



Part 1

PEOPLE AND FORESTS

FORESTS AND FOREST PRODUCTS have almost everywhere formed part of rural livelihood systems. Historically, they have been important to local people in two main situations, which often overlap. In one, forests and woodland formed part of broader livelihood systems based on rotational agriculture, with periods of cultivation alternating with longer periods of forest fallow. In the other, rural households filled gaps in the material and income flows from their on-farm resources by drawing on nearby areas of forest, woodland or scrubland.

As long as forest resources were abundant, unregulated 'open access' use was likely to prevail. However, as populations and economies grew, pressures on the resource, or the land, increased, and some form of control over rights of access and use was usually imposed. Many such systems of control incorporated at least a measure of local management by the user community.

The willingness and ability of people to involve themselves in the management of a forest or other tree resource is evidently linked to the nature and extent of their needs for forest products, and to their access to the resource. The incentive for those who are dependent on forest outputs (in the sense that they would suffer a decline in livelihood standards if they no longer had access to them) is likely to be greater than for those for whom these products are just one of several equivalent options from which they can choose.

In order to be able to understand what role community forestry might play in a particular situation, and what form it might take, it is therefore important to know how forests and forest outputs contribute to local livelihoods, how supply and use patterns are changing, and the reasons for, and consequences of, these changes.