities and desires. This concern was partially motivated by the problems that have emerged in national community forestry programs. ACM has provided an umbrella conceptual framework (not unlike the frameworks of national programs), but within which we have encouraged field personnel to respond to local interests, to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves, to adapt our general structure to meet local needs. These young facilitator/researchers come primarily from the countries concerned. They have shown themselves capable of selecting appropriate "interventions"[11] together with local communities, after brief training, using the guidance framework of ACM, and with some mentoring from their supervisors. Field personnel listen closely to community concerns; and supervisors listen carefully to field personnel.

Our attempts to foster greater equity are an example of our pluralistic approach. Field personnel approached gender and diversity from a variety of perspectives, using different

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[9] Led by Eva Wollenberg, the team included Njau Anau, Ramses Iwan, Miriam van Heist, Godwin Limberg, Made Sudana.

[10] BOLFOR is a USAID-funded project on sustainable forest management that has been operating in Bolivia for nearly a decade. ACM work there is also funded by USAID and is intimately integrated with BOLFOR's activities. Peter Cronkleton is in charge of ACM activities in Bolivia.

[11] We do not claim perfection; that would be counter to one of the principles on which the ACM approach is based: That no plan is perfect, that plans inevitably need and benefit from responsive improvement.

methods, and succeeded in stimulating involvement of marginalized groups in forest management. Their activities were fashioned in response to the contexts in which they worked.

From the standpoint of enhancing equity, our conclusions from this experience are
1) Women and other marginalized peoples have something significant to offer and to gain from better forest management;
2) The effort to involve relevant segments of communities in forest management is important for maintaining/enhancing forest health and human well being; and
3) Involving marginalized groups is feasible, using locally appropriate methods, such as those outlined above.

From the standpoint of improving community forestry in general, we conclude that:
1) Managers themselves must adopt the iterative, learning approach to management that we have tried to foster in our field sites,
2) Field personnel must be granted the flexibility to respond creatively to local conditions.
3) Small amounts of training in the approach, combined with strong support from the bureaucracy, can produce positive results.

We conclude that it is possible and preferable to have broad guidelines rather than rigid procedures, and that the skills of young, suitably trained and mentored extension agents are sufficient to enable the necessary flexibility for conscious and structured learning and collaboration. We must, however, caution that the culture of many forestry institutions still function to discourage such flexibility. Ultimately, success in the field will require greater levels of trust in forestry's home offices.

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