

Participatory forest management: the Jamaica Forestry Department experience

M. Headley

In a pilot programme, local forest management committees were organized to involve communities in the utilization and management of nearby forest reserve lands.



Trees and forests provide essential products and services at the local and national levels. This means that many people and interest groups have a stake in how forests are managed. Hence, one of the biggest challenges facing forest managers is how to incorporate the views and desires of diverse groups of forest users into forest management decisions. It has become widely accepted that participation of local people is a prerequisite for sustainable forest management and it is recognized that involvement in forest management must provide real benefits, based on local and national needs.

This article documents the Jamaica Forestry Department's attempt to engage local communities in participatory forest management. In 1999, the Jamaica Forestry Department launched a pilot programme to organize local forest management committees (LFMCs) as instruments through which communities would become involved in the utilization and management of nearby forest reserves. The article describes the pilot area; the enabling forest policy; the setting up of the committees; their roles and functions and those of the Forestry Department; and issues and challenges.

CONTEXT

The Trees for Tomorrow Project, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Government of Jamaica, was initiated in 1992 with the goal of increasing the capacity of the Jamaica Forestry Department to manage and conserve forests and tree crops for the sustainable benefit of the people of Jamaica.

For land use planning purposes, Jamaica is divided into 26 watershed management units (WMUs), each containing one or more watersheds. In the first phase of the project, the Buff Bay/

Pencar WMU was selected as the pilot area for developing a methodology for biophysical inventories, socio-economic and agroforestry baseline studies, mapping, forestry extension, and preparation and implementation of a local forest management plan, as well as for training Forestry Department personnel. The selection of the pilot area was based on evaluation of social, environmental and forest criteria for all of the WMUs in Jamaica.

Activities in the pilot area began in 1998, and the groundwork to establish a local forest management committee for the Buff Bay/Pencar WMU got under way in 1999.

PILOT AREA

The Buff Bay/Pencar WMU is located in the northeastern portion of Jamaica and encompasses 20 258 ha, rising from sea level to 1 600 m at Silver Hill Peak in the Blue Mountain range.

The population of the pilot area is estimated at 30 700. Most settlements are stretched along rivers and major roads. Farming is the main occupation of most households. However, families usually have more than one source of income. For example, marketing of farm products may be combined with wage labour, usually on large coffee farms.

Approximately one-third of the land in the Buff Bay/Pencar WMU is in agriculture. Perennial crops other than coffee are common features of farming systems in the watershed. Every farm grows a variety of fruit-trees such as mango, breadfruit, avocado pear and pimento, usually dispersed on the land or combined with coffee in a mixed agroforestry system.

Scattered but numerous timber trees are a feature of farm landscapes. These trees were not necessarily planted by the farmer but were left for shade or timber purposes when the land was cleared.

Where timber trees have been planted, mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*), West Indian cedar (*Cedrela odorata*) and blue mahoe (*Hibiscus elatus*) are the most common species.

Approximately 75 percent of the land in Buff Bay/Pencar WMU is privately owned, while the balance constitutes public lands. Forest reserves amount to 2 815 ha or just under 14 percent of the total watershed area.

LEGISLATION AND POLICY

Since the early 1990s the Jamaica Forestry Department, with the assistance of international agencies and the Government of Jamaica, has embarked on new paths for development. The Forest Act (Government of Jamaica, 1996) promulgates the appointment of “a forest management committee for the whole or any part of a forest reserve, forest management area or protected area” and lists the functions of such a committee:

- monitoring of the condition of natural resources in the committee’s area;
- holding of discussions, public meetings and the like about the state of the natural resources;
- advising the Conservator on matters relating to the development of the local forest management plan and the making of regulations;
- proposing incentives for conservation practices in the committee’s area;
- assisting in the design and execution of conservation projects in the area;
- any other functions as may be provided for, by or under the Forest Act.

The five-year National Forest Management and Conservation Plan, prepared by the Forestry Department and adopted by the national Cabinet in July 2001, proposes community participation as a key strategy in national forest management (Jamaica Forestry Department, 2001).

ESTABLISHMENT OF LOCAL FOREST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Groundwork

In 1999, two rural sociologists (one from the Trees for Tomorrow Project and one from the Forestry Department), two extensionists and Forestry Department field officers began an intensive programme of community outreach activities in the pilot area. It included presentations about forests and the environment, farmer training days, development of agroforestry demonstration plots and school programmes. The Forestry Department’s private planting programme, which provides free timber tree seedlings and technical advice as incentives to landowners and farmers to plant trees on their property, was the central component of the outreach programme.

Initial stages

The favourable reception by Buff Bay/Pencar communities to the Forestry Department’s programme of activities was a key factor in the decision to begin developing a participatory forest management process with local communities in 2000. The work was guided by an internal position paper (Jamaica Forestry Department, 2000), prepared following discussions with national and parish-level agencies and organizations, feedback received by the Forestry Department field staff from area residents and farmers, and guidelines provided in the Forest Act, 1996.

Since the Buff Bay and the Pencar valleys of the watershed are geographically separate, the position paper proposed that separate committees be formed for each subwatershed. Issues identified for discussion included:

- the role of the LFMC;
- the role of the Forestry Department;
- the institutional status of the committee;

- committee membership;
- functions of the LFMC;
- administration and organization;
- funding of the LFMC.

The Forestry Department held its first discussions with potential LFMC members in the Buff Bay and Pencar areas at separate meetings in September 2000. At both meetings, individuals and representatives from local organizations expressed considerable interest in being involved. Thus the establishment of an LFMC was endorsed for each subwatershed. A joint meeting of stakeholders from the two areas, to which government agencies with an interest in watershed management were also invited, was held in October 2000. At the second meetings of the two committees in November 2000, officers were elected and rules of procedure were established. The LFMCs were officially launched at a joint meeting on 1 December 2000.

Membership and organization

The Forestry Department’s position paper on the establishment of LFMCs proposed that there be no limit on the number of persons serving on the committees and that membership be open to all community groups, organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private-sector entities present in the Buff Bay and Pencar subwatersheds. At the initial meetings, the groups decided on a structure similar to that of other community-based organizations with which they were familiar. The Forestry Department’s legal officer prepared draft constitutions which LFMC members reviewed, finalized and adopted during meetings in early 2001.

The position paper also proposed that, in the early stages, the Forestry Department serve as the secretariat for the committees and provide the necessary technical advice and support to assist the committees in their functions.

DEVELOPMENTS TO DATE

Role and functions of the LFMCs

Since their establishment the Buff Bay and Pencar LFMCs have held regular bimonthly meetings and joint meetings every six months. Membership in the LFMCs remains relatively stable although meeting attendance fluctuates. A recent review of Jamaica's experience with LFMCs (Geoghegan and Bennett, 2002) noted that the meetings have demonstrated the interest of local people in obtaining harvesting licences for timber in the forest reserves, participating in reforestation and serving as honorary forest wardens. Local people and Forestry Department field staff have noted the effectiveness of the Forestry Department's private planting programme in increasing local environmental awareness and benefiting farmers. The Forestry Department also recognizes the private planting programme as an incentive for promoting further involvement in

forest-related activities and local forest management.

Input by the LFMCs into local forest management is primarily through the forest management plan for the watershed. The two most important roles initially proposed for the LFMCs were to provide assistance relating to the development of such a plan and to monitor its implementation.

Production of the forest management plan for the Buff Bay/Pencar WMU took longer than expected because of the large number of data analyses required. A draft was completed and presented to LFMC members at a joint meeting in February 2002. As this draft was found to be too technical for most non-foresters, the Forestry Department decided to prepare a simplified or "popular" version of the plan to facilitate participation by LFMC members in its implementation.

In the absence of a local forest management plan, there was concern that

the LFMCs required a specific focus to keep them together and active. Therefore the Forestry Department and the LFMCs have looked at ways for local communities to benefit directly from their involvement in forest management. As a result, the Pencar LFMC established a plant nursery on land leased to it by the Forestry Department. The Forestry Department field staff helped the Pencar LFMC put together a project proposal which was successful in attracting funding for nursery construction from the CIDA-sponsored Enhancing Civil Society Project.

Another example is a proposal by members of the Buff Bay LFMC to use the Lancaster Forest Reserve in the Buff Bay watershed for ecotourism. Aiming to serve both local and overseas visitors, the LFMC proposes to build trails for hiking and to rehabilitate a forest building for use as a picnic shelter. Financial assistance is being requested



The Forestry Department's private planting programme provides technical advice to encourage farmers to plant trees on their property; here a forester demonstrates the use of an A-frame to lay out planting on slopes

from donor agencies as well as local funding agencies.

Role of the Jamaica Forestry Department

Working with communities has not been a part of traditional forestry activities in Jamaica and foresters were not trained in this practice. The pilot work in the Buff Bay/Pencar watershed, beginning with community outreach activities and leading to the establishment of the LFMCs, has contributed to the development of a core group of Forestry Department staff who are highly committed to participatory approaches. In addition, with the success of the extension programme and the LFMC initiative, most senior staff have come to accept the need for more participatory approaches.

As noted by Geoghegan and Bennett (2002), there was no local demand for the establishment of LFMCs. These were conceived as one of several strategies to support the implementation of the National Forest Management and Conservation Plan and were proposed to local stakeholders as a Forestry Department initiative. The department stimulated community interest in participation in a local forest management committee by developing outreach activities that reflected issues raised by local people during community meetings with the Forestry Department. For example, farmers in the pilot area were aware of soil loss from heavy rain; communities in the upper parts of the watershed had suffered the consequences of landslides; and some communities were concerned about the quantity and quality of water available at certain times of the year. As general mistrust of government is common, particularly in rural Jamaica, it is an indication of the success of the extension programme that despite the somewhat uncertain role of the LFMC,

Blue mahoe (Hibiscus elatus) is among the most common timber species planted; here a forest officer inspects a newly planted H. elatus seedling



JAMAICA FORESTRY DEPARTMENT

people wanted to cooperate with the Forestry Department in developing a local forest management process.

The Forestry Department remains the active force in the functioning of the LFMCs. There has been some decline in attendance at LFMC meetings since their official launch more than 18 months ago. The lack of a focus for the LFMCs, with the Local Forest Management Plan incomplete, or of a clear definition of the role of the LFMCs in the implementation of that plan are seen as contributing factors to the declining interest. At this time, mutual trust between LFMC members and Forestry Department field officers must be relied on to ensure that the Forestry

Department considers the expressed wishes and opinions of communities with respect to how local forests are managed and utilized.

The Forestry Department recognizes and acknowledges that in return for “the participation and cooperation of communities”, the communities “will be able to derive sustainable economic and environmental benefits from planned forest use” (Jamaica Forestry Department, 2000). LFMC members have indicated that in addition to the watershed protection benefits of “planned forest use” they are also interested in direct economic benefits such as those provided by timber harvesting, particularly in the pine plantations.



*Young students participate in a demonstration on planting khus khus grass (*vetiveria zizanioides*) for slope stabilization – an example of community outreach activities in the pilot area*

In a school programme organized by the Jamaica Forestry Department, these schoolchildren set up a compost system on their school grounds

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The establishment of the Buff Bay and Pencar LFMCs carried a high cost. In the four months leading to the official launch, the sensitization and awareness programme included attendance at more than 80 community and group meetings. People's willingness to listen was a direct result of the groundwork laid during the Forestry Department's outreach activities in 1999 and 2000. The heavy investment in personnel time, travel costs and other expenses was supported through the Trees for Tomorrow Project as part of the overall activities being implemented in the Buff Bay/Pencar pilot area. The experience has shown the Forestry Department that trust building and overcoming scepticism of government is essential to developing working partnerships with communities.

It has been proposed to establish LFMCs in other parts of the country. However, given budget constraints, it will be a challenge for the Forestry



Department to duplicate the success of the Buff Bay and Pencar LFMCs.

In the short term, the delay in finalizing and implementing the Buff Bay/Pencar Forest Management Plan has left the LFMCs without a clear focus for their

meetings. In the long term, sustaining the interest of LFMC members will be an ongoing concern. The absence of a strong basis for group action means that the Forestry Department will probably have to continue acting as a catalyst to

bring together people and organizations to address the forest agenda. The Pencar nursery project and the proposed Buff Bay ecotourism venture are encouraging first steps in developing economic opportunities based on the forest resource, and the Forestry Department will be exploring with the LFMCs the modalities for the sustainable harvesting of existing pine plantations to maximize retention of economic benefits within the watershed.

Recent experiences have shown the difficulty in achieving a balance in the relationship between the Forestry Department and groups it has involved in the participatory LFMC process. The Forestry Department's success in facilitating the functioning of the LFMCs appears to have inadvertently raised expectations that the Forestry Department will take the lead in all aspects of LFMC business, regardless of whether forest activities are involved. Given the disparity in organizational strength between the two groups, this expectation is not surprising and highlights the need to establish clearly, early in the relationship, the responsibilities and obligations of the "facilitator" and the community.

National-level policies may affect the future of LFMCs. Over the past few years a policy shift by government to a more participatory approach to development planning has focused attention on strengthening parish-level governments by establishing Parish Development Committees. LFMCs support this process, but questions have been raised as to whether the efforts of the Parish Development Committees will duplicate those of the LFMCs. There is a need to ensure the complementarity of the two. The future of LFMCs will also be influenced by the watershed policy, currently in draft, which proposes that local watershed management committees be established in all the WMUs. The

broader mandate of these committees would subsume the forest reserve lands that are the focus of the LFMCs.

Financial and administrative sustainability is an ever present issue as the Buff Bay and Pencar LFMCs struggle to establish themselves as viable, effective and representational organizations. While the government increasingly advocates the participatory management approach, financial support for local stakeholder involvement in planning and decision-making processes remains the purview of externally funded development projects. The Forestry Department does not have an "extension" budget, and given the annual budget cuts, the existence of the LFMCs is uncertain following the end of the Trees for Tomorrow Project in 2004.

CONCLUSION

Although the elucidation of a defining role for the Buff Bay/Pencar LFMCs is far from complete and issues of sustainability are unresolved, the experience of the Jamaica Forestry Department with participatory management has been positive and the Forestry Department is committed to the process. The response of local people to the Forestry Department's activities in the Buff Bay/Pencar watershed has shown that working with communities can work. The Forestry Department has succeeded in getting communities to trust a government agency – unprecedented in Jamaica – and the foresters are dedicated to interacting with the rural communities in and around the forests. Although funds are short, the Forestry Department is constantly looking for innovative ways to accomplish its work, including sharing resources with other projects funded by other donors in Jamaica.

The emergence of clearly quantifiable benefits lies some time ahead, but future initiatives with communities in

the watershed are likely to benefit from the relationships built up through the establishment of LFMCs. ♦



Bibliography

- Geoghegan, T. & Bennett, N.** 2002. *Risking change: experimenting with local forest management committees in Jamaica*. CANARI Technical Report No. 308. Laventille, Trinidad and Tobago, Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI).
- Government of Jamaica.** 1996. *The Forest Act*. Kingston, Jamaica, Jamaica Printing Services Ltd.
- Jamaica Forestry Department.** 2000. *Formation of a local forest management committee for the Buff Bay/Pencar areas*. Position paper. Kingston, Jamaica.
- Jamaica Forestry Department.** 2001. *National Forest Management and Conservation Plan*. Kingston, Jamaica. ♦

Differing views of forestry – a call for innovative management



Extracted from the paper "Community-company partnerships and sustainable forest management: co-existence of Atikamekw and industrial ways of managing the forest", by Stephen Wyatt (Université Laval, Quebec, Canada), presented at the XII World Forestry Congress.

Partnerships between communities and the forest industry can offer advantages for both, but the expectations and the objectives of the partners are often different. Each may have its own way of viewing and understanding the forest landscape, and each may have developed its own systems for managing the utilization of forest resources.

An example comes from Wemotaci, an indigenous community of about 1 200 people in central Quebec, Canada, surrounded by forests and located over 100 km from the closest town. The forests are the traditional lands of the Atikamekw, who led a semi-nomadic life based on hunting and trapping until the early part of the twentieth century. Since the 1700s the Atikamekw have adapted their lifestyle to outside influences such as the fur trade, missionaries, a railway, hydro-electric development and the forest industry. In 1986 the Atikamekw established a forestry company to undertake contract work for larger forest industry companies and in 2000 entered a partnership to build a sawmill in their community. Forestry continues to be predominant in the regional economy.

Terms from the Atikamekw language, which is still in everyday use at Wemotaci, reveal the Atikamekw view of living in forests. *Aski* denotes "Mother Earth", including all components of the biosphere (living, non-living and human). The forest or the territory is *notcimik*, again including the whole forest ecosystem, but also signifying "the place that I come from". *Tipahiskan* is a system of management incorporating land divisions, knowledge and mechanisms for consultation and control. *Nehirowisw* denotes autonomy; it is used to describe either a person who has the knowledge and skills necessary to live on *notcimik* or the Atikamekw nation being responsible for itself. These are characteristics of the current Atikamekw use of the territory. The Atikamekw accept timber harvesting as a way of using *notcimik* and of being *nehirowisw*. However, they expect that it be done in ways that are respectful of *aski* (such as maintaining the

diversity of the forest ecosystem) and of *tipahiskan*. The Atikamekw also expect their role and their traditions to be recognized in forest management.

Industry's view of forestry is based on the scientific management of the forest, principally to provide a sustainable supply of wood fibre. In Quebec, resource planning is sector-based and forestry planning is distinct from planning for management of fauna, water or recreation. The forestry companies in the Wemotaci area use state-of-the-art technology in forest inventory, stand modelling, mapping and planning to optimize the efficiency of their harvesting and silvicultural operations. They operate in a competitive economic environment that emphasizes optimizing production while minimizing operating costs, and they need to harvest the full volume of timber allocated to them in accordance with government calculations of maximum sustainable yield. Planning for the protection of other values, including Atikamekw practices, is generally treated as a constraint to commercial exploitation of the forest.

Through their partnerships, the Atikamekw and the forest industry are trying to find a middle ground. Forestry companies are assisting Atikamekw participation in the industry, providing employment and economic benefits, while ensuring continued access to timber. New consultation processes enable the inclusion of Atikamekw concerns and traditional knowledge in forest planning, but stop short of providing a role in management decision-making. This experience shows some of the benefits of partnerships, but also illustrates the differences that occur in cross-cultural partnerships. If such partnerships are to lead to sustainable forestry, then it will be necessary to develop innovative approaches to management that can respond simultaneously to different ways of understanding forests.