Participatory Approaches and Tools for SFM

Basic knowledge

This module is intended for forest managers, project planners, facilitators of policy processes, extension agents, leaders of local forest groups, and members of multi-stakeholder platforms interested in applying participatory approaches and tools in SFM. It highlights the importance of participation as a key principle of SFM, identifies important issues to consider when actively engaging with key forest stakeholders, and provides links to relevant tools and case studies.

Participation

The term "participation" describes a spectrum of levels or forms of people's engagement in decision-making processes (Table 1). At one end of the spectrum, individual members of a group or community are informed about decisions after they have been taken; at the other end, people are fully engaged in information, analysis and debate and are able to influence decisions.

Table 1. Typology of participation in decision-making	
Form/level of participation	**Characteristic features**
Nominal participation	Individual is a member of a group or community but takes no part in decision-making
Passive participation	Individual is informed of decisions *ex-post facto*; attends meetings and listens to decision-making without speaking up
Consultative participation	Individual is asked for opinions on specific matters, without a guarantee that such opinions will influence decisions
Activity-specific participation	Individual is asked (or volunteers) to undertake specific tasks in the decision-making process
Active (collaborative) participation	Individual expresses opinions, solicited or not, or takes other kinds of initiative
Interactive (empowering) participation	Individual has a voice and influences decisions

In forestry, participatory processes are designed to enable local people to be part of decision-making in all aspects of forest management, including policy formulation.

Participatory forest planning and policy development processes empower stakeholders through exposure, direct interaction with decision-makers at different levels of government, and timely access to relevant and appropriate information, knowledge and technology. Such participatory processes lead to increased local responsibility for forest resources, improved local rights, increased bargaining power for local actors at the national level, and policy reform processes that are truly inclusive and multi-stakeholder in nature. Participatory policy development may take longer than centralized decision-making, but it results in more effective and acceptable policies, making it more cost-effective in the long term.

There are often competing perspectives and interests among stakeholders with regard to forest resources, such as local customary rights versus state-sanctioned rights, and competition for access among the users of forest products. The use of participatory approaches involving stakeholder analysis and gender analysis increases the chances that all relevant aspects get due consideration and that management options and decisions are better tailored to the needs of local people.

Participatory approaches in forestry

Participatory approaches in forestry have been evolving globally as the limitations of centralized and top-down approaches to forest decision-making become increasingly clear. In many countries, the principle of participation has been integrated into the planning, management and monitoring of national forest programmes (NFPs), creating opportunities and spaces for stakeholders to negotiate agendas, policies, programmes, roles and partnerships.

Most participatory approaches aim to place leadership and responsibility for development goals in the hands of local people. In forestry, participatory approaches and tools have predominantly been developed within the context of community-based forestry (CBF), forest enterprise development (e.g. "Market Analysis & Development"), collaborative research, participatory assessment, monitoring and evaluation, collaborative conflict management, and the governance and stakeholder participation components of NFPs. Approaches such as the Socio-Economic and Gender Analysis Program are important in forest project planning for ensuring that poor, marginalized groups and women are given precedence.

Participatory approaches and tools for SFM contributes to SDGs:

Related modules

- Collaborative conflict management
- Development of forest-based enterprises
- Forest management planning
- Gender in forestry

In more depth

Principles when involving people and using participatory tools

Attitude, behaviour and skill of facilitators

The use of participatory tools does not guarantee participation. To a large extent, the attitude and behaviour of facilitators, and their skill in selecting and adapting appropriate tools, will determine the extent to which all participants are able to contribute and, ultimately, the success or failure of an intervention. The facilitator's role is not to create solutions but to ask questions. Facilitators should listen and avoid dominating, but they also need sufficient confidence and courage to steer the process forward. They should be open-minded and free of rigid preconceptions about the causes of a problem, and they should avoid apportioning blame. Facilitators should focus on applying the appropriate process and tools and should not seek to influence the content or outcomes. Above all, however, they need to master communication skills so as to give each participant a voice and an equal opportunity to contribute to the process.

Realistic expectations

When inviting local people to participate in policy processes, it is important to be specific, precise and clear about their roles; the relevance of the process to actual decision-making; and the contributions and actions participants will be able to make at different stages of the process. If the contributions of participants will not have an impact on decisions, this must be communicated clearly at the beginning.

In projects, participants should be clearly informed about the benefits of participation and the time and resources (e.g. labour) they are expected to contribute. Transparency, credibility and appreciation are prerequisites for avoiding misunderstandings, which may result in conflicts or unsolicited exclusion.

Who should participate?

Obtaining appropriate stakeholder representation is essential for meaningful participation. Development interventions and policymaking will lack validity and "ownership" if they fail to identify the most important (affected and influential) stakeholders (or a representative sample of them).

Having identified the suite of stakeholders, it is important to classify them with respect to the extent of their involvement, for example those whose collaboration is needed for specific decisions and actions, those who must be consulted prior to decision-making, and those for whom passive or nominal participation may be acceptable at certain stages of the process. On the basis of such classification, decisions can be made as to how (i.e. using which tools and formats) such participation might be obtained. Special attention should always be paid to marginalized groups and women to ensure their active participation.

Selected participatory tools in forestry

A great deal of information is available on participatory tools adapted for use in community-based forestry facilitation, natural resource management and participatory community development. Table 2 lists commonly used tools, all of which are suitable for use with all forest stakeholders – from top-level decision-makers in public forestry institutions to smallholder farmers and villagers – in formal meetings, workshops and conferences.

Table 2. Selected participatory tools

Participatory tool	Purpose	Reference*
Crosscutting tools		
Brainstorming and grouping	To rapidly obtain relevant information, working with large groups or with small groups of people directly involved in an issue. To condense the issues raised	1
Building rapport	To develop communication and establish working relationships with local people	2
Fishbowl debate	To level the communication "playing field" by reducing the influence of dominant participants and thereby providing opportunities for all to take part (ideal for multistakeholder meetings where there are contentious issues, grievances or conflicts)	7
Focus groups	To organize people in a community who share common interests or circumstances in order to address specific issues identified by the community	1
Guided discussion	To make use of local knowledge, facilitate decision-making processes and guide stakeholders through conflicts	11

Participatory tool	Purpose	Reference*
Ranking	Can be used in various ways to arrange groups of issues (derived from brainstorming or other exercises), for example according to priority	2, 7, 9
Secondary sources	To supplement other information-gathering techniques and provide a richer picture of local conditions	2
Semi-structured dialogue (interview)	To engage individuals ("key respondents"), families ("representative families") or focus groups in conversations, prompted by a series of open questions	1,2, 3, 7, 9
Gender analysis	To determine who has access to the products of family labour, how decisions on those products are made, and how responsibilities are apportioned	
Selected tools for appraising general community issues – social issues		
Community history chart	To visually portray the changes that have affected community life in recent years in terms of social organization, health, production and natural resources	1
Income classification	To identify the main social strata that exist in a community in the eyes of its own members, based on their definitions of "wealth" or "well-being"	1
Livelihoods	To understand income levels within a community, as well as the conditions in which people have access to natural resources and sources of income	1
Mapping services and opportunities	To visually portray the services and employment opportunities known to and used by members of a community	1
Relationship mapping	To explore perceptions of relationships among forest stakeholders, etc.	7
Seasonal analysis	To portray seasonal variations in parameters and activities in community life. To illustrate the relationships that exist between various activities and seasonal changes	1, 8, 9
Social mapping	To develop a visual breakdown of household income in a community in order to study income levels and differences in access to resources	1, 8
Timeline/trendline	To identify significant changes in a community's past that continue to influence events and attitudes in the present	1, 7, 8, 9
Selected tools for appraising natural resource management		
Conflict analysis matrix	To identify the main sources of conflict in a community	1
Decision-making analysis matrix	To determine the individuals or institutions responsible for making decisions on issues such as the use of specified resources	1
Historical diagramming and mapping of natural resources/timeline	To discuss how natural resources have changed in order to better understand current problems. To assess trends in forest cover or quality and determine the causes of changes	1, 7
Mapping access to natural resources	To develop a visual breakdown of household access to public natural resources. To determine whether certain members of a community have less access than others to resources	1
Participatory mapping	To draw maps that reflect community perceptions of how physical space and resources are used. To identify the tentative boundaries, stakeholders and neighbours of community forests. To facilitate boundary demarcation. To understand forest types, quality, uses and users	1, 5, 7, 8
Simple forest assessment form	To assess the resources (wood and non-wood) of a community forest (baseline; preparation of management plan)	10
Selected tools for the analysis of problems and solutions		
Analysis of pros and cons	To foster open dialogue on conflictive subjects using dynamic role-playing to overcome obstacles to discussion	1
Impact assessment	To analyse *ex ante* with members of a community the possible or probable consequences of implementing a project or specific action	1, 9
Problem tree: cause-and-effect diagram	To probe the root causes of forest-related problems and enable analyses of the interlinkages among causes and effects	**7**, 9
Solution evaluation matrix	To evaluate *ex ante* with a community the feasibility or sustainability of the various solutions considered	1
Solution tree	To identify strategies for tackling the causes of problems identified in a problem analysis (acts as a bridge to management planning)	7
Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis	To conduct an *ex ante* evaluation of alternatives with highest priority, to compare advantages and disadvantages, and to foresee possible problems	1, 9
Selected tools for planning		

Participatory tool	Purpose	Reference*
Action (activity) plan matrix	To mobilize the capacity of people to design plans of action	1
Community planning mapping	To produce maps representing the final objectives envisioned by communities in their planning of natural resource management within their areas of influence	1
Matrix of needs and available resources	To identify the resources needed to achieve objectives (e.g. money, supplies, technical personnel, and human and natural resources)	1
Visioning/guided visualization	To assess expectations for participatory forest management or sustainable forest management. As a step towards developing forest management plans by identifying aspirations, goals and activities	7, 9
Selected tools for participatory follow-up and evaluation		
Follow-up and evaluation planning matrix	To draw up matrices for planning participatory monitoring (or follow-up) and evaluation processes	1
Follow-up indicator matrix	To draw up matrices showing the indicators to be used in monitoring or follow-up in projects	1
Impact assessment	To draw up matrices with the indicators to be used in evaluating the impacts of projects	1, 9
Strength, Weaknesses and Recommendations (SWR) analysis	To review the 1-year work plan to encourage learning from strengths and weaknesses and to look to the future based on lessons from the past (an adaptation and simplification of SWOT)	7
Selected tools for participatory conflict management		
Conflict analysis	To examine the rights, responsibilities and benefits of stakeholders in relation to a resource as part of improving understanding of conflicts	4,5,6, 7
Conflict mapping	To show geographically where land-use or resource-use conflicts exist or may exist in the future. To determine the primary issues of conflict	4,5,6
Conflict timeline	To assist stakeholders in examining the history of conflicts and in increasing their understanding of the sequence of events that led to those conflicts	4,5,6
SWOT analysis	To analyse the internal strengths and weaknesses of organizations or groups of stakeholders and the external opportunities and threats they face	4,5,6
Venn diagram	To analyse and illustrate the nature of relationships among key stakeholder groups	4,5,6, 8, 9

* Numbers refer to the following references, where more information on specific tools can be obtained: 1 Geilfus (2008); 2 Jackson and Ingles (1998); 3 Lecup and Nicholson (2004); 4 Means and Josayma (2002b); 5 Evans *et al*. (2006); 6 Engel and Korf (2005); 7 Said and O'Hara (2010); 8 Wilde (2001); 9 VSO (2009); 10 Gambia Forestry Department (2005, 2011); 11 SVAW (2015).

Recommendations for the practical use of participatory tools

The following guidelines should be followed to maximize the success of sessions using tools designed to encourage participatory approaches.

- **Practice.** Facilitators should practise with the tools before using them in real situations. This enables them to learn by doing and provides opportunities to think through practicalities and identify the materials facilitators will need to use the tools effectively.
- **Prepare.** Interventions are most likely to succeed with good preparation. Before facilitating a session using participatory tools it is important to identify the stakeholders/participants; have a clear outline of, and timeframe for, the session; have all materials (e.g. boards, markers, cards and tapes) needed to run the session; and plan for every conceivable eventuality, including potential problems.
- **Select.** Facilitators should take care that the selected tool is suitable for the purpose and context, for example using drawing rather than writing if some participants are illiterate. When women or certain other groups of people are reluctant to express themselves in front of men or more powerful people, separate the group or use tools that enable people to give their views anonymously (e.g. by writing cards). "Ice-breakers" (activities designed to relieve inhibitions or tension between people) or written group agreements can help in create a trusting atmosphere.
- **Explain.** Facilitators should explain the purpose of a tool and why it will be used before describing how it will proceed; the procedure should be clear and broken into manageable steps. Illustrating, demonstrating and practising the method will help make it understandable to participants.
- **Cross-check.** Facilitators should use several methods for the same purpose. This approach, known as "triangulation", provides a range of "lenses" for examining issues and helps verify outcomes.
- **Leave results with the group.** Facilitators should document the process with photos, but the detailed outcomes belong to the group, not the facilitator.

Further learning

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Credits

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