

SECTION 2

KEY ELEMENTS FOR ENHANCING INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY BASED FOREST MANAGEMENT

2.1. Enabling conditions: Prerequisites for Institutionalizing Community-Based Forest Management

Based on the above lessons learnt, a range of enabling conditions for the promotion of community-based forest management (CBFM) has been identified and summarized below:

A discrete and defined community

A discrete community with identifiable membership is important for community organization, decision-making and benefits sharing, control and regulation of behaviour, sharing of management responsibilities and accountability. Community forestry implementation should therefore be undertaken at a well defined target community with clear leadership and institutional structure that is accepted by the members. For communities to be able to engage in forest management they must be recognized by the government as legal participants in the management of the forests (Heermans, J. and Otto, J., 1999; AFORNET, 2005). To be the legal participants they need to be defined, with clearly defined boundaries which delineate limits of their jurisdiction (FAO, 2002).

Well established Institutions

Communities are by nature heterogeneous and therefore have members with multiple and often competing interests. The existence of legitimate local community institutions that are respected by the community members and provide platforms for interfacing and engaging with other stakeholders such as private sector, local government authorities and central government is an important prerequisite for a successful CBFM. The key role of such institutions is to organise and facilitate community platforms for dialogue, debate and setting of community forest resources management objectives that take into account the multiple uses and demands placed on the forest and tree resources by their community. Other roles include overseeing implementation of management plans, enforcement of rules and regulations, monitoring of management outcomes and impacts and facilitating equitable distribution and sharing of benefits.

Clearly defined resource property rights

The forest area over which the defined community has jurisdiction should be clearly defined with identifiable boundaries. In addition, secure boundaries give

communities the right to exclude outsiders and power to prosecute offenders. This effectively ensures that the forest is not under open access but closed access. With clear ownership or power over a forest, each community jealously guards its own forest or sphere of forest (in the case of JFM) against encroachment or illegal use by outsiders. Above all, security of tenure encourages investment without fear of expropriation (FAO, 2002).

Land use planning

It is important to ensure that the forest to be managed is part of a land use plan that sets aside the forest area in relation to other land uses such as agriculture and settlements. This provides a framework for long term investment in forest management without the danger of conversion to other land uses. Planning should be based on a good understanding of the different needs of different user or interest groups in the community as well as an understanding of the land use capabilities. In this regard it should be undertaken by the community itself with assistance from technocrats.

Improved policy and legal frameworks

Conducive legal and regulatory environments are needed to enable CBFM. In most countries, there has been notable progress in developing CBFM friendly policies, legislation, and institutional reforms and tenurial re-arrangements (Odera, 2009, Heermans, J. and Otto, J., 1999). Clear tenurial rights are crucial to enable the community to negotiate with government for exclusive use of forest resources and for investment as well as revenue sharing. Awarding of forest ownership or use rights has been proven to be necessary but not sufficient to guarantee forest conservation and management by communities. This has to be achieved through decentralization of power and devolution of authority directly to the community level (Odera, 2009, Heermans, J. and Otto, J., 1999). However, to safeguard the community from shift in ideologies that come with changes in administration, a legally binding framework is advocated for (Wily, 1997). In this regard, the willingness of the government to shed power and the readiness and capacity of the community to "*receive and make use of new-found powers*" remain critical (Wily, 2001).

Political support

The advent of political democracy and multi-party systems has increased demands for accountability and transparency. Coupled with the pressure from global processes and civil society, political support gives CBFM strong foundation for growth (AFORNET, 2005: Odera, J., 2009). Political support can also be demonstrated by promulgation and implementation of supportive CBFM policies and legislation and allocation of resources for implementation.

Cost and benefit sharing

Local communities must become recipients of genuine benefits from all forest-based economic activities including the most lucrative - timber and tourism. NTFPs are certainly valued for personal consumption and local sale, but are not usually as financially interesting as timber or income derived from exploitation of forested lands. If communities do not get, or are denied access, to all benefits, there will be no real lasting incentive for them to invest in CBFM. It is therefore imperative to ensure that the benefits from CBFM generate enough resources to: cover the costs of management activities incurred by the communities; allow re-investment into management of the forest resources; and to contribute to community and household socio-economic needs. The basis and mechanisms for cost and benefit sharing between the different stakeholders and within communities must be clearly articulated right at the onset. In general these should take into account how much each of the stakeholders has invested based on their roles and responsibilities to ensure equity.

Improved marketing

The ultimate success of CBFM will be measured by its contribution to the transformation of the forest dependent communities (AFORNET, 2005: Odera, J 2009). This includes the capacity of forest-based enterprises to function efficiently and generate profits in a sustainable manner (Heermans and Otto, 1999). For this to be achieved the current challenges of lack of, or limited access to markets and credit need to be addressed; low levels of literacy, and poor technologies resulting in inferior products have to be overcome. CBFM is more likely to succeed where forest products have good access to reliable markets. However, most natural forests do not have close proximity of markets, thus there is need to develop more sophisticated marketing strategies (Heermans and Otto, 1999). In some instances there might be need to modify laws and offer services to facilitate forest-based enterprises. Value-adding processing also increases the attractiveness of CBFM.

Access to finance

The availability of financial resources is critical for investment in forest management activities, capacity building and establishment and operation of small forest-based enterprises. Sometimes only small amounts are needed, (usually less than \$US100) to buy tools or improved beehives. Larger enterprises such as mobile sawmills naturally require more capital investment. The financial resources may be in the form of grants or loans. Investment credit on affordable terms is crucial for the establishment of forest-related businesses that are at the economic core of CBFM. In this regard linkages and partnerships with financial institutions and other private sector partners are essential to ensure communities and other stakeholders involved in CBFM have access to all necessary financial services.

Capacity development for local communities and service providers

The local community members, through their different user groups, and the local community institutions need to have adequate capacity to execute their mandates and responsibilities. This will require training, external support and above all an opportunity for the community to “learn-by-doing”. Capacity development is essential to help communities adopt new forest management systems and techniques, and to improve their skills.

As roles change from policing to facilitation, public forest institutions will need to develop new capacities and equip their staff with new skills and knowledge to enable them to better engage and support communities in CBFM. The same applies to other service providers in the private sector, civil society, academia and research. Some of the skills and capabilities to be developed include conflict management, participatory techniques, operational planning, facilitation of meetings, market analysis and access, participatory monitoring and evaluation methods, and time management, among other competencies. Another way of strengthening the capacity of public forest institutions is by establishing and /or assigning specific units and staff with the roles and responsibilities of developing and supporting CBFM at national level.

Improved knowledge base

The knowledge base and technical capacity to develop the full potential of CBFM in different settings are often very weak, both at community levels and among institutions and organisations. In this regard it is essential to support activities for generating improved knowledge of the forests and management techniques and their impacts. Action research should be an integral part of CBFM activities including collaborative monitoring. In this regard research institutions need to establish mechanisms for identifying and capturing research priorities from communities engaged in CBFM as well as effective ways of availing the research results to the communities.



Participants at a Community Forest Committee training in Jenoi, Lower River Region of The Gambia

Long-term commitment

Given the limited experiences in CBFM interventions in many countries and localities, it is clear it is a fairly new concept and practice which is still in its infancy. Development and implementation of CBFM requires long term investment and nurturing before its full benefits can be realised. A long term view to provision of assistance from donors, NGOs, forest departments and private sector should be considered for any such intervention (AFORNET, 2005). This will also ensure that the different CBFM models are sufficiently tested and refined including the re-engineering of the forest extension systems to support planning, and implementation of CBFM (AFORNET, 2005.). In the same vein, local communities intending to or engaged in CBFM should take a long term view and be prepared to commit themselves over a long period of time.

Information management and communication strategy

An effective communication strategy based on well-defined communication channels is very critical for facilitating exchange of information and experience sharing between all stakeholders. Care must be taken to ensure that the information is relevant and is communicated in forms that are accessible and easy to understand by all partners. This also includes deliberate documentation of experiences and lessons learnt and discussion platforms. An important component of the communication strategy is general awareness raising among communities and other stakeholders to ensure the concepts, benefits and challenges of CBFM are understood right from the onset and throughout implementation.

Participation

Participation is based on the democratic doctrine that stresses the importance of the participation of local people in the governance of their own affairs (Ostrom *et al.*, 1993). In this regard all members of the community, including different user groups (hunters, fuelwood collectors, NWFP harvesters etc.) and other stakeholders (e.g. private sector, local government state agencies) need to be involved in all aspects from planning to monitoring to ensure their needs and interests are taken into account. This requires the establishment of planning and review fora and dialogue platforms that will provide the space for participation and reconciliation of the multiple interests.

Collective decision making

Genuine agreement among different user or interest groups on the principles and objectives of forest resource management is a prerequisite for effective community based forest management. Collective decision making is critical for providing the mechanism for reconciliation of diverse interests and preferences within and across various levels of social and political organisations. Ultimately, each decision-making framework has spheres of its own efficacy, with the dilemma being to strike some measure of best fit.

Adaptive management:

This is a participatory process of goal setting, planning, management, experimentation and evaluation (Schelhas *et al.*, 2001). The approach provides an effective way of dealing with the complex and uncertain situations associated with forest management given the wide range of species, product types, varied ecological zones and diverse socio-economic contexts. It is a value-adding approach whereby individuals or groups who use or manage a forest agree through a process of participatory action research to act together and draw up plans for their forests. Also known as learning-by-doing, this approach is characterised by deliberate efforts among collaborating groups to communicate, negotiate and seek out opportunities to learn together about the impact of their actions and to adopt corrective action based on the available indigenous and scientific knowledge.

Collaborative learning and monitoring

The management objectives, status of the natural resources and the impacts of utilization are relatively dynamic and unpredictable. Collection of monitoring data and creation of platforms to review the outcomes and impacts of forest management on a regular basis enables communities to learn more about their forests and to adapt their actions to meet new needs and respond to changing circumstances.

Step-wise approach

A phased approach gives all concerned time to learn and adapt to changes as well as to build confidence between the communities and the state and other partners. A gradual process also allows all stakeholders (administrators, implementers and communities) to acquire all the necessary skills for the new approaches and techniques, so that they can carry out their new tasks effectively and successfully.

