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COMMUNITY FORESTRY, MARKETS AND TRADE

SECRETARIAT NOTE

Definition of Community Forestry

1. Community Forestry (CF) is broadly defined as an approach to increase the role of local people in governing and managing both natural and planted forests. CF takes many forms. It includes collaborative management regimes, with partial or full devolution of management rights, practiced on public land that has some form of communal tenure or ownership and requires collective action. It also includes larger areas of smallholder tree plantations on leased public or private land. Throughout Asia and the Pacific, CF is considered an important modality to engage local communities and farmers in sustainable forest management, forest rehabilitation or plantation establishment. The discussion in this paper mainly focuses on CF practiced in natural and planted forests although much of the discussion may also be relevant to broader forms of community and smallholder forestry.

Current state of Community Forestry

2. While forms of community forestry have been practiced for hundreds of years, Community-based Forest Management in its current guise started in Asia and the Pacific in the 1980s. It took the form of local initiatives, mainly in response to community demands and concerns about forest degradation. Across 16 countries in the region for which data are available, a total of 185 million hectares of forest land are currently held under CF management regimes (based on RECOFTC, 2013 except for Australia (ABARES, 2013) and Mongolia (H. Ykhanbai, personal communication, 2015), accounting for 34 percent of total forest land in those countries. While many countries in the region have some type of CF regime, the various programmes and approaches are highly diverse. A common factor in most Asian countries is that most forests are legally under government control and CF regimes generally involve some form of devolution of responsibility. In Pacific island countries, customary ownership of forests is more common.

3. CF is currently at varying stages of development across the region, ranging from long-running and mature regimes in countries such as India, China, Nepal and the Philippines to relatively recent programmes in Bhutan and Mongolia. China has the greatest area of forest land under CF, equivalent to

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60 percent of the country's total forest land. In contrast, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand have 3 percent or less of their forest land held under CF regimes. The rate of increase in the proportion of the region's forest land held under CF regimes is modest, having grown from 31 to 34 percent between 2002 and 2012.

4. Many countries in the region, particularly in Southeast Asia, have set targets for the area of forest under CF (Table 1). Most face significant challenges in achieving these targets.

Table 1. Target area for Community Forestry, selected countries in the Asia-Pacific Region

Country	Target		Existing area of community forestry (2017) (ha)	% of target achieved
	Area (ha)	Year		
Cambodia	2 000 000	2029	460 000	23
Indonesia	12 700 000	2019	800 000	6
Myanmar	919 000	2030	160 000	17
Philippines	9 000 000	2008	6 350 000	70
Thailand	1 600 000	2025	480 000	30
Viet Nam	4 000 000	2020	1 130 000	28

Source: Asia-Pacific Forest Sector Outlook Study III.

Challenges facing Community Forestry

Insufficient and insecure forest land and resource tenure

5. A significant proportion (71 percent) of forests in the Asia-Pacific region is owned publicly. Within the region, public ownership accounts for 87 percent of forests in South Asia, 91 percent in Southeast Asia, 58 percent in East Asia, and 57 percent in Oceania. There are considerable differences within Oceania, with local communities in Pacific island countries owning, on average, 97 percent of forests (FAO FRA 2015).

6. Reform processes in various countries have triggered shifts in forest ownership and rights to tenure. The area of forest in the region under communal or collective ownership has increased since 1990, especially in East Asia and to some extent in Oceania. Despite the increase in the formal recognition of tenure of local communities and indigenous people, many indigenous peoples and local communities continue to face serious tenure-related problems. Rights to land are often denied due to the absence of evidence for formalizing claims. Moreover, formal recognition of tenure rights is often very slow. Consequently, many indigenous peoples continue decades-long struggles for rights and access to disputed lands and resources.

7. Limited or absence of recognition of formal ownership and unclear or insecure land and resource tenure of communities and indigenous people over forest land remains one of the key impediments to the adoption and expansion of CF in Asia, though more so in natural forests than in planted forests. A major challenge for policymakers in many countries in the region is to further improve the ways in which they deal with this complex and crucial issue.

Inadequate or inconsistent regulatory and policy frameworks

8. In addition to ownership and tenure issues mentioned above, many countries impose regulatory constraints favoring forest protection, especially in the case of natural forests. Many partial or complete logging bans have been imposed over the years – typically restricting the logging of natural forests in specified areas or across entire nations. The stated objectives in prohibiting timber harvesting have mostly been conservation-related. One of the hoped-for results of logging bans was to give forests a “rest” from overharvesting and to buy time for drafting better policies and regulations and improving forest law enforcement capacity. FAO assessments of logging bans over the years have revealed various unintended

consequences. In economic terms, logging bans have reduced the financial value of forests and often triggered further degradation and conversion.

9. These national policies have often affected community forestry. Even without logging bans, rights of forest-dependent people living in forests outside protected areas, have generally been limited to the collection of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) and rarely include the harvesting of timber beyond subsistence use. The incomplete delegation of rights and responsibilities due to an emphasis on forest protection, has in fact contributed to forest degradation.

10. The role of indigenous peoples and local communities in forest protection is recognized. Too often, CF user groups have been asked to protect or rehabilitate low quality/value forest, without ensuring adequate revenues or establishing equitable benefit sharing arrangements. A lack of livelihood benefits and minimal financial attractiveness of restrictive or protection focused CF models, however, have increased the attractiveness of other land uses and caused deforestation.

11. Some countries have recognized these issues and have improved their policy and legal frameworks in favour of commercial CF. Table 2 below illustrates how some countries have gone further by legalizing commercial timber extraction from CF established in natural forests.

Table 2: Legal provisions for CF and timber extraction in natural forests in selected countries

Country	Eligibility of CF in natural or primary forests	Provision of laws for timber harvesting from natural CFs
Nepal	Yes	Yes, and on-going commercial harvesting.
Myanmar	Yes, under Forest Law 2018.	Commercial timber harvesting from CF is being planned (new Community Forestry Instruction), which would apply to CF plantations and possibly also natural forests.
Lao PDR	Yes, under Forest Law 2007.	Natural timber harvest is allowed for household or public use, not for commercial purpose.
Cambodia	Yes, according to the 2006 community forestry guidelines (Prakas). Also allowed in Community Protected Areas (CPAs).	In CFs, the harvesting of natural timber species is not allowed. Commercial harvesting only for planted forests and plantation species. In CPAs, NTFP collection for daily use is allowed, but use of natural resources for commercial purposes is not allowed.
Viet Nam	Yes	Natural timber harvest is not allowed (focus more on Payments for Ecosystem Services). Harvesting only allowed in planted forests.
Indonesia	Yes, based on customary land tenure.	Community is allowed to harvest timber for commercial purposes.
Philippines	Yes	No timber can be harvested in natural forests under Executive Order No. 23 of 2011.

Source: Unpublished data from RECOFTC Country Programmes.

12. In general, in forests under community management, timber harvesting in planted forests is more straightforward than in natural forests. While there are usually sound environmental reasons for broad restrictions in natural forests, the possibilities and impact of reduced impact logging are also well known. The lack of consideration of an environmentally acceptable level of timber harvesting often compromises the effectiveness of CF programmes and regimes. Despite supportive government policies, implementation of economically attractive and equitable CF often remains problematic and regulatory and bureaucratic constraints on forest resource harvesting, transportation and enterprises registration remain common.

Insufficient support from government institutions, non-government organizations and private sector

13. Illegal logging, weak governance and complicated bureaucratic procedures for sustainably harvesting and marketing timber, are common problems across the region and are inhibiting the

development of CF. Similarly, the capacities of government organizations are often insufficient to provide the necessary institutional and technical support or backing required. If CF is to continue to advance and prosper then the role of governmental institutions needs to continue shifting from command-and-control to more facilitative and regulatory roles.

14. Communities often operate in isolation and lack support from strong social organizations and networks to advance CF and advocate on their behalf. The roles of collaborative institutions – including community forestry groups or federations, farmer unions and cooperatives – and of NGOs have proven to be essential to the success of CF and need to be fully recognized and encouraged.

15. Partnerships between CF groups and the private sector are often weak or non-existent. This is due to a variety of factors including remote or inaccessible locations of community forests, lack of capacity to provide stable supply of timber, or simply an absence of connection between communities and commercial entities. There are also cases where community groups are not prepared to work with private companies due to perceptions of imbalanced power relations. However, where a value chain approach linking CF groups to private operators can be developed, benefits such as value addition and profitability, investment, knowledge transfer and enhanced market access are likely to be achieved.

Internal challenges and limitations

16. CF initiatives tend to be subject to a variety of internal organizational problems. These often include limited access to relevant regulatory requirements, capital and/or technology for forest improvement, protection, harvesting and value addition, unfair distribution of labour and/or benefits among members, the capture of decision making by local elites or prominent groups within the community. The potential engagement of forest dependent communities is also increasingly affected by outward migration, especially of youth. Communities often face challenges to organize themselves effectively and lack the entrepreneurship skills and resources to invest in economically rewarding activities. These issues require CF groups to solicit external technical and financial support which, if discontinued before technical and managerial skills are internalized, put CF groups at risk of halting activities.

New opportunities for Community Forestry

17. If the above mentioned challenges can be addressed, there are many new opportunities for CF to increase or regain momentum and political support by:

- Scaling up CF as an integral part of countries' efforts to achieve sustainable forest management, SDGs, REDD+, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and other targets at the national level;
- Scaling up CF contributions to local and national economies by ensuring communities have access to more tangible benefits beyond subsistence, including opportunities for adding value and access to domestic and international markets for goods and services.

18. Growing domestic markets and increasing global demand for legal and sustainable timber offer opportunities for CF to significantly contribute to sustainable rural development. To fully realize this potential, unnecessary barriers to responsible timber production and trade need to be removed and access to institutional support and services improved.

19. For CF timber and wood products to access more demanding and rewarding markets, they will need to comply with National Timber Legality Assurance or Verification Systems or internationally recognized Voluntary Certification Systems (e.g. FSC and PEFC), which verify the legality of timber produced. However, significant challenges often exist for community forestry groups including the small scale of their enterprises, lack of knowledge and expertise to facilitate compliance with requirements, and lack of financing to gain the necessary accreditations. Legal compliance for CF timber could be facilitated by adapting and simplifying national legal frameworks to match local capacities and risks of illegal and unsustainable practices. Similarly, verification and certification systems could further simplify their associated procedures, promoting collaborative and group approaches and reducing the cost of

verification or certification. Doing so could help communities move beyond ‘informal’ timber harvest towards officially recognized timber production that yields significant economic benefits.

Points for consideration

20. The Commission is invited to share experiences and make recommendations to APFC members and FAO on the following:

- Challenges and opportunities to accelerate CF establishment and/or expansion, especially in non-degraded natural forest areas;
- Challenges and opportunities to facilitate and promote commercial timber production and trade by CF user groups and to ensure tangible benefits to local people;
- Changing roles and responsibilities of governments and other key stakeholders; and
- Programmes and activities that might be implemented, to enhance the establishment and/or expansion of CF and its contribution to rural development, SFM, SDGs, REDD+ and NDCs.