



FORESTS *and* PEOPLE:

# 25 years *of* Community Forestry





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Community  
Forestry

by J.E.M. Arnold



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# Foreword

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ALMOST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS have elapsed since the concept of community-based forest management emerged as a focus for addressing the linkages between forestry and rural people. Many countries are still at an early stage in the process of developing and introducing the concepts used in community forestry that may be appropriate to their situations. In others, community forestry has become central to the way forest resources are managed.

The experience of some of the longer-established and more flexible of these community forestry initiatives has been encouraging. It has become clear that, in the right circumstances, local or joint control can result in increased flow of products and other benefits to local users, and can bring about an improvement in the condition of the resource.

The importance of the roles that forests and forestry play in rural livelihoods, especially of the poor, is well recognized. The need to involve rural users who depend upon forests in decision-making and activities related to the management of forest resources is becoming widely accepted. Furthermore, the experiences and knowledge gained through community forestry have proven to be indispensable for sustainable forest management in a much wider context. The last decade of international dialogue on forests has focused on the social, economic and environmental functions for sustainable forest management. Participatory approaches are central to this concept, and practical implementation is relying heavily on community forestry experiences. This concept also gives a sharper focus on poverty alleviation and the livelihoods of the rural poor.

A major theme of this publication is that community-based participatory forestry is part of the overall process of adapting forestry and forest management to make it more

responsive and relevant to the needs and interests of rural people with a stake in forests. Community forestry is being redefined, not as a separate form of forestry but as part of the process whereby forestry itself is meeting broader societal, environmental and economic challenges and changes.

This publication was supported and funded by FAO and the multidonor trust fund, the Forests, Trees and People Programme (FTPP). It was prepared to fill a gap in the current documentation on community-based forest management. One of the most highly requested and widely distributed of the FFTP publications has been *Community Forestry Note 7, Community Forestry: Ten Years in Review*, which provides a synthesis of the experience gained in community forestry by the end of the 1980s. Given the strong, continuing demand for *Ten Years in Review*, we decided that a new review was needed to record recent changes. Like the previous one, this publication not only describes developments in community forestry over the past 25 years, but also looks to the future, highlighting some of the principal issues that are likely to influence community-based forest management.

We would like to pay special tribute to the author of this publication, Mr J.E.M. Arnold, a well-known authority on community-based forest management. He has been closely involved with community forestry at FAO since the outset, with the launch of the Forestry for Local Community Development Programme in the late 1970s. We are grateful to him for having undertaken this comprehensive review of the state-of-the-art in community forestry.



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# Acronyms

<b>CAMPFIRE</b>	Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources	<b>JFM</b>	Joint Forest Management
<b>CARE</b>	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere	<b>MIQRO</b>	Maderas Industriales de Quintana Roo
<b>CIFOR</b>	Center for International Forestry Research	<b>NAFTA</b>	North American Free Trade Agreement
<b>CSIR</b>	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research	<b>NAS</b>	National Academy of Sciences
<b>ESCOR</b>	Economic and Social Committee for Overseas Research	<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>FECOFUN</b>	Federation of Community Forestry Users in Nepal	<b>OCEES</b>	Oxford Centre for the Environment, Ethics and Society
<b>FTPP</b>	Forests, Trees and People Programme	<b>ODA</b>	Overseas Development Administration
<b>FUG</b>	Forest user group	<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>GEMINI</b>	Growth and Equity through Microenterprise Investments and Institutions	<b>PPF</b>	Plan Piloto Forestal
<b>GTZ</b>	German Agency for Technical Cooperation	<b>PRA</b>	Participatory Rural Appraisal
<b>ICIMOD</b>	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development	<b>PRODEFOR</b>	A government financial incentive plan
<b>IFPRI</b>	International Food Policy Research Institute	<b>RECOFTC</b>	Regional Community Forestry Training Center
<b>IIED</b>	International Institute for Environment and Development	<b>UCODEFO</b>	Unit of Conservation and Forestry Development
<b>ITTO</b>	International Tropical Timber Organization	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>IUCN</b>	World Conservation Union	<b>UNOFOC</b>	A network of forestry associations in Mexico
		<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
		<b>VFC</b>	Village Forest Committee
		<b>WWF</b>	World Wide Fund for Nature



# Introduction

This publication sets out to provide a review of how community forestry has evolved over the period since it first came to prominence in the mid-1970s. ‘Community forestry’ is interpreted as “any situation that intimately involves local people in forestry activity” (FAO, 1978). It therefore covers a broad range of linkages among people, forests and the outputs of forests, from forest-dwelling communities to populations who draw on nearby forests for part of their livelihood needs, and to those outside forests who manage tree stocks on farmland in order to sustain flows of forest outputs, or who engage in artisanal and other local small-scale commercial production and trade of forest products.<sup>1</sup>

A major theme of the publication is that community forestry is part of the overall process of adapting forestry and forest management to make it more responsive and relevant to the needs and interests of rural people with a stake

<sup>1</sup> For discussion of various interpretations of the term ‘community forestry’ and of other terms, such as ‘social forestry’, ‘participatory forestry’ and ‘collaborative forestry’, which have also been used to describe initiatives that involve people in forestry, see Wiersum, 1999; and Gilmour and Fisher, 1997.

in forests. Community forestry thus is interpreted not as a separate form of forestry, but as part of the process whereby forestry is being refashioned in line with broader societal and economic changes. Part 1 of the publication is devoted to exploring its evolution in terms of these changes. As the impact on forests and rural populations of key forces for such change, such as greater devolution and local participation, has varied throughout the world, the impact of community forestry has differed. Though of real relevance to industrialized as well as developing countries, it has generally been more important in the latter, and this is reflected in the balance of the publication.

Rural people have often practised some form of control and management of local forests in the past, and there are many instances of historical systems that still exist, if only in reduced forms. As these have been extensively reviewed elsewhere, they are not dealt with at length here.<sup>2</sup> Instead, this publication focuses primarily on initiatives that governments and donors, and civil society, have taken in recent times to create forms of community forestry relevant to circumstances prevailing at present. The publication reflects the reality that some of these contemporary systems are longer established and more fully developed than others, and hence provide more experience from which lessons may be drawn. Though the discussion in the publication draws heavily on this experience, and in particular on that in Asia, it is important to keep in mind that much

community forestry is at an earlier and more tentative stage.

Part 1 examines the main features of relationships between people and forests. Chapter 1 reviews the causes and consequences of the decline in locally managed systems of forest management and use that were widespread in the past. It then examines the factors underlying the changes in both government and local-level attitudes towards community forestry that began to attract attention in the 1970s. The chapter concludes with a summary account of the lessons learned in the early years of community forestry initiatives, and of how this led to the main thrusts evident in the 1990s.

Chapter 2 outlines the information available on the nature of people's linkages with forests and forest products, highlighting the issue of choice versus dependency on forests, and the nature and consequences of the changes in these relationships that are

taking place and will continue to take place. It also records the shifts that are taking place in patterns of supply of the products that rural people use (particularly the shifts from forests to bush fallow, farm trees and other tree stocks), which result from the ways in which people transform the natural resources available to them. A framework is developed to explore how the linkages differ across major categories of resource, land use and livelihood systems.

Against this background of information on past trends, and on needs and resources, Part 2 explores contemporary forms of community forestry systems. Chapter 3 explores different forms of collective governance and support measures that have been developed in different people-forest situations, and the measures that have been taken to encourage and support them. Similarly, Chapter 4 examines systems based on smallholder rather than collective management, including farmer management of

trees as part of farm systems, and small-scale production and trade of forest products. Both chapters discuss the extent to which such approaches appear to have been successful, and the main factors explaining their performance.

Part 3 discusses some of the principal issues that are likely to influence the ways in which community forestry continues to change. These include changing perspectives on the balance between conservation and development that may realistically be achieved in community forest management, the growing impact of market liberalization and the private sector, and the debate on how to move towards approaches to collaborative management that accommodate multiple stakeholders and interests. The publication concludes with an examination of the changing roles of governments and civil society in forestry as they adapt to community forestry, and the implications of this for forest departments.

<sup>2</sup> For regional and global reviews of this literature, see Wiersum, 1999; Ascher, 1995; Messerschmidt, 1993; Davis and Wali, 1993; Shepherd, 1992; Arnold and Stewart, 1991; Ostrom, 1990; and Poffenberger, 1990.