participatory approaches.
- Given the importance of forests and forest products for rural women, a deliberate effort must be made to ensure the involvement of women at every level of management.

Ensure coherence of national forest policies and legislation with international agreements and local by-laws

National policy reforms take place in the context of i) obligations flowing from international and regional instruments to which countries are signatories, and ii) customary systems and local by-laws which govern resource use at local levels. National and local level regulatory framework on tenure must therefore be coherent with both levels of policies.

International instruments to be given consideration are mostly those related to:
- Multilateral environmental agreements, such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), etc.; and
- International human rights treaties.

It is government responsibility to ensure that policy, legislative and institutional frameworks adopted at national level are coherent with these international instruments to which the country is signatory.

At local level, it is important to ensure that practices under customary rules and local by-laws are congruent with the provisions of national land and forest tenure regulatory frameworks. Conversely, efforts should also be made to ensure that there is opportunity for local realities to inform the formulation of national policy and legislation. This is particularly important where customary rules are undemocratic and traditional leaders and their families and associates always take the lion share. To ensure coherence with relevant Agreements and by-laws, the CBFM process should:
- Enhance stakeholders' knowledge of international agreements and local by-laws relevant to CBFM
- Analyze national policy and legislation, international agreements, and local by-laws relevant to CBFM, and revise where appropriate.

3.3. Facilitating the Development and Implementation of Community-Driven Management Plans

The ultimate and desirable outcome of planning is the formal adoption of a community- driven management plan and its effective implementation. The sections below highlight the key steps involved in the process.

Introducing CBFM: The process

Community-led processes for developing management plans takes time. Experiences from The Gambia and Tanzania, generally considered as successful, clearly indicate that the process to successful introduction and acceptance of CBFM is long and complicated. Despite this, the process should not be rushed. As one CBFM expert puts it, "PFM/CBFM has more to do with attitudinal changes and building social capital than with legal and technical procedures. These take time to evolve and mature. The process has to give time for concerned stakeholders to build confidence or mutual trust and to develop a sense of ownership amongst communities".

Although details of actual procedures vary depending on local realities, it is now widely agreed that the process of initial set-up of CBFM areas and subsequent management have to follow more or less standardized procedures referred to as phased or step-wise approaches. The phasing provide sufficient time for confidence building between state and local stakeholders, and for building stakeholders' capacity and sense of responsibility. This cannot be achieved solely through the registration of a property title, or the formalization of a management agreement.

Two successful examples are shown in Box 4 (The Village land forest reserves experience in Tanzania) and Box 5 (The phased approach for community forestry in The Gambia). Although their origins and structures are different, the two processes share some common key elements, including the following (FAO, 2008):
•   *A phased approach:* the formal recognition of ownership is the result of a relatively long process during which the government uses pilot villages to test the process, assess local capacities and build confidence before releasing land titles.
•   *Capacity building* is an integral and significant component of the process.
•   *Mechanisms for benefit sharing* provide an incentive for titling and the sustainable use of resources.

The main limitations so far have been the comparatively high costs and resultant dependence on external funding in The Gambia, and the unclear impacts on poverty alleviation in Tanzania, mainly because of the poor condition of forests devolved to local communities.

In the Gambia, a program entitled the Community Forestry Program uses a formal three-phased model consisting of 1) a start-up phase, 2) a preliminary phase and 3) a consolidation/ownership phase. Implementation of the three-phased approach is illustrated in Box 5.

Box 4: Village Land Forest Reserves (VLFRs) in Tanzania

A village council may reserve common land within the village land as a VLFR for the purpose of forest management. The village council owns and manages the trees through a village natural resource committee (VNRC), a group or an individual, and most of the costs and benefits of managing and utilizing forest resources accrue to the owner. Central government has a minimal role in the management of VLFRs, and district councils are responsible for their planning and establishment, as well as for undertaking occasional monitoring. To declare a VLFR, the village prepares a management plan, which must be approved by the village assembly. Villages can make by-laws to support the management plan and provide the legal basis for enforcing forest management rules. The following are some of the incentives that the Forest Act (2002) provides to encourage local communities to reserve forest resources on general land:

- *Waiving State royalties on forest products*: This means that the village is not bound by inflexible (and low) royalty rates, and can sell its products at prevailing market rates.
- *Exemption from local government taxes ("cess") on forest products from village forest management*: This means that products harvested from VLFRs are not liable for local government taxes during transportation.
  Exemption from the reserved tree species list: This mechanism under the Forest Act (2002) protects commercially important or endangered tree species on unreserved land, and entrusts their management (and commercial use) to the district forest officer. When under village management, decisions about harvesting these species are transferred to the village administration.
- *Confiscation and sale of illegally harvested forest products and illegal equipment*: Any illegally harvested forest products or the equipment used for illegal harvesting in a VLFR may be confiscated and sold by the village council, and the proceeds used to benefit the village.

As a result of these incentives, communities' interest in establishing CBFM is increasing. Evidence is mounting that forest condition is significantly improved when forests are managed locally by mandated village institutions under CBFM arrangements.

Source: (Akida and Blomley, 2007) **In FAO, 2008**

Box 5: Phased approach for Community Forestry (CF) in The Gambia

A village or group of villages can become involved in community forest management by concluding an agreement with the Forestry Department over any piece of forest land that is not a forest park and that lies within the traditional lands of the village or group of villages. The Participatory Forest Management (PFM) Programme is implemented in phases. The timing for transfer to community ownership depends largely on the experience and readiness of the community concerned. Phased implementation is useful because it gives partners the chance to learn about each other. The responsibilities transferred to a local community must be commensurate with its technical and managerial capacity for sustainable management of the forest. The process of ownership transfer must therefore include regular training sessions to build community capacity.

The management of a community forest is based on an approved forest management plan developed by the local management committee with the help of forestry field staff. There are two types of plan: the three-year preliminary management plan, and the five-year community forest management plan. These correspond to the preliminary and consolidation phases of the CF implementation process. The community's management performance is evaluated before the end of the preliminary phase. If the evaluation results are positive, the final agreement - the Community Forestry Management Agreement - is signed, leading to the community's permanent ownership of the forest. During this three-year period, the Forestry Department provides capacity building to the local forest management committee, with training in record-keeping, bookkeeping and numeracy skills to enhance its financial management skills. The programme has had positive effects on forest cover, gender equity, income generation (through commercialization of forest products), governance, capacity building, and promotion of the integrated rural development approach.

Source: (Camara and Dampha, 2007) In FAO, 2008.

Branch firewood from Bulanjor community forest in Gambia (Photo: FAO)

Less successful examples from Cameroon highlight some of the main constraints that can hinder the successful completion of the process of developing community-driven management plans. Cameroon appears to be quite progressive regarding the promotion of community forest management. However, FAO (2008) and WRM (2007) reported constraints of overcomplicated and too expensive procedures that were discouraging for local actors. The result was limited success of the country's programme of communal forest at that time, although the situation may have improved since then (Box 6).

> **Box 6: Communal forests in Cameroon: A case of limited success**
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> **FAO, 2008 -** Cameroon's Forest Law of 1994 foresees the possibility for a village represented by its mayor to request the creation of a communal forest (forêt communale). So far, the success of this initiative has been limited: not only is the law vague about the use and exploitation rights associated with the land titling, but the procedures are so complex and the costs so high that the advantages are not clear in comparison with the income assured to a local community through sharing the income taxes generated from a concession (40 percent to communes). As a result, even though communal forests have the advantage of being owned in perpetuity by the villages, this alternative tenure system has not yet received adequate support.
> *Source*: (Bigombe Logo, 2007) *In* FAO 2008, p14, Box 6
>
> **WRM, 2007 -** In Cameroon, logging is carried out in an industrial scale by large corporations –national and foreign- linked to foreign capital and export-oriented. Paradoxically, the country appears to be -on paper- quite progressive regarding the promotion of community forest management. In this respect, a community forestry law was passed in 1994 which enables communities to manage their own forests –although with a maximum of 5,000 hectares- under a contract agreed upon with the Ministry of Environment and Forests and valid for 25 years…
> On 12 September [2007] we visited the COVIMOF (Communauté Villageoise de Melombo, Okekak, Fakele 1&2, Ayos et Akak.) community forest, where the first thing we learnt was that the process for approval of community forest management is very slow. In this case, the five communities involved started the process in 1996 and only in 2004 they managed to comply with all the requirements for the approval and signing of the necessary legal agreement. They complain that even now, when they present the annual management plan, the Forestry Department takes months to approve it, which means that the community is left with a very short period of time (1-2 months) to implement it.
>
> *Source:* WRM's bulletin N° 123, October 2007

3.4 Practical Steps in Developing and Implementing a Community-Based Forest Management Plan

The objective of the forest management plan is determined by the needs of the community. It is these needs that should drive the development of the plan. To some extent, the process of preparing a management plan is as important as - if not more important than - the final written document. A management plan should not be prepared quickly just to fulfil a target. If the process is not carefully followed, the users will not understand the plan and will not be able to implement it. Furthermore, the community should be at the forefront of the preparation of the plan. The process of developing the plan normally involves several stages and steps. As it is likely that the community will not have the technical expertise required to actually develop the plan, the process will need to be undertaken with the assistance of an external facilitator, i.e. from the Forest Administration or a

Training course for community leaders as part of activities in strengthening the capacity of local communities in the sale of NTFP in Southern Cameroon (Photo: FAO)

capable and experienced consultant or NGO. The community would need to establish its own management committee to work with the facilitator in order to create capacity at community level.

A major constraint in developing a community forest management plan is the high cost. Financing options to be explored include the following:
*   If the management targets commercial goods and services, the private sector may be approached;
*   In the case of multiple use management which provides public goods for livelihoods improvement of forest-dependent people, Government or donor support should be solicited.

Key stages in the development of the plan are summarized below, although the stages themselves as well as their sequencing may vary by country across the region:

Stage I: Determination of land and forest use rights. The aim here is to research and document the status of the forest and the community. The process involves stakeholder analysis, livelihood analysis, institutional assessments, forest gazetting

and resource overview assessments, forest mapping, community mapping. Contrary to the detailed technical inventory normally required by the Forest department, a community management plan uses simpler methods to carry out resource assessment. These should be simple enough for the community to understand and carry out with the assistance of a technocrat, but comprehensive enough to guide sound management.

Stage II: Development and negotiation of a time-bound plan. The Forest Management Plan is usually developed for a pre-determined period. It gives details of the forest management objectives and the activities to be undertaken yearly or over any specified short time period. Once the plan is completed, it should be endorsed or cleared by the community and formally approved by Government.

Box 7: Example of a summary content of a community forest management plan
1. Background Information
2. Introduction
3. Description of the forest
4. Objective of the Forest Management Plan (short term and long term outcomes)
5. Forest management actions (activities regarding protection, development, utilisation and monitoring)
6. Collaborative monitoring and learning (setting targets, indicators, data collection and analysis, adaptive management)
7. Approval of the plan

Source: Sola, 2001

Box 7 shows an overview of what the forest management plan would generally cover.

Stage III: Development of a Forest Management Agreement. In addition to the forest management plan, the state and the community should enter into an agreement detailing exactly what the terms of the partnership are and the cost and benefit sharing mechanisms thereof. The Forest Management Agreement details the legal transfer of forest resources from the state to a community (where this is necessary) as well as the negotiated and agreed rights, responsibilities, rules and regulations for the sustainable management of the forest resources. The Forest Management Agreement is a legally binding contract document for partnership between the community and the state. Examples of points generally covered in a forest management agreement are shown in Box 8.

Box 8: Example of points generally covered in a management agreement

1. Introduction and background
2. Article 1. Definitions
3. Article 2. Objectives of the agreement
4. Article 3. Location, historical background and condition of the forest
5. Article 4. Description of agreeing parties
6. Article 5. Benefits to the agreeing parties
7. Article 6. Rights and responsibilities of the agreeing parties
8. Article 7. Conditions, legality and duration of the agreement

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Further stages include the implementation of the CBFM plan, which focuses on the development of a detailed annual work plan with clear targets, and a monitoring system. The monitoring system should be set up with agreed community driven indicators and targets. As part of the process, capacity building activities are important to address some of the problems identified during the monitoring and learning process.

Community forest meeting in Oshampula, Namibia (Photo: FAO)

An important requirement for a CBFM implementation plan to be successful is that it must be user friendly. Box 9 shows key characteristics of a good CBFM plan.

Box 9: Characteristics of a simple forest management plan

A community forest management plan should be:
• **Useful**: a management plan should only contain essential forest management operations that need to be carried out to meet the users' objectives. This means that objectives should be clearly defined in the management plan. No unnecessary activities should be included.
• **Simple:** (easy to understand): a management plan should not contain terms that cannot be understood by the users. It should not contain data (from inventory or forest survey) which is not needed by the user groups to manage their forest.
• **Independent:** (drawn up by users): the primary managers of the forest are the Forest Management Institutions (FMIs) or users. This means that the plan should not be imposed from outside. The users themselves should produce the plan. Technicians should only act as facilitators.
• **Realistic:** (can be carried out by users): the user group should decide whether it can really carry out an operation before it is included in the management plan. For example, if the forest is very large, an operation such as enrichment planting should be written in a small part of the forest (e.g. in one workable block or compartment).each year rather than in the whole forest area. Activities should not be too costly for the community. Prior funding arrangements should be made if activities that are beyond the means of the community to finance must be put in the plan.
• **Flexible**: a management plan is a working document. Users will learn from experience what can or cannot be achieved. The users should be encouraged to adjust the plan according to these experiences (however, major changes should be approved by Ministry).
• **Participatory**: although the FMI executive and key community representatives initially prepare the management plan, other members of the community must have the opportunity to make comments and amendments during small group meetings and at enlarged community assemblies.
Source: FAO, 2002