

Annex VI

Summary of panel discussions

A panel discussion was held on the afternoon of day 4, Thursday, 29 April, to bring out the key elements of the presentations and discussions of the preceding days. The panellists were:

- ▶ Mr Abdoulie A. Danso, Acting Director of the Forestry Department, the Gambia;
- ▶ Ms Liz A. Wiley, Rural Development and Land Tenure Specialist (independent), East Africa Region; and
- ▶ Mr Michael B. Vabi, Social Science Support Officer, World Wide Fund for Nature, Cameroon Programme Office.

A presentation was made by each panellist on his or her view as regards the present situation, actualities, and institutional and tenure arrangements in the sphere of community forestry in Africa based on case studies. Important issues highlighted were that African countries have made significant strides in community forestry implementation by way of pilot programmes and attempts at policy and legislative changes to accommodate community-based forest and natural resource management. The need for more information to be gathered on the subject was raised by the discussions since the various case studies presented indicated the existence of very many different experiences at the various country levels. Therefore the information presented might not be exhaustive in terms of methodologies, processes and impact at the national and community levels.

It was also observed that the practice of community forestry in Africa is a little narrower than the concept implies. Community forestry in Africa is being used as a (legal) means to share responsibility for forest management between government and the local populations through partnership arrangements, as in Cameroon, the Gambia and Tanzania. Community forestry is also viewed as a sustainable forest management and utilization strategy with emphasis on community benefits. It is

also being used as a vehicle to advance the social and political processes of decentralization.

In terms of practice, two major foci of community forestry were underlined: the focus on the forest and its products; and the focus on protected areas management. In the first case the communities are directly involved in the management and utilization of the forest resources while in the second case emphasis is on contractual agreements to achieve protection for wildlife.

Community forestry in Africa has been largely project-initiated and driven. Whereas in some cases policy changes in favour of it have been brought in as a result of project experiences gained on the ground (the Gambia and Tanzania), in many other cases such policy changes have been made without any prior experience to guide the policy formulation process.

The wide implementation of community forestry in Africa, despite the varying degrees of organizational success, is demonstrative of the increasing tendency to use the participatory approach to policy and decision making, especially for decentralization. The progressive evolution of community/participatory forest/natural resource man-



agement will necessitate a continual amendment of the existing policies and legislation. It was also highlighted that, given the different tenure and legislative (land and natural resources) environments in the various countries, the foci of community forestry differ between countries. While some countries involve communities in the management of government reserves and parks (e.g. Uganda, the Niger and to some extent Tanzania), others (e.g. the Gambia and Tanzania) are seeking to devolve authority to the local communities to own and manage open non-reserved forests that have hitherto been under State control. In countries like Cameroon it is the village or common lands that are targeted for woodlot establishment and individual tree management. In other countries no distinction is made between the various categories of forest lands, all of them being targeted for community management. Tanzania is a case in point in this approach. In the Niger the focus has been on managing and utilizing the forest products as opposed to the resource base itself.

In their consideration of the objectives of community forestry in Africa as presented in the case studies and as indicated by the discussions, the panellists noted a diversity in objectives. The objectives vary from environmental and natural resource management and protection, to empowerment of the local populations to own and man-

age the forest/natural resources in their particular locality. Conservation and income generation for the local communities constitute the cornerstone of community forestry in some cases.

A basic and outstanding feature of community forestry in Africa, which is the attempt by the governments to transfer the ownership and management responsibility of forests to the communities that might have customary claim to them, was underscored. The need for a genuine transfer, with policy and legislative support, was stressed in order to permit meaningful and sustainable community involvement. Other important issues include the need to involve other partners, such as NGOs and the private sector, in the process and the close linking of community forestry with other development programmes and activities.

During the discussion and question session that followed, the participants concentrated mainly on tenure issues, the future of community forestry in the light of the current trend towards privatization, the meaning of empowerment, and partnership arrangements that ensure real community benefits. The role of community forestry in poverty alleviation and the general lack of political commitment to the process were again raised.