

Local People, Devolution and Adaptive Collaborative Management of Forests

Researching Conditions, Processes and Impacts

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Context

Despite substantial human and monetary resources invested in forest management over the past few decades, not much improvement has been recorded in most places. Forests are still neglected, degraded and cleared while the livelihoods of those who use them regularly, especially poor and politically less powerful groups, have not improved. Nowhere is this truer than in developing countries where resource and infrastructure constraints compounded by limited institutional capacity and the demand for forest land further exacerbate processes of disempowerment, resource loss and poverty. Part of the problem is that managers and resource users have just begun to acknowledge how many stakeholders there are in the forest, and how quickly and dramatically their relationships with each other and with the forest can change. At present, forest management systems generally do not deal well with the complexity and dynamism of forest ecosystems, the relationships among the many stakeholders with interests in the forest and processes, and the rates of socio-economic change.

Adaptive Collaborative Management

In our vision of sustainable forest management the key stakeholders in forest management would be able to respond to dynamic complexity by adapting their management systems. We expect that disadvantaged local communities would be empowered and that local governance systems would be sufficient to enable fair negotiations among stakeholders. The stakeholders would confidently seek to anticipate the future based on improved abilities to learn as a group from their shared experiences. Their disposition to treat management as a series of experiments to be consciously observed, evaluated and acted upon would catalyze their ability to learn, adjust and improve the information, technical options, organizational forms, incentives and social





institutions upon which successful management depends. This would require strengthening communication across stakeholders. Different interests would be balanced through negotiation based on collective awareness of the impacts of different management and resource use interventions. All this would result in an improved ability to strike a timely balance between economic, ecological and social needs.

How Can Research Contribute?

Improving the ability of forest stakeholders to adjust their systems of management and organization to respond more effectively to the challenge of trying to manage a complex and dynamic system is an urgent task. Our research focuses on developing and testing the concepts, management principles, tools, and policy options needed to help strengthen this ability. We also aim to understand under what conditions such innovations can lead to real improvements in human well-being and forest quality. We place special emphasis on innovations that will help the poor and politically marginal, as they have often benefited the least from forest management as it is practiced today.

Three research questions underpin our concept of adaptive collaborative management (ACM):

1. Can *collaboration* among stakeholders in forest management, enhanced by processes of conscious and deliberate *social learning*, lead both to improved *human well-being* and to the maintenance of *forest cover* and *diversity*? If so, under what **conditions**?

2. What **approaches**, centred on *social learning* and *collaborative action* among diverse stakeholders, can be used to encourage *sustainable* use and management of *forest resources*?

3. In what ways do the processes and outcomes of ACM affect social, economic, political and ecological functioning and how does this *feedback* reinforce or weaken forest management? What explains the **impacts** on people and forests with respect to the different ways that stakeholders act and learn together?

Research Framework

Researching these questions is a big challenge, too big for one institution alone. We are therefore collaborating with many different institutions involved in research, implementation and facilitation of change across a number of case studies in several countries. The nature of our research requires us to work across disciplinary divides, in a process-sensitive and action-oriented manner. As researchers we are not outside 'the system', but are actors within it and therefore not neutral. Consequently there is no 'objective' or 'static' viewpoint from which to safely observe the dynamics of management. This predicates the need to involve actively and meaningfully the managers and users of forests at these case study sites in the research. Key local stakeholders will join hands with researchers in a framework of participatory action research. Such a framework should ensure that the research remains locally relevant and useful while at the same time allowing us to draw meaningful generalizations. We seek to generalize findings at case study sites through comparison across sites in different countries. This we feel is a key and possibly unique feature of our research.



A simplified view of ACM comprises three broad processes:

- ✓ *Stakeholder interaction*,
- ✓ *Communication and learning among stakeholders* and
- ✓ *Joint or collective action,*

resulting in changes or *adjustments* to management. These changes in turn impact on the *benefits* people derive from forests and the *quality of the forest* system. Feedback from benefits and forest quality, together with intermediate feedback among the processes, would then serve to strengthen or weaken the dynamic of adapting forest management collectively. In our model the feedback would be modulated by the following key factors:

- ✓ *Information, Knowledge and Skills*
- ✓ *Attitude, Motivation and Incentives*
- ✓ *Resources*
- ✓ *Institutions and Governance*



While our major focus will be at the local level, it is also important to understand what is happening at higher levels of hierarchy. Together with partners around the world we have sought to clarify the processes of involving multiple stakeholders in forest management, using case studies, historical reviews and reports on field projects. Particular emphasis has been given to devolution policies as a potential means of increasing the involvement of local stakeholders in management.

We expect to use a variety of analytical tools and approaches to arrive at an analysis that is as well rounded as possible given that we recognise that as non-neutral actors we are likely to introduce bias. This will include cross-sectional analysis of key conditions and drivers carried out by a range of the actors involved in the research, statistical methods such as multivariate analysis, and simulation modelling. The data base for this analysis will be generated by a variety of means (e.g. literature reviews, ongoing studies of the social and biophysical context at each site, collaborative monitoring of key indicators, etc.).



Outputs

Our research outputs will be diverse in order to target key local, national, regional and global audiences. As key clients for our research outputs we have identified local resource users, extension agents and NGOs, national research systems, policy makers and donors. The nature of research outputs will vary according to client group, but will include: issue papers, manuals on methods and approaches, a 'toolbox' for development practitioners, case studies of successes and failures, policy briefs, scholarly research papers and software such as simulation models.



Sites



We are carrying out a comparative set of comprehensive three-year case studies in Bolivia, Brazil, Cameroon, Ghana, Indonesia, Malawi, Nepal, Peru, Philippines and Zimbabwe. In each country the research will be led by a national research institution and will usually involve teams of researchers from different institutions working collaboratively with local stakeholders at each site. The range of sites selected for the research varies according to ecological and social criteria.

We also are conducting additional field-based research on institutions, policies and devolution in China, India, Madagascar, Mozambique and Tanzania. Results will be integrated into the analysis of the comparative case studies.

Who we are

We are a group of researchers from over 20 institutions in 14 countries who have come together under the umbrella of a CIFOR coordinated research program on 'Local People, Devolution and Adaptive Collaborative Management of Forests (ACM). We refer to ourselves as the 'ACM Group'. Our research is being generously supported by the Asian Development Bank under RETA 5812, the Department for International Development in the UK, the European Union, International Fund for Agricultural Development, International Tropical Timber Organization, International Development Research Centre and United States Agency for International Development. You can learn more about us and our research through our web page: *http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/CimatWeb/ie4/acm.htm*

Alternatively you may wish to contact Ms. Linda Yuliani (*l.yuliani@cgiar.org*) at CIFOR headquarters for further information about the research and the institutions involved in it.

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