

# Strengthening Local Forest Governance: Lessons on the Policy-Practice Linkage from Two Programs to Support Community Forestry in Asia <sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The policy environment for community forest management in Asia ranges from being supportive to absent to opposing. Where enabling policies do exist, local stakeholders often do not know their rights and responsibilities. Where such policies are absent or opposing, the challenge has been to gain recognition for continuing informal practices of forest access and management.

This paper draws lessons from two regional programs - the Small Grants Programme for Operations to Promote Tropical Forests (SGP-PTF) and the Community Forest Management Support Programme for Southeast Asia (CFMSP). Combined, the two programmes supported 276 projects of community-based, non-government, and government organizations in eight countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam) from 2001-2007. Both programmes supported stronger community voice in policy development through linkages between communities, local government and field-level line agencies, as well as supporting community bodies to take issues forward in wider policy discussions.

The need to nest local efforts to manage the commons within supportive frameworks has been noted by key commons theorists; the challenge has been how to achieve this. These programmes' experiences highlight that, with the right kind of support, community level bodies can develop and use linkages with each other, with local government and higher-level policy to strengthen governance and livelihoods.

**Keywords:** *Forest, local governance, policy, networks*

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Processes of colonisation and state-formation have brought the majority of Asia's forestlands under management as public good, with typically weak rights for local forest users. In five countries<sup>4</sup> in Southeast Asia, lands classified as 'state forests' range between 33% and 60% of a country's land area; in South Asia, the range is between 2% and 37% (Poffenberger 1998; Poffenberger 2000 cited in Soriaga and Walpole, 2006). Decisions on the use of these public forestlands – for production, protection, conservation, special use – are largely made at the national level. Governments also determine rights and responsibilities related to commercial production and conservation (Poffenberger *et al.* 2006).

The ability of the state to effectively manage these vast tracts of land from afar in the face of processes such as industrial logging and forest conversion has, however, been limited and resulted in rapid rates of forest loss over the last century. This failure has been explained in terms of benign neglect, capacity and resource limitations and, at times, outright corruption [ref]. Unfortunately, for the estimated 450 million plus rural poor who live in and around forests in Asia (ADB 2003), these top-down forest governance processes and the resulting deforestation have brought profound and negative impacts on their quality of life and livelihoods.

Given these limitations with highly centralised modes of forest governance, several countries in the region are transferring some planning and implementation decisions to state or local governments, especially for smaller-scale forest areas. The Philippines' Local Government Code 1991, Thailand's Tambon Administrative Act 1994, Indonesia's (Regional Autonomy Law 1999, and Cambodia's Commune Law 2001 are some of the national policies that provide openings for nurturing local forest governance. The shift also stems from a growing recognition by many States that rural communities may have a role to play in forest governance, given their proximity to such resources, their day-to-day decisions about resource use and management, and, at times, the persistence of informal rules and norms that mediate such decisions and interactions. Other important factors include pressure from civil society and support for participatory approaches from development agencies and international agreements (Poffenberger *et al.* 2006; SGPPTF *et al.* 2007).

This trend towards greater local engagement in forest governance has not been absolute or uniform across Asia, with considerable variation between countries on 1) whether a legal or policy basis for CFM exists, 2) where it does exist, whether CFM is underpinned by regulations and programs or remain at the level of discretionary and changeable policies, 3) the specific bundles of rights devolved to communities, and 4) the duration of such rights. One factor that does seem to have achieved greater uniformity is the quality of forest made available for local management, which in most cases is uniformly degraded. Furthermore, policies and laws are evolving through learning, interaction and political dynamics

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<sup>4</sup> Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam

(Gilmour *et al.* 2006; Mahanty and Guernier 2008). Community Forest Management (CFM) thus encompasses a diverse array of arrangements, from locally initiated to state-sponsored arrangements, and differing in the level of local versus State control, the nature of rights involved, and how responsibilities and benefits are shared by various stakeholders. Where supportive CFM frameworks do exist, implementation gaps are common because of resource and capacity constraints and resistance in some quarters of government.

With these transitions and challenges in mind, we focus in this paper on the question: how are local CFM bodies engaging with this wider policy and legal context? How are they garnering wider support for local forest governance and livelihoods?

## **2. THE POLICY-PRACTICE LINKAGE**

Having established the broad terrain that this paper aims to cover, we turn now to defining some of the concepts and relationships that will help us to navigate it, namely: policy, practice, governance and the relationships between these.

WRI's lucid definition of resource-related governance encompasses the processes, structures, rules, norms, and practices through which we make decisions about resource management. This includes, for example, laws and rules about participation and representation, what levels of authority are held at different levels, accountability and transparency rules, property rights, and rules guiding markets (WRI 2005). McQueen and Mayers' (forthcoming) less comprehensive but more catchy definition - 'who gets to decide what, and how' - serves the useful purpose of highlighting the actors, context and content for decisions, and processes by which decisions are made as key considerations.

These two concepts of governance emphasise decision-making, but the other critical concern in understanding outcomes is how decisions translate into practice – their implementation. Of particular interest is the question of how the policies of government, the positions taken and communicated in relation to CFM, translate to programs, supportive instruments and, ultimately, action (Dovers 2005). To help us analyse this complex picture, Dovers (2005) distinguishes the 'products' of policy systems, such as policy statements and implementation mechanisms (regulations, laws, operational directives) from the 'processes' through which policies are developed and carried out. The latter, he says, has received relatively less attention in discussions on policy and governance but is as important as the content of policy products. This point is supported in recent analysis by IDRC colleagues, who suggest that that policy needs to be understood not just in terms of its formulation and implementation, but also in how it is modified, deflected, interpreted, contested and resisted by actors at various levels (Tyler and Malley 2006).

A number of tactics and strategies might be relevant to open and strengthen policy development and implementation processes. IIED through its "power tools" series organises these in terms of:

- **Strengthening understanding** of policies with improved information and awareness,
- **Organizing** effectively through groups and networks to gain legitimacy and have a voice in policy discourses,
- **Engaging** to influence policy discourse by identifying innovative entry points, and through strategic alliances, champions, advocates and contacts
- **Ensuring** effective policy implementation through monitoring and review mechanisms and recourse to systems of justice, both informal and formal (IIED2004)

The IIED's 'bottom up' perspective on tactics for policy engagement contrasts with the ODI's Research and Policy in Development project, which focuses on how evidence can improve the character and impacts of policy processes, perhaps more from the perspective of researchers and policy-makers. ODI adds that bridging policy and practice requires a mix of effective information and communication systems, institutional development and knowledge management to support learning (ODI 2005).

We do not aim here to cover this very broad swathe of potential tactics, but focus on those that emerged in the context of the two case study projects. The approach here is more akin to the IIED one, in that we examine tactics from the bottom up, from the perspective of local CFM bodies and the organizations that support them. Broadly the tactics and methods discussed here encompass actions to build a critical mass of practice and action in a policy vacuum, to garner support for local action by linking these to programs and policies, as well as influencing the content of these, through processes of organizing, engaging, communicating and knowledge management.

In the CFM context, as we have already noted, a schism often exists between policy and action both in terms of weak policy implementation by government, and often insurmountable differences between formal policy and local realities. Between 2001 and 2008 when the two projects discussed here were being implemented, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam newly adopted new CFM-related policies during this time.

As the number of Asian countries without CFM-related policies shrinks, the challenge is increasingly one of finding ways to infuse policy and planning processes with local perspectives, gaining a level of recognition for existing community level initiatives, and realising in practice the sometimes elusive rights and responsibilities that CFM policies articulate.

In terms of influencing emerging or evolving policy, two key approaches discussed here are:

- strengthening local practice through peer support and networking, and
- working with local government and other actors to influence locally relevant development policies and plans

For countries that already had or were developing supportive policy 'products' during the project period another set of challenges have applied: getting locally

informed and meaningful implementation of these policies and related instruments and/or meshing such policies with local practice. These are discussed in this paper under the following themes:

- formalizing community forestry agreements, and
- monitoring forces driving forest sector transitions.

### **3. OVERVIEW OF THE TWO CASE STUDIES**

From 2001 to 2007, the European Commission funded two regional programs with a stated aim of promoting stronger community voice in forest management:

- Community Forest Management Support Programme for Southeast Asia (CFMSP) and
- Small Grants Programme for Operations to Promote Tropical Forests (SGP-PTF).

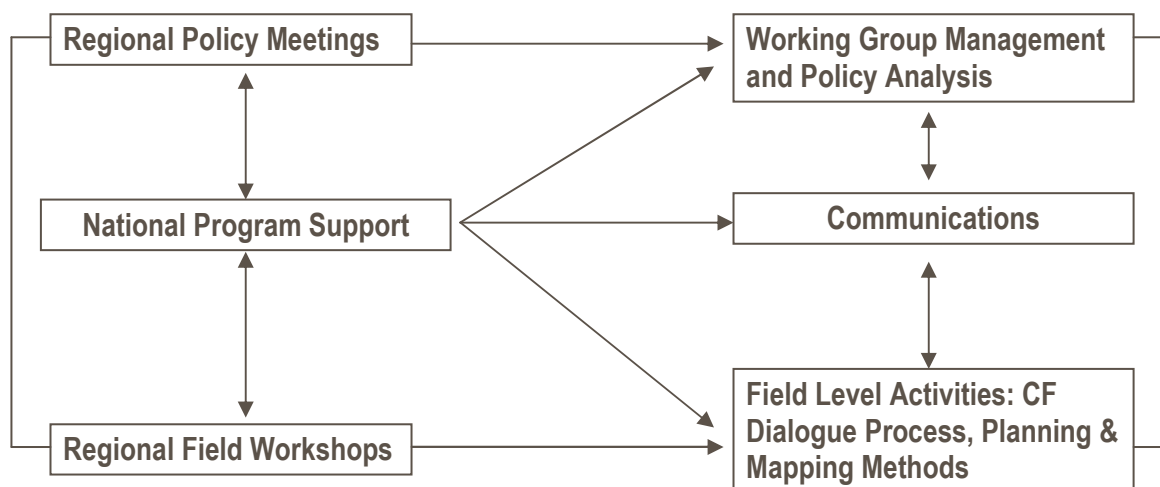
Combined, the two programmes supported 276 projects of community-based, non-government, and government organizations in eight countries (Thailand, Philippines, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia). Both programmes aimed to contribute to policy development through improved linkages between communities, local government and field-level line agencies, as well as supporting community bodies to take issues forward in wider policy discussions.

#### ***3.1 Community Forest Management Support Project for Southeast Asia (CFMSP), 2001-2005***

CFMSP was a programme of the Asia Forest Network to facilitate forest sector transitions underway in the region, through a variety of interventions at the community, national, and regional level to complement large-scale donor investments (Figure 1). At the regional level, CFMSP organized a series of regional events to stimulate exchange between countries engaged in developing community forestry policies and programmes.

At the national level, CFMSP provided technical and financial assistance to 29 partner organizations representing multi-stakeholder country working groups and NGO networks that were contributing to policy frameworks and national strategies in support of forest sector transitions towards greater community engagement as principal partners. At the field level, CFMSP worked with partner organizations implementing CFM, by providing small grants, technical assistance, and documentation support to facilitate a process of diagnosis, planning and agreement development.

Figure 1. CFMSP Knowledge Management Framework<sup>5</sup>



One component of CFMSP was to collaborate with field project partners to produce one case study from each of the five participating Southeast Asian countries, including Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. The creation of resource management partnerships linking communities and local governments is a strong theme in each of the five case studies. So too is the process of building community abilities and confidence to protect and regulate access to their natural resources. The case studies primarily examine changes that occurred from 2001-2005. For the most part, the progress made in stabilizing local resources, building community institutions, resolving conflict with local government and neighboring villages, and in establishing a sustainable system of management has been visible. The CFMSP publication series on Community Forest Management Trends in Southeast Asia reviews national level CFM policies and their implementation in the context of continuity and change in Asia's forests. The series also identifies forces driving forest transitions and suggests prospects for change.

### **3.2 Small Grants Programme for Operations to Promote Tropical Forests (SGP-PTF), 2003-2007**

With the goal of protecting tropical forests and contributing to poverty reduction, the SGP-PTF supported activities that: demonstrated community-based forest management and resource use; facilitated dissemination of innovative community practices; and built grassroots capacity for localized management through partnerships and networks. The UNDP, SEARCA and EC collaborated through this programme to provide support to 247 community-based and non-government organizations in eight countries (Thailand, Philippines, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia), with potential impacts reaching an estimated 155,000 households (Table 1). The 'first wave' countries identified in

<sup>5</sup> Obtained from Asia Forest Network, as cited in Apte, Tejaswini, Ed Quitarano, Kristiina Mikkola. 2005. Community Forest Management Support Project for Southeast Asia: Formative Final Evaluation Report.

the table commenced implementation at the beginning of the programme, while the second and third wave countries started later.

Table 1. SGP-PTF Indicators of Impact <sup>6</sup>

Country	Grant Partners	Communities	Households	Local Knowledge Documentation & Use (% of Grant Partners)	Partnerships with Local Governments (% of Grant Partners)
<b>1st wave</b>					
Pakistan	29	249	37,743	72%	66%
Philippines	43	50	11,000	21%	93%
Thailand	53	300	10,000	60%	65%
Vietnam	29	51	23,000	72%	93%
<b>2nd &amp; 3rd wave</b>					
Cambodia	17	151	31,659	ND	94%
Indonesia	32	80	16,321	28%	78%
Malaysia	24	96	14,330	83%	46%
Sri Lanka	20	117	11,300	40%	60%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>1,094</b>	<b>155,353</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>74%</b>

Although operating within a common framework, the specific priorities of each country varied according to their social, institutional, and environmental circumstances. These differing emphases arose from national analyses of trends and issues within each country by multi-stakeholder National Steering Committees, who then determined the most useful priorities for the programme. These priorities were set out in country guideline papers that country coordinators used to implement the small grants mechanism.

Towards the end of the programme, a regional synthesis paper was produced as part of an overall effort to share the knowledge gained over five years of implementation. The findings, lessons, and recommendations presented in the paper, *Forest Lives*, emerged from the grantees' reflections, site visits, project documentation, and discussions and inputs from the eight in-country teams, as well as from the key staff in regional support organizations.

Among other themes, *Forest Lives* reported on how to build effective linkages between local practice and policy. Two main approaches are discussed: strengthening local practice through networking, and linking local practice to higher level policy and planning.

<sup>6</sup> Culled from SGP-PTF, AFN, and ESSC. 2008. Local People Promoting Local Forests in Asia (map poster). Bohol, Philippines.

## 4. ENGAGEMENT IN POLICY AND PLANNING PROCESSES

The motivation for local community institutions to engage in policy and planning processes is mainly to secure formal rights to access and manage forest resources, as well as obtaining resources for integrated livelihood development beyond resource management. Many rural communities whose lives closely relate to natural resources have informal systems for managing shared natural resources including forests. These systems may be indigenous, or they may have emerged in response to changing circumstances and linkages with non-local actors. Indigenous community forest systems refer here to 'traditional' resource use and management practices by communities that have a long history of residence and forest use in an area. Emergent community forest systems usually based not on a long history of use or ancestral claims to land and resources, but have arisen in response to experienced degradation of communally used forest resources, or to take up opportunities sponsored by external NGOs or government agencies (Poffenberger *et al.* 2006).

Although local rules and regulations may not be documented, they can nevertheless be influential in guiding practice at the hamlet or village level. In predominantly indigenous populations that experience limited external pressure, such forest management practices may be more extensive in scope and scale, and reflect a capacity for these communities to arrive at common decisions and implement these.

Formal recognition of these local management systems has been slow to come. In 2001, Asian countries without policies that support community forest management included Cambodia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. However, countries with decentralization policies such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam gave responsibility of smaller-scale forest areas to local governments. These four countries were also drafting forest policies in support of community management and were testing pilot programs on the ground. The question of how these CFM policies work with informal and local management regimes has emerged as an important one in countries with emerging policy frameworks, to say nothing of those countries where any formal policies for CFM are still to emerge.

Forest dwellers may have complex knowledge systems that provide a basis for understanding the impacts of their own and neighbors use on forest cover. Indigenous and local resource management systems may, however, be challenged by the scale of operations and impacts that come with logging operations, plantation establishment, dam construction, resettlement projects and mining activities. In addition, remote indigenous groups may be too far from the seat of government to participate in the processes of national-level governance or else too weak to negotiate with other actors laying claim to the resources.



In countries with emerging CFM policies or without supportive policies, what are community level institutions doing to gain voice in policy and planning processes to support local practices and safeguard their rights?

#### **4.1 Strengthening local practice through networking**

Networking or federating enables communities to learn from the practices and avoid mistakes of each other, as well as pool resources to face powerful external interests or increase bargaining power (Tyler and Mallee 2006). Peer-to-peer learning processes can translate lessons into practice more quickly. These also build trust, which can lead to more substantive collaboration to implement activities and influence policies for forest management and local development. The two programme cases supported activities of several community networks in Asia.

In Thailand, which until recently lacked a policy to recognize community forest management, the SGPPTF-supported Inpaeng Network used peer-to-peer learning in the Life University that they established as a node for knowledge sharing on forests, agriculture and other livelihood activities. Through the network, they have worked to spread the practice of 'bringing the forests to their backyard' and reduce the need for small farmers to travel into the nearby national park to gather mushrooms, herbal medicines, and other products for daily consumption and sale. They were also able to acquire recognition from national parks authorities and local governments on their forest management initiatives, providing them a sense of tenure security, albeit informally, on the land.

In Vietnam, sixteen villages in Quang Uyen district started networking in 2002 to support each other in community forest management with support from CFMSP. From 2002-2007, their meetings revolved around sharing what events led to the village deciding to manage forests as a community, what forest management rules they have agreed on, what benefits they are deriving from their management activities, and what steps they can take with local governments to formalize their rights.

One of the participating communes, Phuc Sen, had previously initiated the practice of having rules to manage village forests in the district. Villagers agreed to vest households with rights to the following forest products: 300 kg fuelwood for funeral or wedding; 40 kg for each family member who tends the community forest twice a year; cattle fodder; timber for construction of houses and public facilities such as schools and clinics; and timber for households impacted by natural calamities such as fire, storms, and floods. The trust and collaboration built over 50 years of implementing these village-designed rules are the key factors in regenerating over 650 hectares of limestone forest in the commune while taking care of local needs. Now, Phuc Sen supplies seeds to other communes and districts for use in planting on limestone forests and members of the district network are discussing how they can pool seed stocks so that they can supply to limestone areas in neighboring provinces and even as far as China (Dzung *et al* 2004).

In Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan, peer-to-peer learning activities among 10 village organizations of Miandam Valley supported by SGP-PTF was contributing to more sustainable collection of medicinal plants. Regular meetings helped build trust among collectors and buyers such that they have agreed on a season for collecting, to allow time for the plants to mature. Local buyers agreed to refuse purchasing immature plants (SGPPTF-Pakistan 2007).

In Malaysia, cross-community visits helped transfer ideas for immediate action. The visit of Institut Pribumi Malaysia (IPIMAS) to MAMAKAT, another SGPPTF partner, inspired visiting participants to plan ginger on their farmlands, after they learned of the potential returns from selling to local markets.

These examples show that horizontal networking is an effective way to multiply impact. People tended to absorb lessons more readily from peers who they knew came from a similar context and faced similar challenges. This indicates that when peers with common challenges can develop mutual trust and regularly communicate, they are more likely to find means to collaborate and complement one another's activities towards a common goal (SGPPTF 2007). Intermediary organisations played an important facilitating role in identifying what practices might be shared, identifying willing peers to engage in such networks, and providing communication and learning opportunities in the form of enduring networks as well as events such as cross-visits and workshops.

#### ***4.2 Linking local practice to higher level policy and planning***

Linking local practice to higher-level policy and planning are highly dependent on available opportunities and constraints in individual country contexts, according to the policy-making and political and economic context. In countries where policy-making environments are more conducive to broad-based participation, civil society chose the path of targeting national policy reform. Where this is not the case, strategies focused on finding specific areas where collaboration could be cultivated. This kind of vertical networking for local impact has been most important in countries where communal rights are fragile because of a formal or effective absence of national policies. The two programmes supported strategies that help local or national governments open up to discussions over forest access, management, and tenure, in order to promote enactment of supportive policies.

The Thai government finally passed the Community Forestry Bill in 2007, fifteen years after the initial draft. Obtaining formal rights to manage community forests is crucial because as the Thai economy grows, forest communities have come under increasing pressure. Many of those living within national parks have been forced to relocate many times (SGPPTF 2007; Stidsen and Ernie 2007). These pressures have also compelled them to defend their community forests. The new law has limitations in terms of which forest areas might be available for CFM and the types of activities allowed in these, but is seen by Thai CFM activists as an important first step.

Prior to the passing of the national policy, vertical networking worked for people in the Nong Hong Song Forest Reserve. Villagers using the Dong Na Tam Community Forest negotiated with the senior forest official to allow long-standing residents to be spared resettlement from the national park. The official agreed on the condition that their livelihood would not threaten the park's conservation. The community presented a plan to divide the forest into three zones, as it was done in the past: 1) 'reserve forests' where felling of trees was strictly prohibited; 2) 'utility forests' where cutting of trees was prohibited but people were allowed to collect wood products; and 3) 'animal farming forests' where people could raise animals, collect forest products, and harvest trees with permission.

The local government recognized the community's rules, which in turn inspired the Dong Na Tam communities in Nong Hong Song Forest Reserve to increase their efforts to improve their forests. Building a common understanding took sometime, but brought results. Now, state authorities are more sympathetic to the village and they act as facilitators and technical trainers for the network. As the community forest faces new threats, such as its conversion into a commercial rubber plantation, local people are more confident in taking their concerns to the government. Groups similar to Inpaeng and Dong Na Tam exist throughout the country, and over 10,000 CFM bodies networked to campaign for the passage of the Community Forestry Bill at the local and national levels (SGPPTF 2007).

The Thai cases is interesting in illustrating both the scope for a critical mass of practice to build up through local negotiation and understandings, while civil society movements simultaneously work to shift national policy. In the former case, an understanding of common environmental concerns within a landscape or seascape unit helped to trigger supportive local decisions and galvanize local actions.

A number of other SGP-PTF supported programs sought national level engagement in policy processes. In all cases, a key ingredient was the availability of a 'policy window' – an emerging area of change or development in policy, which CFM bodies targeted and built upon. The selection of the right people for the SGP-PTF National Coordinating Committees, in the sense of people with the right linkages and knowledge about national policy processes, was a critical ingredient in facilitating these policy linkages.

In Vietnam, the Forest Protection and Development Law was revised in 2004 to formally recognise village communities as legal entities for allocation of forestland. This revision was something to which both CFMSP and SGPPTF contributed, through supporting the National Working Group on Community Forest Management (NWG) in knowledge management. The NWG brought together representatives from various departments under Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, as well as from the academe, international development agencies, and individual professionals supporting forest management programs around the country. The NWG provided a forum for examining, monitoring, and accelerating progress in policy and operational strategies to strengthen the role of communities in forest management.

The showing of three video documentaries from SGPPTF sites on national television, as well as publishing good practices in the CFMSP regional case study series, also aided in garnering broad based support for policy enactment. Even prior to enactment of the policy, NWG activities have already helped build the confidence of the local populace in community management, through visiting field sites and witnessing first-hand how communities live and manage resources. The involvement of the SGP-PTF coordinator with the National Working Group dealing with amendments to the Forest Protection Law enabled him to document relevant lessons from the field at the right time to be taken up in policy formulation processes.

In Sri Lanka, the amendment process for the National Forest Policy started towards the end of SGPPTF, and lessons from field sites it supported are informing this process. The Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources said, “The good relations maintained throughout the program is facilitating the feeding of lessons on pine conservation, NTFP collection, and rural energy projects to the amendment process for the National Forest Policy that will start in 2008.” It helped that SGPPTF got the Secretary to chair the SGPPTF National Steering Committee, which provided him the venue to review community management initiatives around the country with others.

The sharing of community management stories with local authorities can also help to shape local policies and programs. The common experience and essential human interaction generated through joint visits to the forest help communities in geographic and political margins relate to a previously ‘faceless’ government. Such visits build trust within government that communities can manage forests. Joint experiences also have an important relationship impact, gradually changing the attitudes of frontline forest officers and communities toward each other – from “us and them” and “yes and no”, to “we” and “what can we agree on”

In Sulawesi, Indonesia, communities in Lore Lindu National Park are working to revitalize the production and use of the tree bark cloth (*fuya*) with the help of Jambata, a local non-government organization. They are doing this through creating cultural and environmental awareness among the youth and developing capacities for product design and marketing. Upon learning these efforts, the district and provincial governments provided galleries to display the communities’ products and supported participation in trade exhibits.

In Malaysia, PACOS Trust, a group that promotes community-based natural resources management in Sabah, encouraged riverine villages along the Upper Moyog River to revitalize the *tagal*. The *tagal* is a traditional system to stop fishing during certain seasons or to close certain portions of the river to allow the fish to spawn. The Sabah State Fisheries Department, after seeing the system’s impact on improving fish catch, issued an administrative order promoting the spread of the tagal system throughout the State. The fisheries official from the neighboring state of Sarawak learned of this story at an SGPPTF national workshop, and committed that he will work to adopt a similar ordinance.

In summary, critical factors for CFM bodies to engage with policy in the two projects included: relationship building and negotiation around specific issues and concerns between local CFM bodies, local wings of national line agencies as well as local government; peer learning to build a critical mass of practice as a basis for demonstrating and garnering formal support; and timely engagement with emerging policy windows together with strategic links to key individuals and policy forums. In terms of the interpretation and implementation of formal policy, this kind of practice-driven policy may ultimately prove more able to work with local perspectives and practices.

## **5. TRANSLATING POLICIES TO ACTION**

Throughout Asia, an expanding number of government line agencies are exploring how to best involve communities in resource management, and relate to their customary practices. These agencies include departments of forestry, public works, watershed development, protected areas and so forth. In some nations and some agencies, this experimentation is being conducted through pilot projects, while other countries are pursuing an accelerated conversion to community management driven by new policies and programs supported through development assistance (Poffenberger *et al.* 2006).

Of the eight countries under both programmes, the Philippines had the longest experience in working to translate community forest management policies to nationwide action. The country is into its second decade of implementing the 1995 Executive Order that made community-based forest management (CBFM) as the national forestry strategy, as well as the 1997 Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act.

At the sub-national level, Malaysia and Pakistan passed similar policies in the early period of their nationhood. The States of Sabah and Sarawak in Malaysia integrated provisions recognizing indigenous peoples' rights to native customary lands in some state laws. In Pakistan, ownership of forest areas in former princely states such as Swat District was formally retained by local users as 'guzara forests' after joining the national government system.

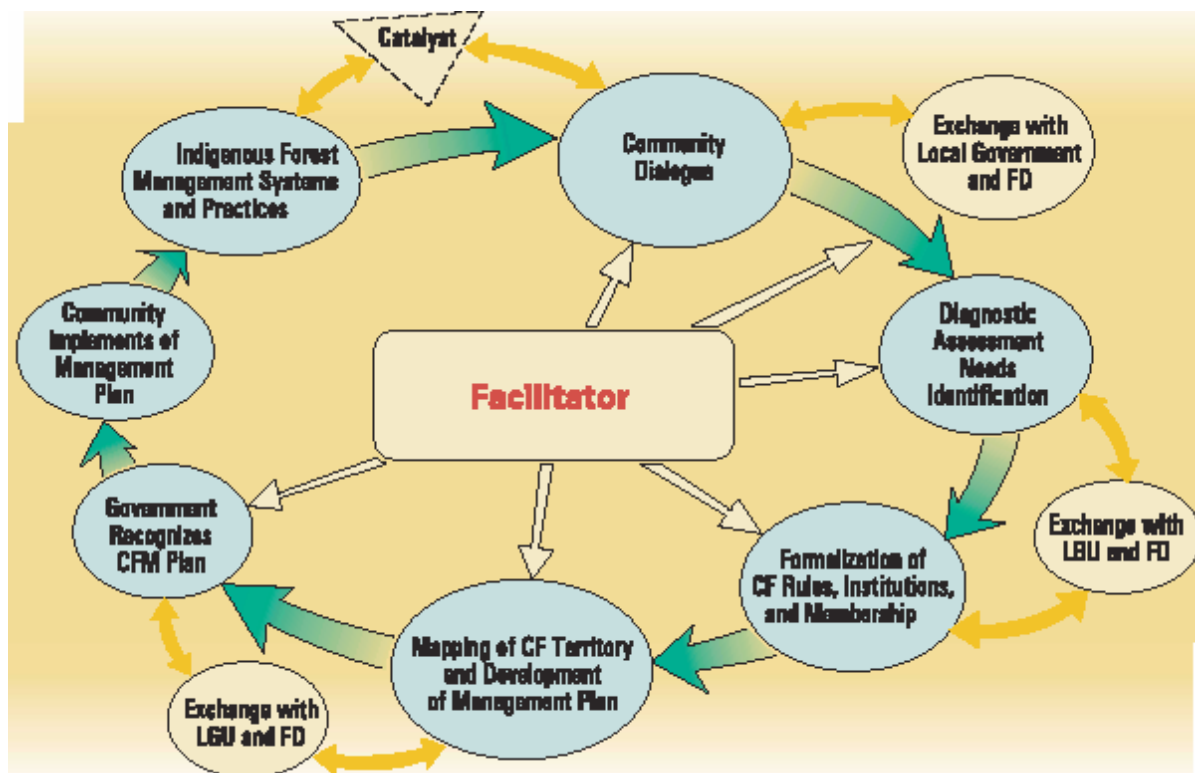
### **5.1 Formalizing community forest management agreements**

Laws and policies that support and extend new rights and responsibilities to community managers of public forestlands vary widely depending on national contexts. Around 18 percent of forestlands in Asia are now formally under various modes of management by local users (FAO 2006). Yet, emerging methods to transfer management authority often share many common features (Poffenberger *et al.* 2006).

The process usually requires a dialogue between government representatives and relevant communities regarding management duties, as well as tenure and

usufruct rights. At a number of points during the process, key decisions and agreements are made, with corresponding outputs (Figure 2). When effectively implemented, these courses of action prove to strengthen indigenous rights and cultural identity, address inconsistencies in forest management rules, draw out challenges regarding access and management, and contribute to poverty reduction and rural development.

**Figure 2. Common Steps to Formalizing Community Forest Management Agreements<sup>7</sup>**



In many cases, the process begins with communities that already possess informal systems of forest management, either of a traditional nature or of more recent origin (Figure 2). An external or internal catalyst, sometimes a forest department official, community leader, or NGO development worker, may initiate a dialogue in the community about forest-related problems, or opportunities emerging from a new government program or policy. With an agreed facilitator who guides the process, the diagnostic assessment identifies management problems and opportunities, which aids in setting the dialogue agenda.

Save Cambodia's Wildlife (SCW) facilitated the diagnostic assessment with a village aspiring to sign a community protected area agreement with the Ministry of Environment. SCW found that identifying resources important to community livelihoods was a good starting point. In Prek Thnout in Kampot Province, the

<sup>7</sup> Source: Poffenberger, Mark, Rowena Soriaga, Peter Walpole. 2006. Communities and Forest Stewardship: Regional Transitions in Southeast Asia. Asia Forest Network, Bohol, Philippines.

participatory assessment process led to villagers' realizing that the forest in their area was insufficient to sustainably support their rattan-based livelihood. (SGPPTF 2007)

The experience of Sinui Pai Nanek Sengik (SPNS) in east Malaysia showed that assessment methods rooted in community values and engage local knowledge generate quality results. SPNS facilitated a resource inventory led by the youth, and involved women, children, elders, and the working population. Together, they were able to identify 240 kinds of plants important to their community. (SGPPTF 2007)

Community institutions usually are required to document and legally register their structure and by-laws, clarifying how executive bodies operate and membership are determined, as well as rules and regulations governing forest use. This seemingly simple step for town-based associations is usually difficult to accomplish in forest areas located far from seats of government, where basic services such as schools, health centers, and roads are mostly inadequate or non-existent. In some countries, forest areas especially in the uplands are even treated by governments as havens of insurgency and conflict. (Poffenberger *et al* 2006)

Evidence is increasing that the process of formalizing management agreements, when treated as a strategic point for social mobilization, can produce lasting positive impacts beyond environmental goals. An NGO leader facilitating in a conflict-ridden area in the Philippines succinctly expresses this shift from a bio-centric to an anthropocentric approach: "Whereas others use community organization as an entry point to (achieve) reforestation (objectives), we have used reforestation as an entry point to organize the community. We want to see that when we leave, more than the trees are growing, people's relations are growing." (SGPPTF 2007)

Defining and mapping the community forest territory and developing management plans are important components of the dialogue, as this step is the venue to surface overlaps in use and access with neighboring communities and other interests and clarify how these overlaps may be resolved. As the dialogue proceeds, local government and other communities may be drawn into the discussions. The dialogue to reach agreements takes place over a period, from a minimum of six months to even several years, depending on the complexity of the situation wherein the community operates (Poffenberger *et al* 2006). Communities that are relatively homogenous (e.g. from one cultural group) and managing fairly degraded forest areas tend to secure agreements faster than those that are heterogeneous (e.g. composed of several cultural groups and recent settlers) and relating with high-value areas that oftentimes are nationally protected or licensed to external commercial interests. Existence of strong leadership in the community and good relations with local governments help speed up the clarification and negotiation process with other stakeholders.

Several SGPPTF cases showed that in facilitating dialogue and planning, the more crucial investment is time, not money. Grantees from several countries

expressed that two years were not enough, and that they would rather spread the use of the same amount of money over a longer period. Participants of the final reflection workshop in Cambodia cited the problems they encountered in the process, which included: difficulty in getting villagers to come together, low literacy level, and the lack of interest to participate. They also shared ways to solve these problems, including: letting villagers set the time and venue of the meeting; simplifying complex documents through local language translation and using visuals to explain concepts and policies; and maintaining direct contacts with those not showing interest.

Government recognition of the community management plan is normally viewed as the final step in formalizing community forest utilization rights and responsibilities. The facilitator often may continue to help the community develop the skills they need to implement their plan. The forest department continues to engage with the community to monitor implementation throughout the duration of the management contract agreement (Poffenberger *et al* 2006).

This process of formalizing community forest management agreements is being increasingly defined in implementing rules and programming of state forest departments. Facilitating such process is a time consuming task and requires new skills from technically-focused forest department personnel, such as community organizing and conflict management. Communities themselves often need to develop new capacities to formalize their institutions, document their management mechanisms, and design new management goals and plans. It is however very difficult for desperately poor communities to translate their plans to action when there are no resources to assist in the restoration of degraded lands, and where even basic services are lacking.

The challenge in Asia is that millions of rural villages need to be engaged in these steps to formalize agreements. In the five Southeast Asian countries under CFMSP alone, an estimated 120 million forest-dependent people have the right to undergo the process (Poffenberger *et al* 2006). The human and financial resources required to implement such process on a national level are immense and require decades to develop. These constraints are major impediments to the implementation of new community forest laws and policies and the long-term forest sector transition, as illustrated in the Philippine experience. Such constraints frustrate efforts of many communities to secure forest rights at a time when external pressures on resources are intensifying, and delay the start of a generational period necessary for the social investment to have effect on the land and the people.

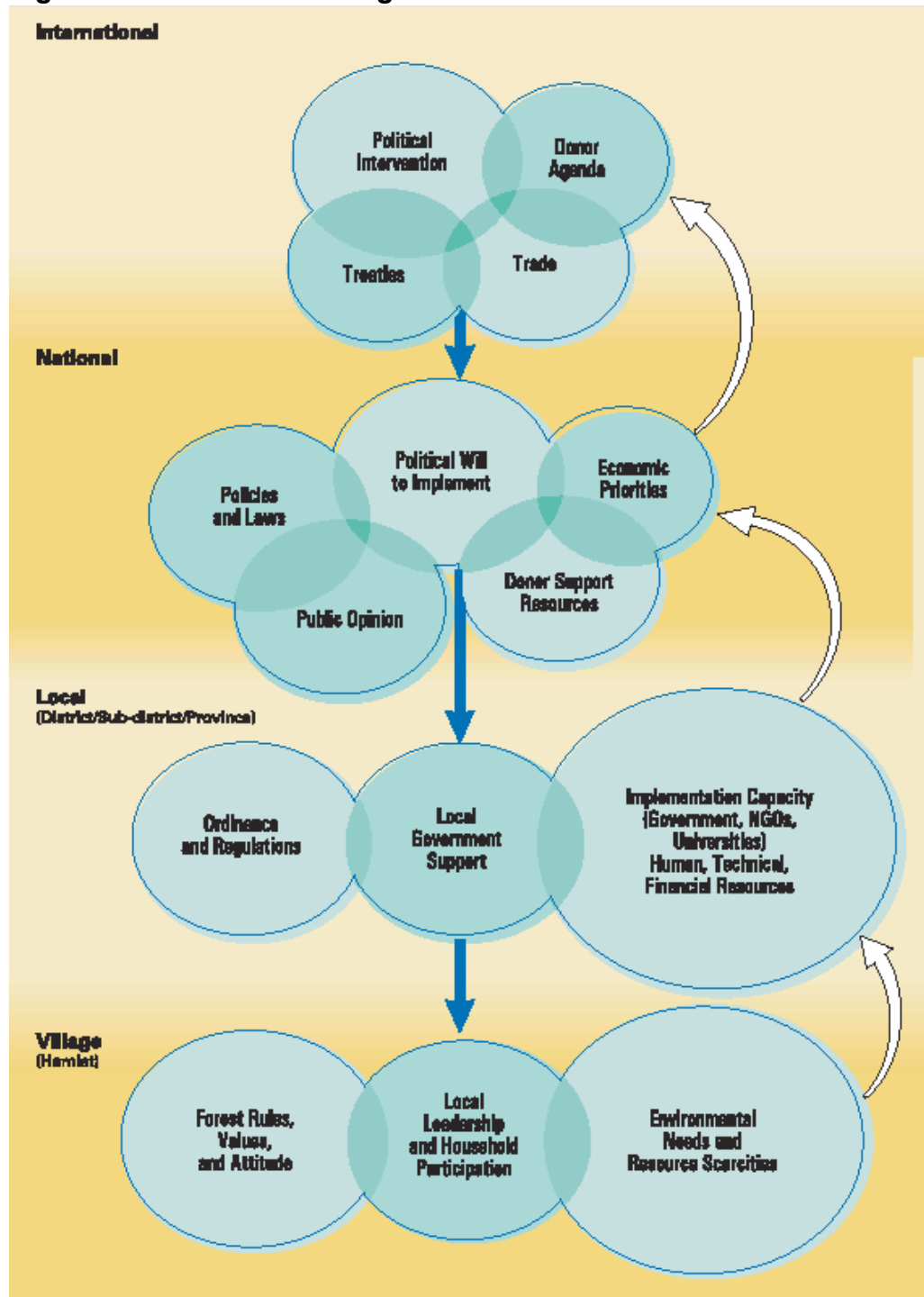
## **5.2 Forces driving transitions towards local forest governance**

The process of formally integrating community forest policies into the forestry sector and the larger society is a lengthy process, requiring years of pilot programs, policy development mechanisms and building capacity for implementation. Figure 3 highlights that forest governance transitions depend upon actors and forces for change at the village, local, national and international levels. Like any system, action at any one of these levels can have repercussions



at the other scales. In countries with supportive policies on paper, what challenges do community level institutions face in making these policies work for them? What opportunities are available whether or not there is a policy to support local forest governance?

**Figure 3. Forces Influencing Forest Transitions**<sup>8</sup>



<sup>8</sup> Source: Poffenberger, Mark, Rowena Soriaga, Peter Walpole. 2006. Communities and Forest Stewardship: Regional Transitions in Southeast Asia. Asia Forest Network, Bohol, Philippines.

## *Village forces*

Most rural communities in Asia have established traditions of natural resource management that are adapting to social, political, economic and natural environmental changes. In many cases, rules and norms of resource use have been evolving for centuries and that change is accelerating as the rate of social transformation intensifies. Communities are finding modes of development that balance local perspectives with external opportunities, when supported with practical strategies to help people plan for and take up opportunities that support local practices and culture.

Local knowledge however, needs to be used and exchanged for it to be kept alive. Methods for documenting and sharing this knowledge need to fit the purpose. These may include influencing public opinion of and societal attitudes towards indigenous people or nurturing inter-generational and inter-community exchanges. (SGPPTF 2007)

Lack of basic services constrains implementation of activities developed under community forest management programs. In some cases, access to government services is deliberately withheld because the governments continue to treat some communities as 'squatters' on public forest lands. Most hard hit are indigenous peoples who may not have political acceptance or even recognized citizenship. For the most part, remote forest-dependent communities face an uphill struggle in benefiting from government programs as they are neither a threat to more totalitarian regimes, nor an important part of the electorate in a democratic system.

When policies are in place, people are often not aware of their rights and responsibilities. In 2004, a review of 139 sites for allocation to communities in a small island province revealed that only 65 have signed agreements and that many of the community plans submitted still need to be internalized in the participating villages as not all people are aware of their newly formalized rights and responsibilities (Poffenberger *et al* 2006).

While the reorientation of the Asian forestry sector is being guided from above, it is also gathering momentum on the ground where a growing number of communities are networking, federating, and mobilizing politically around shared concerns regarding forest and watershed management, livelihood needs, cultural integrity, supported by a rapidly expanding civil society. Weak political will, vested interests, corrupt practices and limited government capacity often constrain the effective devolution of meaningful forest management rights and responsibilities to rural communities. Such civil society institutions typically appear after a substantial number of communities have already experienced some success in obtaining control over natural resources in their area. A single hamlet of 20-50 households may have little chance of challenging illegal forest use operations of powerful external interests, but if they are part of a larger association of ten, fifty or one hundred villages or more, they can mobilize visible protests and are also more likely to attract the support of elected officials.

## *Local forces*

Many countries in Asia are making progress in devolving greater forest management responsibilities to local government institutions, while they continue to explore legal avenues for enabling community-based forest management. A critical area where roles of communities and local government are changing is in the allocation and distribution of revenues from forestlands. In the Philippines and Indonesia for example, decentralization policies are prompting central government to channel forest resource tax revenues to local government, where before it was under the control of the national forest departments. National forestry line agencies are also increasingly directed to respond to the needs of local governments, thus shifting their accountability. Ultimately, policies that increase the involvement of communities in the flow of forest revenue may be one of the best indicators that a meaningful transition to local forest governance is underway. (Poffenberger *et al* 2006)

Decentralization often involves new systems for electing village representatives, delegation of small development budgets, and new authority to design and implement local policies to manage natural resources. However, in some countries this is happening in a limited way. For example, few indigenous peoples are engaged at the lowest levels of governance in most parts of Asia, though this may well shift if the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples' Rights impacts on how the Asian states that signed will operate in the future. While local government is given the responsibility to monitor resources, rarely it is given the authority to allocate resources, especially those having limited revenue and skills to assist communities. Accountability of local government representatives to constituent communities is often limited, as many provincial and district heads still see their authority emanating from above, rather than from the communities below. In other cases, local government chiefs operate as authorities unto themselves, and greater control over the province has only accelerated deforestation, as in the early period of decentralization in the forested districts of Indonesia.

Some policy makers and research institutions question the value of decentralizing natural resource management responsibilities to local governments because of stories of elite capture and cases of contributing to further deforestation. In Indonesia, this has fuelled the cancellation of some district-level regulations on natural resource management, including those that are supportive of local community involvement. Both programmes on the other hand, have found several cases where local governments are actually facilitating a process towards sustainable management with their local constituents.

Understanding the common environmental concerns within a landscape or seascape unit helps trigger local policies and galvanize local actions. In the Philippines, the Carood Watershed Management Council was borne out of the increased awareness of resource base concerns, as a result of learning as a working group, the problems of upland and coastal communities applying for agreements under the community-based forest management policy. Linking different administrative institutions and development agencies is a difficult task that took Environmental Science for Social Change, the first secretariat to serve

the working group, five years to nurture before it formalized as a Council. Even in a small degraded watershed of 50,000 hectares like Carood, jurisdictional coordination between government agencies and across six municipalities was cited as the most critical problem in moving the Council agenda. Now, the main challenge is how to ensure that increasing business interests from overseas workers from the province can be linked with communities that have rights under the CBFM program but have limited financial capacity to implement.

Local governments can mobilize resources for communities doing forest management if they have effective communication with community institutions. This is where the strategies of horizontal and vertical networking discussed in the previous section help. Investments that bring local authorities to the forest and facilitate face-to-face interactions help communities better communicate their concerns. According to some SGPPTF grantees facilitating dialogue and planning processes in Pakistan, there is an overwhelming response from communities especially because the forums give them space to dialogue with local government officials. Elsewhere, one grantee coming from a conflict-ridden area said, "line agencies are now more trusting of our activities."

### *National forces*

As observed under CFMSP, national level experiences indicate that this process may be viewed in phases. In the Philippines for example, the first phase involved a 10-year period of preliminary programs beginning in the mid-1980s. The second phase occurred after the approval of the national community forest management policy in 1995, a period heavily financed through donor assistance.

The Philippine government, through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), has 'turned over' almost 6 million hectares (over 1/3 of public forest lands) as community forest areas to almost 5,000 grassroots organizations, after five years of policy implementation (2002). The formal basis for turnover is a 25-year management agreement between the DENR and the community organization, renewable for another 25 years. This impressive area accomplishment was made possible through nearly \$1 billion of external financing to implement the policy in the 1990s (ESSC 2004).

The country appears to have entered its third phase, but this time implementing the policy using limited internal funds and relying on mainline staff rather than contractual personnel under foreign-assisted projects. Frequent changes in government leadership, and therefore forest department priorities, is severely hampering implementation and the provision of continued technical and financial support. Many communities have yet to complete the mapping and planning stage of the process. Some agreements were cancelled without adequate justification, even if the community organization is performing well. Sadly, the dichotomy that often exists within government services is often quiet when such program finances are available, but reasserts itself once the line agency is left to itself.

The process of empowering community forest management institutions is being increasingly well defined in many Asian nations, though often confounded by a

multiplicity of other rulings and interpretations as well as fast-track development schemes. Rules and plans for forest management at the national, provincial, district, sub-district and community levels can be inconsistent and even contradictory. In Thailand, the forest-related agencies made considerable progress orienting staff in implementing programs supporting community forest management. However, conflicting watershed and protected area policies slowed the integration of participatory approaches in mainstream functions within their ministries.

### *International forces*

Both projects provide insights on the role of the international dimension in policy products and processes. Development of supportive policies and ensuring effective implementation often reflect the willingness of development agencies to finance these new initiatives. Development banks have made forestry sector policy change a pre-condition for new funding in some countries. Development agencies have played a strategic role in financing initiatives for managing the commons, often through poverty reduction programs. Donor agencies and multi-lateral organizations are currently giving more attention to basic services and livelihood needs in thousands of upland villages.

National governments in most Asian countries are not yet in a position to provide and sustain direct support to communities engaged in forest management, as it is not a venture that can generate immediate and tangible revenues to country coffers. However, governments are increasingly under pressure to account for resource allocation and to protect areas that require the engagement of local people.

In terms of mechanisms for directing such assistance, a number of SGPPTF grantees observed that the program strategy of giving funds directly to community organizations or local assisting NGOs has helped to make local authorities more accountable to their local constituents. This has been the case when local communities, using their project funds, provide forest department staff with budgets to conduct field operations. In Southeast Asia, central government budgets for the forestry sector may average from USD\$1-8 per hectare (Poffenberger *et al* 2006). Most of these funds, however, are absorbed into personnel and office costs, with little remaining for field costs. Forest guards in the Philippines earn approximately \$100 per month and protect an average of 4000 hectares of forest. In Cambodia and Indonesia, field staff salaries are less than this. Thus, field personnel appreciate whatever support they can get to do their work.

International agreements, global and regional programs, and advocacy movements are all shaping the national contexts in which supportive policies are developed and projects implemented. Agreements related to human rights and environment that states ratify through the United Nations help provide focus on the rights of indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities and encourage their formal engagement in stewardship, both to facilitate sustainable management and to generate livelihood.

One important influence on CFM approaches has been the UN Millennium Development Goals, in helping to garner support for basic services. These goals, at least on a rhetorical level, are slowly filtering into policy documents in a number of Asian nations, with encouragement from development agencies. International agreements have been less effective in generating additional financing to support local forest governance, but this may well change depending upon the outcome of negotiations for the post-Kyoto implementation of the UN Forum on Climate Change. Though influence on implementation is weak, formal agreements of the international community to support transitions to greater community involvement is having an impact on Asian policies.

Social impact reviews and assessments have recently occurred in a number of sites across the region, to ensure that social equity occurs during the implementation process and to manage and spread the knowledge generated from the experiences. Participatory monitoring and evaluation sessions facilitated between communities and local governments help them constructively reflect together on how things could be better.

However, forces driving deforestation and displacement of upland forest-dependent people are in many ways more powerful determinants of behavior than time-bound, site-specific projects. Though attitudinal shifts within government and donor agencies are underway, a significant proportion of professionals continue to view local communities as a problem rather than as part of the solution.

A major impediment to Asia's forest sector transition is the rigidity of the professional forestry paradigm. Michon (2005) noted that many professional foresters have never seriously considered indigenous forest cultures as models for management, despite their general sustainability and profitability. Why is this so? Forest gardens do not "fit" the conventional separation between forests and agriculture. Customary communal tenure systems do not fit within the laws and regulations governing the public forest domain. Such management systems created forests with physiognomy so close to an old-growth or secondary forest that they are easily confused with a natural forests. Such forests were nurtured by politically 'invisible' people, the same swidden farmers who were cast as destroyers of the forest in forestry policies and programs. Nonetheless, it is critical that the Asian forestry paradigm finds a way to integrate the concept of "farmers in the forest" and "forest culture on farmlands".

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The experiences garnered from these two projects, which interacted with 276 sites in eight Asian countries show that with the right kind of support, community level bodies can develop and use linkages with each other, with local government and higher-level policy to strengthen governance and livelihoods.

What is the 'right kind' of support?

For countries without or in the process of developing supportive policies, effective strategies to link local practice with policy are those that strengthen local practice through networking, and those that link local practice to higher-level policy and planning. Some important strategies have included: peer learning through facilitated opportunities for exchange, and support for communication relationship building between local CFM bodies and local government as well as local offices of national line agencies around specific and shared local concerns. These strategies can help move countries towards recognizing community forestry arrangements based on a critical mass of practice, and to develop specific bounded agreements in the absence of formal policy.

While policy development is in process, pilot programs and activities supportive of community forest management can become tools to communicate with local authorities, civil society, and the private sector, and to cause changes in attitudes within district and town centers towards 'forest cultures on farmlands'. It has also been important to cultivate linkages between CFM bodies and key individuals and important national actors and forums, and timing communication to capitalize on specific policy windows. Both of these can help to open up policy processes to local perspectives and build policy with awareness of field realities.

For countries with supportive policies on paper, strategies to translate these policies to meaningful action have been important. These need to be mindful not just of the tangible outputs required to formalize management agreements, but also of the quality of the decision-making process underpinning these agreements. When decision-making processes promote transparency, equity, cultural identity and organizational capacity, local forest governance can promote sustainable forest management alongside rural development.

For community forest management agreements to contribute to broader rural development frameworks in the midst of uncertainty and change in our globalizing world, the process needs to allocate ample time: raising awareness and capacities, nurturing social capital, and being rooted in community values concerning forests. Horizontal networking is an effective way to achieve these aims. However, strong support from local authorities and civil society is also crucial, discussed here in terms of vertical networking, particularly when communities face powerful groups such as large-scale developers and commercial actors.

Experiences in both programmes indicate planners, development agencies, and civil society organisations are gradually placing more trust in the region's rural villagers, and that this is not misplaced. At the same time, as is apparent from the cases, the need for substantial financial, technical, and political support remains. A great deal of damage has been done to the region's forests in recent decades, largely due to failures of national policy, as well as field-level management. An equally extensive effort will be needed to restore these critical ecosystems and community relationships with them. The case studies suggest that a long-term investment in building the capacity of communities and local governments to sustainably manage much of Southeast Asia's forests would be a strategic one.

The most promising process that can make a difference in forest lives will be strong partnerships of local communities, local government and civil society.

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