

Business incubation exchange visit with Forest and Farm Producer Organizations (FFPOs)

17 – 19 November 2017, Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar



Introduction to the exchange visit

The exchange took place in Kachin state in the North East of Myanmar. The focus was on business incubation. Participants from ten Asian countries including the three FFF partner countries of Myanmar, Nepal and Vietnam (57 people from 10 countries in total). The intention was to show how local NGO groups are working to establish community forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs) and develop viable business ideas in Myanmar and to share their own experiences.

Visit to Wuyan Community Forest

Participants arrived in MyitKyina on 17th November 2017 and had an evening introductory session on the context in Kachin. Early on the 18th November, participants travelled to Wuyan, one of 60 CF areas in Waing Maw township (of which 25 have been registered by government).

A walk to the forest itself highlighted the impressive scale of voluntary activity to establish 800ha of community forest by the 260 households involved. A full description of the forest area established and the species involved is found elsewhere (Springate-Baginski and Than, 2011). A mountain which had been heavily degraded in 2006 and sits in the centre of a low plain of rice paddy, was now completely forest-clad. A taungya agroforestry area (120 ha) of fast growing firewood species had been planted around the edge of the forest – mixed in with naturally occurring (or older historic plantings) of bamboo – present in extensive quantity. The firewood species (*Cassia siamea* and *Gliricidia sepium*) had already been cut regularly and was coppicing vigorously. A coppice management system for firewood was clearly well established.

Further up the mountainside there were plantations of several mixed local hardwood species (*Gmelina arborea*, *Chukraria tabularis*, *Cedrela multijuga*, *Amoora wallichii* and even Agar wood *Aquilaria molaccensis* etc.) planted from 2006 onwards, but with most planting seeming to have occurred between 2006 and 2009. Some teak (*Tectona grandis*) and Ironwood (*Xylia dolabriformis*) was mixed into these planted areas, although in places it was being overgrown by some of the faster species. The faster growing of the species mix that had been planted in 2006-2008 were now 20+cm dbh. All planting was done by individual households. It seemed that individual households had planted using slightly different mixtures of species both between households and between years (e.g. some single species teak had been planted later on as confidence about the community forestry title grew).

Visit to rattan processing centre

Participants were shown harvested rattan stores, rattan processing machines and rattan weaving within a small factory in Waing Maw township. The La Myang Community Forest Rattan and Bamboo group was established in 2014. Discussions between members of Shalom and Pyoe Pin, the Kachin Forest Users Association and the Myanmar Bamboo and Rattan Association led to early plans to establish a rattan splitting and weaving business in La Myang community. Two master weavers were sent by the Classic Home Craft business to train 285 members in 7 communities in how to weave rattan. In addition, two splitting machines were introduced to allow semi-processing of rattan prior to shipment to Yangon and connected first to a generator and later to mains electricity. A rattan store was built that can accommodate up to 30 tonnes of raw material. There are essentially four component elements to the rattan business, and the Wing Maw communities are now involved in the first three:

- Harvesting of raw material

For this business, only one La Myang community forest has considerable stocks of both water cane and red cane and is harvesting about 10-20 tonnes this year. Each forest user group member has rights over an area of 5-10 acres of cane and accrues profit individually during the harvesting and sale of cane to the business. Each of the other forest user groups is currently considering how to enrichment plant red cane within their community forest area – with some already well established in that practice. The rest of the raw material for the business is currently bought from local rattan traders.

- Primary processing (skinning, splitting, and grading)

The La Myang business has now purchased two splitting machines which can convert hand-peeled rattan cane into split rattan for use by weavers. Each piece of rattan is purchased for approximately 80 Kyat and can be sold peeled and split for 160-180 Kyat (with a processing cost of approximately 20 Kyat per piece). It is quickly apparent that this part of the business is relatively lucrative, and has been the main source of income for the La Myang Rattan business to date.

- Secondary processing (weaving)

By 2015, two master weavers had been brought to Kachin to train members of the 7 FUGs in contemporary rattan weaving designs and techniques. Early on in 2015, the rate at which newly trained weavers could produce pieces was not yet sufficiently fast to make the work economically attractive, but the communities gradually seem to be more competitive in this area.

- Distribution (retail and export)

At present the main market for products are both to Myanmar Bamboo and Rattan Association and locally where some sales exist.

Discussions at the Waing Maw Township community sawmill site.

With help of KCWG and ECODEV the community have established a sawmill base (not yet functioning). They have a management plan in which the 60 Waing Maw township Community Forest User Groups have elected 11 management committee representatives for running the enterprise.

A group discussion was held to allow participants to discuss what they had seen so far. General support was offered by several participants for what Kachin CFUGs were trying to achieve. They emphasised the importance of building recognition of the growing numbers of CFUGs. Questions were raised over gender and the inclusion of women in the CFUGs and how they benefit (equity of posts and distribution of income). It was explained that membership is a fairly equal split, but that there are cultural division of roles with NTFPs preserve of women and heavy harvesting of timber falling to men – but women can do both if necessary. Questions were also posed over value chain research for timber products and the capacity to manage the sawmill and how benefit sharing would work. Members explained that they had been receiving support from the Myanmar Timber Merchants Association. Further questions looked at how road infrastructure and extraction equipment might need to be improved to reduce harvesting costs.

Visit to the source of the Irrawaddy

Early on the 19th November, and to ensure participants had a broader understanding of the Kachin environment, participants were invited to see the source of the Irrawaddy river where informal discussions continued on a boat trip.

Discussions with CSO members of the Kachin Conservation Working Group (KCWG)

A discussion meeting had been organised with 9 Members of the KCWG: Anglican Church Development Department, ALARM, Karuma Mission School Solidarity, Kachina Relief and Development Committee, Myitkyina Kachin Baptist Association, Uak Thon, Shalom Foundation, and Namkyeo Oarahita Foundation. The vision of the KCWG was to protect and strengthen the ethnic groups knowledge and natural resource management and to raise their livelihood activities and promote their accountabilities. They had four main thematic areas of work

- Representation (Tree plantation, plastic campaign, Coordination and networking)
- Rural Development (livelihoods, microcredit and CFEs)
- Rights defended (FLEGT, EITI, Environment Report Card)
- Resources and Governance (CF establishment, community patrolling, consultation, advocacy, ecotourism)

The KCWG members had variably been supporting CF registration, management plans, with the establishment of nurseries and with some financial support for business development. They had a wide range of support activities spanning seedling and nursery development, vegetative propagation, production of organic fertiliser, forest protection through weeding and fireline construction, area delimitation and boundary pillars, plantation of both timber trees and crops such as pepper, dragon fruit, traditional medicines and vegetables, carpentry and craft business development.

One FFPO example was shared of the Tsit Tsawn Association of 15 CFUGs described their bamboo chopstick factory which had needed capital investment of around 4,000,000 Kyat (roughly US\$ 4000) which is being collected from community members to ensure ownership – with a benefit sharing mechanism also in place including for factory maintenance, industrial expansion, and for community development. Training is being given for bamboo cultivation and maintenance. Success has been seen in 15-20 recently certified community forests and the emergence of community forest enterprises. KCWG does also coordinate with the Kachin Farmers Union (KFU) – but do not formally include them in their membership. They have a plan to have a policy review on Vacant and Fallow Land law with the KFU.

In the subsequent discussions it was asked how marginalised persons are they being represented in the policy process? The answer was that during the process of revising the Community Forest Instructions they had both participated and felt their voice had been recognised in the new policy. For Vacant and Fallow Land law revision they are trying to have their voices heard.

In responding to a question on their reach and coordination they noted their regular KCWG coordination meetings. Members divide up townships and villages to work with. There is good information flow. They noted their efforts to work with government by involving government representatives in training and having regular meetings.

Evaluation of the Kachin element of the exchange visit

WHAT WE LIKED (COMMENTS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRY TEAMS)

- Communities in Myanmar grow trees and manage their own trees – and benefit from their own trees (Cambodia)
- There is cooperation between communities and the Forest Department (FD) in registration of community forests (policy support) (Cambodia)
- Role of civil society organisations (CSO) in supporting community forestry (CF) is very strong in Myanmar (Vietnam)
- The community forestry model is a good example for Vietnam
- We have learned from other community forest user groups in other parts of Myanmar and how it can look like for them in future (Myanmar)
- We liked the step wise CF and CFE establishment process (Nepal)
- Appreciate the collaboration between FD-CSO-CF (Indonesia)
- The community forest certificate is facilitated by the Forest Department (India)
- The exchange visit in its entirety (Philippines)
- Livelihood development from community forestry (Bangladesh)
- Allocation of land to communities and coordination of individual household members who take responsibility for harvesting in their own patch (Lao)

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED (COMMENTS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRY TEAMS)

1. We would have liked more detail on the rattan factory - information on processing and actual link to the market (Cambodia)
2. Background info (contact details) on the site visit and in the CSO discussion (Vietnam, Philippines, Lao)
3. We wanted to see 2-3 more areas of CF to see differences and get more information on the approaches they were using (Myanmar, Philippines)
4. We wanted to see a stronger role of women in decision making processes (Myanmar)
5. We wanted to see the production of multiple agricultural products (agroforestry) from forest areas giving a wider diversity of income/produce (Indonesia)
6. More exposure to the progress from multiple country programs to learn and interact (India)
7. More opportunity to question the sustainability or rattan in CFE development (Philippines)
8. More interaction with local people (Philippines)
9. Need more clarity required on what happens to tenure rights in Myanmar after 30 year CF lease finishes (Philippines)
10. We could perhaps have broken up in smaller groups to engage more with CF, more discussions for country groups and how to use this new learning from the exchange visit, is there a plan? (Bangladesh)
11. We need to set up a social media group – to keep learning and sharing #FFPOASIA2017 for both FB and Twitter (AFA), and Duncan will make you a Facebook Forest Connect member if you search and apply