Unasylva - No. 159 - Tropical forestry action plan for Latin America - Forest land for people: A forestry village project in northeast Thailand





Forest land for people: A forestry village project in northeast Thailand

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The invasion of reserved forest areas by encroaching farmers is a problem in many countries. In the 1970s the Government of Thailand began a programme designed to meet the needs of the small farmers while at the same time rebuilding the forest. This authorized regulated agricultural use of reserve forest land combined with land rehabilitation for forestry.

In 1979 a UNDP/FAO pilot forestry project was undertaken to assist in developing an implementation process for an implementation process for the programme.

The initial operational phase of the project was concluded in late 1986. This article is a condensed version of a project assessment report, prepared for FAO by the author. It describes what the project sought to accomplish, by what means, and with what results, as foresters set out to become partners in development with the small farmers.

The emphasis is on the socio-economic goals of the project since these were far more complex for all concerned than the technical forestry issues.

PROJECT OFFICERS INSPECT NURSERY PRODUCTION trees for land rehabilitation and agroforestry

Although the main thrust of Thailand's forestry policy has been forest conservation and control for environmental and economic reasons, more recently increasing attention has been directed toward social considerations arising from increasing population pressure on the land and the need to attend to the plight of landless and poor rural populations.

The Fifth National Plan (1981-1986) departed from its predecessors by placing greater stress on income distribution and poverty alleviation than on economic growth. Among other things, it sought to deal with population pressure that was causing encroachment into reserved forest land by fostering an expanded programme of forest villages.

Under this programme, scattered encroachers are voluntarily resettled into organized villages within degraded reserved forest areas and allowed to farm land considered suitable for agriculture, supported by government services and technical assistance. Lands not allocated

for village use are rehabilitated as productive forest. The Fifth National Plan set a target of 100 new villages for the planning period.

Conditions under which disturbed forest land may be used for non-forestry purposes, including agriculture, are specified in the 1978 Forestry Act. The Royal Forest Department (RFD) scheme used to implement this policy was authorized by ministerial order in 1981. It empowers the Director-General of the RFD to grant usufructuary rights to up to 15 rai (2.4 ha) of reserved forest land to qualified petitioners. This scheme, known as the Sor Tor Kor (STK) programme after the Thai acronym for the usufructuary title created for this purpose, is now a regular feature of RFD-sponsored forest village projects, which by 1984 total-led about 75.

Foreseeing the complexities of this new approach, the government sought the assistance of UNDP and FAO early in the process, to help develop effective means of programme implementation. Accordingly, in 1979 a pilot project was initiated under a UNDP technical assistance programme with FAO as the executing agency and the RFD as implementing agency. Its official title was: Development of Diversified Forest Rehabilitation in North East Thailand (UNDP Project No. THA/81/004). Phase II of the project was concluded in September 1986.

Background

An urgent need therefore exists to normalize charcoal production in the on in the country.

SILVIPASTORAL ACTIVITIES controlled grazing was permitted in project plantations

The project site was located in the northwestern sector of the Khao Phu Luang national reserved forest in Korat Province, on a tract of some 8997 ha, roughly 8 percent of the area of the total reserved forest. Korat is the gateway province to the Northeast Region, which is the poorest of the four regions in Thailand and is characterized by poor soils, a harsh climate and a shortage of water.

The immediate aim of the project was the rehabilitation of degraded natural forest resources on 40 percent of the area, harmonized with socio-economic development (or alleviation of poverty) of forest encroachers as a precondition for the establishment of man-made forests. The socio-economic aspects of the project (in the form of inputs leading to increased cash benefits, land allotment, infrastructure and services) were intended to convince the farmers to resettle permanently in and farm the remaining 60 percent of the project area suitable for agricultural production and, in the end, to become willing participants in forestry activities (using agroforestry techniques) to complement cash earnings from agricultural production and employment in forestry.

Studies conducted for the purpose of project preparation included socioeconomic surveys; a soil and potential land-use survey; a forest inventory; a review of forest policy and legislation; and an agroforestry application study. Contact was established with provincial and district government offices, agricultural extension, community development, public health, non-formal education, and fisheries, as well as banks, etc.

The natural vegetation of the project area is dry evergreen and mixed deciduous forest. A forest inventory in 1980 resulted in the land classification of the project area shown in the Table.

The remaining forest supported an average of 59 trees per ha and 30 m³ per ha of marketable timber volume. Illegal felling by timber merchants, farmers and charcoal producers was widespread. The disturbed forest contained hardly any trees of commercial value. Some of the

agricultural land and swiddens had recently been abandoned because of soil exhaustion and were being invaded by imperata grasses.

According to a 1982 economic survey, the number of households was 1293 for a total population of about 8000. Sixty-nine percent of the residents interviewed had migrated to the project area in the preceding one to two years while the remaining 31 percent had been there for three years or more, some for as long as 30 years. Although there were small numbers of relatively older settlements, the area was characterized mainly by homesteads scattered over the countryside.

Although tree felling for the lumber industry was a mayor factor in the deforestation of the area, the promotion of maize as a major export commodity from the mid-1950s onward was just as critical. Profits from maize cultivation were high in the early years as the soil of the newly cleared forest was rich and yields were good even without the application of fertilizer.

A group that played a significant role in the area was the road construction workers, especially those employed for the construction of Highway 304 from 1966 to 1969. Many of these were farmers from maize-growing areas elsewhere, who stayed behind to grow maize once me highway had been completed. Through them, word spread quickly to their home villages that new fertile land was available in the Khao Phu Luang forest. The result was a large influx of maize growers who came to settle permanently on land that they either purchased from previous occupiers or cleared themselves, mainly by burning any trees and brush that remained.

From a sample of farmers interviewed in the 1982 survey most claimed ownership over some or all of the land they farmed but, in fact, all were illegally settled public land the national reserved forest - and at that time there were no legal provisions to regularize their occupation of such land. However, claims to ownership were recognized by the local population so that the claimants could dispose of their land just as any other owner would exploiting it themselves, selling it, renting it out, giving it in inheritance, etc. Almost one-half of these "owners" also paid land tax for their holding at the District Office and the fact that this was accepted and a receipt issued for the payment was taken as at least implicit recognition by a government office of their rights as owners.

LEARNING NEW SKILLS extension courses were provided for village women

Class	Percent of total area	
	1980	1975
Undisturbed dry evergreen forest	7.32	22.80
Disturbed dry evergreen forest	1.64	1.61
Agricultural land	58.90	41.58
Swidden areas	32.01	33.87
Water resources	0.07	0.07

Land classification of the project area

Project objectives and results

Forest rehabilitation Forest rehabilitation for environmental protection and economic benefits was a central concern of the project. The species selected for planting in the project area were mainly *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* (Petford and Katherina provenances) and *Leucaena leucocephala*. Each year, 200-300 ha of degraded natural forest land were prepared for the planting out of seedlings raised in the nurseries. Ground vegetation was cleared with hand-

tools and/or tractors and woody vegetation was cut up and stacked for use as fuelwood or timber.

In areas where agroforestry was practiced, the tending was done by the farmers themselves, using hand-tools. In other areas, labourers were hired. Residents in the project area were given priority for these jobs since it was intended that these employment opportunities should be part of the overall socio-economic development plan for the area. However, since it was never possible to recruit enough local people to meet plantation work requirements because of conflicts with farming schedules, many outsiders consequently had to be hired. Another factor contributing to the lack of local participation was that payment often lagged behind the performance of the work by several months.

During the project, some 1163 ha of land were reforested.

Village community consolidation and land allocation The socio-economic development strategy of the project rested upon the double foundation of village community consolidation in an agroforestry context and land allocation in terms of the STK programme.

The original target was the creation of six agroforestry villages, with a seventh to be added in 1935. Each community focus was provided with basic physical and social infrastructure, a package of agricultural development inputs and essential services in relation to health, education and the like.

High priority was given to road building. Approximately 70 km of simple but adequate roads providing direct access to most villages were built and maintained during me lifetime of the project Weirs and dams were also constructed to impound water in reservoirs for local use.

The rate of occupation of the-new villages was slower than anticipated because of problems In persuading some farmers to relocate and the problems experienced by dispersed farmers in organizing and selecting leaders At the end of 1986, 317 households or roughly one-fifth of the project area population had been accommodated in the new villages.

Besides the allocation of 15 rai of land per household under the STK programme, the project also provided an additional 10 rai (1.6 ha) per household on a communal basis, mainly for the establishment of fruit-trees.

During the project period, 1832 ha of land were surveyed prior to allocation and 920 STK documents issued. In relation to the total project area, this covered 32 percent of the 5704 ha found to be suitable for agriculture and affected 59 percent of the 1560 households residing in the area at the end of 1985.

The most time-consuming part of the exercise was the discussion needed to induce the people to accept the rule limiting land entitlement to 15 rai. Another thorny issue was how to deal with the land of absentee claimants. Rather than force issues and provoke conflicts, the RFD officials chose to be flexible and pragmatic, identifying packages of land for allotment that could be acted upon without too much difficulty and leaving the final settlement of problem cases for a later date when appropriate solutions could be found.

The use of as yet unallocated land by resident farmers continues to be tolerated, until such land is disposed of under the terms of the STK document or as communal land. Farmers are also allowed temporary use of land that has been earmarked for forestation but not yet planted.

The Northeast Region... is characterized by poor soils, a harsh climate and a shortage of water.

Agroforestry The special challenge of the project was to create a financially viable situation for farmers with exclusive cultivation rights to only 2.4 ha of agricultural land while at the same time meeting the forestry objectives of natural forest protection and forest rehabilitation This was simply not feasible on the basis of continued reliance on maize monocropping, especially if swidden techniques were involved.

The solution pursued by the project was to get the farmers to apply better farm management and to introduce various sideline activities to supplement farm income, such as, for example, cottage industry and part-time off-farm work on tree plantations.

The diversification of annual cropping was seen as an important measure. The main additional crops proposed were cotton, mung bean, soybean, castor bean, groundnut (peanut), upland rice and kenaf. Although maize continued to be the single most important crop at the end of the project period, some headway triad been made toward diversified cropping.

Promotional activity in the general category of agroforestry and of agroforestry- related practices included forest and fruit-tree planting by the people for their own use; forest pastoralism; forest-related apiculture; and charcoal-making.

The project produced its own growing materials and conducted research and field trials to determine which tree species were most appropriate in relation to local environmental conditions and to their usefulness to the people in an agroforestry context. The main varieties promoted were the same as those used for forest rehabilitation, i.e. *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* and *Leucaena leucocephala*. In beekeeping areas, *Calliandra calothyrsus* and *Eucalyptus deglupta* were also promoted as a source of pollen. The project supplied 167950 seedlings to farmers and to schools, both in the project area and outside, in response to demand.

Response to these forestry extension efforts was at first lukewarm for several reasons. As there was no critical shortage of fuelwood in the area, there was little perceived need to plant trees for this purpose. In addition, the people felt it would not benefit them to plant trees for, in their experience, it was illegal to fell trees in a reserved forest area. The very concept of agroforestry was alien to maize farmers who felt that planting trees in their fields would interfere with tractor ploughing. Gradually, however, interest in planting trees began to gain momentum. According to a sample survey conducted in 1985, 56 percent of the sampled farmers had at least started to establish hedgerows around their homelots and 51 percent had started to plant forest trees. Only 3 percent, however, had ever at any time participated in the establishment or management of village woodlots.

Although the practice of planting trees had become fairly well established by 1985, silviculture as such had not yet become a source of income and this was presumably 8 counter-incentive to engaging in such an activity.

Charcoal production While the idea of planting trees for sale to wood-based industries was viewed with some scepticism by farmers, the alternative of transforming the trees into charcoal for their own use or for sale was immediately attractive. Farmers had considerable understanding of the economic value of trees used for this purpose and they were familiar with the process of making charcoal. According to a survey of 244 project area households conducted in early 1986, more than 60 percent of the households depended exclusively on charcoal; another 27 percent used a combination of charcoal and fuelwood. Most of the charcoal consumed was produced from local forest wood by the people themselves, using very simple and inefficient earthmound kilns.

The charcoal trade has always been viewed with suspicion by the RFD. Any sizeable movement of charcoal is, in principle, presumed to be related to the illegal felling of trees. On the other hand, charcoal is an essential commodity in Thailand, especially in rural areas where

alternative sources of energy for cooking, such as electricity or liquefied gas, are either unavailable or too expensive. An urgent need therefore exists to normalize charcoal production in the country.

The project adopted a two-pronged approach. First, local charcoal producers were encouraged to shift from dependence on natural forests for their industry to the use of plantation tree species established by themselves. Second, the project attempted to improve charcoal production by the introduction of more efficient but inexpensive technologies. The objective was to meet local domestic demand for charcoal on the basis of legitimate enterprise.

The mud beehive kiln was selected for promotion in the project area. Fourteen farmers were trained in mud beehive kiln construction and operation in the first half of 1986 with the expectation that these trainees would later train others. A simple illustrated manual on the construction and operation of the kilns was prepared by the project dendro-energy expert and distributed to farmers.

A small survey of 68 farmers in the project area was conducted to determine their willingness to build these kilns. Reasons given for dissent were lack of money (34), lack of available space (10), and fear of getting into trouble with the RFD (22). None of these reasons had any basis in fact because building the kiln required only family labour, it occupied very little space, and it was approved by the RFD with the proviso that only wood from the farmers' private tree plantations be used for charcoal-making. However, there may be a deeper motivation for this resistance. As mentioned above, charcoal is used extensively in the project area and there is sufficient illegal production to meet demand. The real issue then is how to convince the people to replace their forest destructive practices with the new, modified home industry of charcoal production supplied by the wood of trees from their own plantations, and to utilize the more efficient mud beehive kiln.

Word spread quickly... that new fertile land was available in the Khao Phu Luang forest.

Silvopastoral activity To promote silvopastoral activity, the project allowed farmers to graze their cattle in tree plantations under controlled conditions. By mid-1986, cattle raising had become an important activity, with some herds of as many as 40-50 cattle. About 16 ha of forest plantation were planted in guinea grass and other forage plants to improve grazing.

Fruit-tree plantations Fruit-tree seedlings were distributed to the farmers at the very beginning of the project as a goodwill gesture. Twenty-eight farmers and two project staff were trained in plant propagation in May 1982.

As of April 1986, approximately 60000 seedlings had been distributed to the farmers and the area in fruit orchards was estimated to be 590 ha. Many different kinds of fruit as well as other tree crops such as coconut, cashew, and bamboo (to be harvested in the form of edible bamboo shoots) were grown. The most popular fruits were mangoes, jackfruits, custard apples and sweet tamarinds, but papayas, bananas and limes were also produced.

By 1986, several farmers who had planted fruit-trees at the beginning of the project were deriving an income from them. One farmer visited in mid-1986 had sold baht 40000 (\$1540) worth of mangoes and bought his own pick-up truck to deliver them to market.

Apiculture At the end of March 1982, eight farmers were sent to Khon Kaen University for a one-week training session covering basic knowledge of beekeeping and the production of boxes for beehives. By the end of the year, 30 hives had been purchased for use in the project area.

The project apiculturist provided the beekeepers with advice on seasonal management of honey-bee colonies, methods of feeding the bees, beekeeping equipment construction, methods of prevention and control of pests and diseases, and the planting of honey-bee flora. In addition, beekeepers were given assistance in increasing the number of their honey-bee colonies and removing and extracting the honey crop.

The take-off year for apiculture in the project area was 1984. Ten additional farmers were trained in beekeeping in June but the growth of the industry became a self-sustaining process as other farmers were trained by former trainees. By March 1986, the number of beekeepers had reached 41 and there were 350 colonies. Although training was given to men, beekeeping came to be practised more by women who presumably acquired the skill from their men-folk.

The RFD has adopted apiculture promotion as a regular feature of its forest village projects throughout the country and some 40 staff members assigned to these villages have been trained by the project.

Provision of credit The provision of agricultural credit at reasonable rates of interest was another objective of the project. The project area farmers initially had no land holding rights whatsoever. Gradually they were issued STK usufructuary certificates which legitimized occupation of the land but rights were not transferable except to their natural heirs. Because of this limitation, the land was normally unacceptable as loan collateral to commercial banks because in the case of debt defaulting, it could not be claimed in lieu of repayment.

In late 1982, discussions were initiated with the Government Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) on the prospects of providing loans to farmers in the project area and bank officials came to the area to hold discussions with farmers on loan conditions and loan issues generally.

Two groups, one of 13 farmers and the other of 24, were asked to complete joint liability forma in order to qualify for consideration for loans. Six of the first group and 13 of the second group eventually received loans of baht 15002000 (\$58-77) each. Reasons for disqualification, apart from credit risk, included age, failure to produce a marriage certificate, and lack of local residence registration.

In the meantime, 60 new applicants were proposed for credit of which 24 were accepted after screening. The previous 19 applied for new loans which were granted. Because of the perfect repayment record of the first group, the loan ceiling was raised to baht 3000. The loan repayment level for the second round was again 100 percent and the bank raised the ceiling to baht 4500 (\$173).

In the second half of 1983, 63 project area farmers joined the newly formed Lam Phra Phloeng Cooperative. Its main purpose is to make agricultural credit available to its members who are required to pay a fee of baht 250 (\$9.62). These fees are paid into the loan fund but the bulk is supplied by the BAAC. In 1983 and 1984, 203 loans were made to 140 project area beneficiaries for amounts ranging from baht 5000-7000 (\$192-269). As in the case of the BAAC loans, the performance of the borrowers was monitored and guided by the project agronomist and the repayment rate was again 100 percent.

In 1985, 39 of the 43 farmers who had received and repaid loans from the BAAC, received new loans totalling baht 204500 (\$7865). Again, 129 farmers out of 260 who had been granted loans by the Lam Phra Phloeng Cooperative paid their debts and they then received new loans totalling baht 1025200 (\$39431).

Between July 1983 and March 1986, a total of 303 loans was granted by the BAAC and the Cooperative for a cumulative amount of baht 2173500 (\$83596). This accomplishment proved that it was possible for small farmers without land-ownership title deeds to beat the system of

domination by usurious loan sharks.

By legalizing their statue with the STK certificate, the project area farmers were given the necessary security of tenure. Credit risk from the banks' point of view was also perceived to be reduced by the general sponsorship of the project and its role in assuring good loan repayment performance by the farmers.

Although training was given to men, beekeeping came to be practiced more by women.

FARMING IN THE FOREST maize in still the major crop in the project area

Health services It is the national health development policy that medical services, the introduction of primary health care, vaccination of children, and health and sanitary education are to be provided to rural areas without such services because of remoteness and poor road conditions. The Korat provincial health authorities had planned to implement this policy in the project area in 1985 but given the clear need for such services, they agreed, at the project's request, to anticipate their schedule by two years.

In the first nine months, 1026 men, women, and children were treated. In addition, 117 candidates from 13 villages in all three sectors of the project area were selected and given a one-week training course in April 1984 as health communicators. Nine of these were selected to function as health volunteers and were given a further two weeks' training.

A major health-related issue is the quality of drinking-water. Normally, the population uses stored rainwater for drinking and cooking. Rainwater runoff from the house roof is collected in a large cement jar. At the beginning of the project there was an acute shortage of jars in the area, partly because those sold in the market towns were too expensive. To remedy the problem, farmers were taught how to make the cement jars themselves. As a result, the availability of good drinking-water on a year-round basis greatly increased in the project area.

Non-farm enterprises Training in non-farm enterprise production offered good prospects for earning supplementary income in the project area. Seventeen training sessions were held there from October 1983 to February 1985. Most sessions catered for the interests of women with 13 on dressmaking and two on cooking and food preservation. One session was on engine repair and the other on men's hair-cutting.

Schools were used as centres to help in the dissemination of the innovations proposed by the project. In addition, arrangements were made for the schools to be serviced by a mobile library, and health and nutrition education was provided.

Staff development In spite of the fact that social forestry and its implementation had already had a certain history in Thailand, RFD foresters had not been trained to deal with the human, socioeconomic development aspect of social forestry. Staff training was therefore one of the project objectives.

The people most directly targeted by this activity were RFD staff assigned to work full time on the project. Seven people were involved during the lifetime of the project. Other RFD staff were also involved in project staff development activity and deliberate efforts were made to integrate the learning experience of the project into the RFD system as a whole.

More formal training was also provided within the framework of the project. Two of the deputy field directors were given scholarships for study at the Master's level, one in social forestry at the University of the Philippines at Los Baños, and the other in rural development planning at the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok. Shorter-term (2-3 months) travelling scholarships were also awarded to other deputies. Five took short courses in social forestry at

the University of the Philippines at Los Baños. Four external study tours to the Republic of Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines and Nepal were sponsored by the project to study the experiences of these countries in social forestry. Four project staff and two project area farmers participated in each study tour.

In addition, the Faculty of Communication Arts at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, gave five training workshops on development support communication for staff personnel and other interested people from of me RFD and cooperating government agencies.

ROADS HAD HIGH PRIORITY increase of mobility and access to markets are important

Evaluation of the project

At this moment, it is difficult to do more than evaluate the project as an initiator and a facilitator of a process of change. The full impact of the project will be known only in years to come.

The reforestation of 1163 ha of degraded forest land has brought about considerable change in the project area. Hills that used to be barren are now sprouting young trees. This is apparent to the casual visitor and is commented upon with satisfaction by the villagers themselves.

Soil erosion has certainly been checked on slopes planted with trees. The nitrogen-fixing quality of the leucaena trees as well as the humus from their leaves have helped to improve the soils.

Although a new physical survey would be required to document progress fully, the economic analysis of agricultural enterprise shows clearly that much has been achieved in the improvement of land use in the project area. More time is needed, however, to convince all farmers of its benefits so that both tree plantation and agricultural development can proceed according to plan.

The pattern of villages is now less amorphous as the result of spontaneous or planned consolidation of scattered homesteads into cluster villages, mostly in relation to new physical infrastructure development such as roads and weirs.

The villagers enjoy legitimate status as occupants of the land. They live in functional communities with normal social infrastructures, participate in normal community activities, and receive standard government services in education, health, local administration, security and agricultural support.

Many of the new villages are developing service infrastructures and institutions catering for the needs of the community as a whole, brought about mainly as a result of villager initiative.

As a result of road development and the availability of public transport, communications both within the area and outside have vastly improved.

The possibility of storing rainwater has increased as the villagers are now producing their own cement water-storage jars. The percentage of households with toilets has risen from less than 10 percent to about 25 percent. Most of these are water-sealed cesspool toilets.

As noted earlier, a primary healthcare system has been operating in the project area since mid-1984. Much greater use is also made of subdistrict health stations, now three in number, whereas in the past these could only be reached with great difficulty because of lack of roads.

In the 1985 crop year, maize continued to dominate farm production but other crops that

represented an insignificant quantity in 1981 were beginning to take on more importance.

Non-farm activities provide another source of income for the project area population. Those listed by the economic survey report include: employment by the project to tend tree plantations; casual labour; trading; charcoal-making; fishery; and others. This last unspecified item presumably includes such activities as beekeeping, carpentry, vehicle operation, dressmaking, etc. The only activity engaged in by a substantial proportion of the 300 sampled households (52 percent) was casual labour, presumably working for hire on larger farms. Employment by the project and trading were next in importance. Data on the number and income of households involved in charcoal production tend to be unreliable for, as practiced, such employment was illegal and thus to admit to it would be self-incriminating for farmers.

On the whole, the population affected was very positive about the project. When questioned about the interventions they appreciated most and felt most important, they invariably ranked road construction first, followed by the advocacy role of the project in obtaining development benefits from many sources.

Community forestry is fostered with the expectation that popular participation in tree plantations will contribute to the replenishment of national forest resources. This is beginning to happen in the project area, enthusiastically with fruit-trees but much more haphazardly with other species.

Other forestry-related innovations proposed, such as private forest tree plantations for sale to wood-consuming industries; for use as construction material or for fuelwood and charcoal production; or intercropping cash crops with trees, will hopefully prove to be important in the future.

In practice, landholders continued to claim ownership rights and disposed of land as if they were legal owners.

The problem of landholdings and tenure

The problem of landholdings and tenure

Two problems that have so far defied solution are those of the redistribution of landholdings to comply with applicable laws and regulations, and the large disparity in income and size of landholdings among project area farmers.

During the project period the mean size of holding for all categories of farmers increased from 24.85 to 31.37 rai. Those of the marginal farmers went from 5 to 8.16 rai so that their status seemed to be slowly improving. For large farmers, the mean size of their holdings jumped dramatically from 59.5 to 92.85 rai.

There was also evidence of greatly increased disparity in the landholding position of the farmers. Half of the sampled farmers held less than 20 rai of land as compared to 42.5 percent in 1981.

As explained previously, there can be no discussion of ownership statue in the legal sense of land held in the project area but only of usufructuary rights on the basis of STK certificates. In practice, however, landholders continued to claim ownership rights and disposed of land as if they were legal owners, selling or renting it out as they saw fit.

The problem in the project area is that maize cultivation continues to be the farmers' basic enterprise and although income enhancement on this basis has been achieved to some extent by improved practices, it is accomplished mainly by expanding the area under cultivation. Unasylva - No. 159 - Tropical forestry action plan for Latin America - Forest land for people: A forestry village project in northeast Thailand

The long-term solution built into the social forestry project is to bring all project area farmers under the STK programme, each 15-rat holding becoming financially viable through the practice of agroforestry-related enterprises. The STK programme policy in relation to permissible size of holding has never been popular in the project area and it may be unrealistic to expect farmers controlling 68 percent of as yet unallocated agricultural land (as of 1986) to cede their claim to it without recourse to legal action.

Official land policy regarding making forest land available to landless farmers is currently under review and has been the object of several studies since 1980. It is argued that in areas designated for implementation, STK programme regulations are neither observed nor are they enforceable. Land sale transactions on the informal market continue to be made as before and the RFD simply does not have the labour force or the resources to do much about it. It is further argued that although the purpose of awarding STK certificates is security of tenure for the forest-land encroachers, the effect is often the opposite. Before project implementation, the encroachers felt reasonably secure on their holdings in the knowledge that although they occupied the land illegally, no-one would physically expel them because of the political consequences. Now they have become a focus of attention and the possibility of retaining more than 15 rai of land is questionable.

The land reform programme of Thailand administered by the Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives provides an alternative to the STK programme model that is worthy of consideration in this context. It also operates in degraded forest-land areas but the difference is that these areas have been degazetted as reserved forest land and jurisdiction has been transferred from the RFD to ALRO. Occupation of the land is legalized on the basis of a usufructuary right certificate but, as opposed to the STK certificates conferred thus far, the ALRO certificates grant permanent rights.

Another basic difference between the two programmes is that the ALRO programme recognizes squatters' rights so that any occupier required to cede part of his holding is entitled to compensation. Essentially, the programme is a land redistribution scheme. The maximum permissible size of holding is normally 50 rai (8 ha). Any land held in excess of that must be sold to ALRO.

An evolution in this direction would require some redefinition of the role of the RFD and logically of the involvement of ALRO in social forestry project implementation.

Lessons from the project

Despite some negative outcomes resulting from factors beyond the control of the implementors, the achievements of the project have been substantial.

Initial reactions of the forest-land encroachers to the project were very negative, stemming from their perception of foresters as law enforcement officers. Farmers were suspicious and fearful that the project would lead to their eviction and the loss of their land and livelihood. A first major task of the project implementors, therefore, was to reassure them by the communication of accurate information on the objectives of the project that this would not happen, and to develop relationships of trust. Second, the people had to be persuaded to accept or at least not to resist the reforestation activity planned for the project even when it was carried out on land claimed by the encroachers. They also had to be persuaded to accept the landholding scheme set down by the STK programme regulations. Finally, the project implementors had to obtain the active cooperation and involvement of the people in the various activities pertaining to their own socio-economic development.

Basic to this approach was a deliberate effort to establish meaningful communication between project staff and the project area population.

Project staff avoided the stance of authority figures and strove rather to project the image of sympathetic and understanding friends of the people, bearers of benefits of development, and of willing intermediaries and advocates through whom the villagers could voice their needs and grievances to higher authorities.

An opinion survey of the project area population included in the social survey gave the project foresters a high rating in this respect. More than 85 percent of the people sampled were satisfied or very satisfied with the project foresters in relation to getting along with people, politeness, attention to duty and knowledge ability.

Another characteristic of the project which should be highlighted is its coordinating role in relation to cooperating government agencies and its advocacy role in favour of the people. There is no doubt that the special status of the project as a United Nations-sponsored enterprise and the effectiveness of the FAO chief technical advisor because of his personal qualities and prestige of position, were important. Requests to cooperating agencies for action tended to be acted on more rapidly than in other government projects.

Finally, but not least important, an aspect of project implementation that contributed significantly to its overall effectiveness was the flexibility of management style. Without deviating from the pursuit of essential objectives and the execution of programmed activities, actual work plans were constantly revised in the light of new opportunities and/or constraints. Underlying this aspect of project implementation were the conditions that made it possible, namely, a strong decentralized management structure with flexible rules of operation giving field directors the authority to control the execution of work plans without the need to refer constantly to higher-level individuals or committees for clearances.

Given its present commitment, there appears to be little doubt that the RFD will strive to continue the next phase of the community forestry project in this area and replicate it in its other projects of this kind.

