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Dialectics for the promotion of community forestry in Africa from the top and from the grassroots: actual situation and prospects

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SUMMARY

The endeavour to promote community forestry both from the top and from the grassroots in Africa south of the Sahara involves both finished and unfinished tasks. At various levels, important hurdles have been overcome; others have yet to be overcome. Among the achievements, particular mention should be made of the development of initiatives in traditional and conventional forestry, and the increase and diversification of stakeholders in community forestry networks. Nearly everywhere in Africa south of the Sahara, community forestry is recognized as an effective strategy in the sustainable management of natural resources and the promotion of local development. However, this development is taking place with some difficulty in a setting marked by political, legal, institutional and operational red tape. The future of community forestry hinges on the blossoming and consolidation of a community forestry culture.



Introduction

Community forestry raises the problem of participatory development. Indeed, as pointed out by Jean Bouvin, "participatory development is not a 'stop-gap' measure, but a learning process which requires time, resources, imagination and at times courage to be put in place. It implies a change of attitude by many stakeholders, questions old habits and often reveals conflicting interests resulting from the need to share power. The innovative feature of participatory development ... resides in a new vision of development, organized with the population in mind, and replacing regimented procedures by strategies based on common learning and on negotiation" (Schneider and Libercier, 1995).

At what stage is community forestry in Africa south of the Sahara today? Beyond the differences in approach and strategies, national and subregional specificities, what can be said about developments in community forestry? What are the stakes, achievements and challenges? What has already been done and what still needs to be done about it? What impact does it have? How can the achievements be valorized, consolidated and made permanent? How can the constraints on the development of community forestry be mastered? What institutional and operational strategies need to be put in place for the promotion of community forestry in Africa south of the Sahara? How may its future be envisaged?

Far from satisfying a rather persistent current trend, that is, the trend of balance sheets and prospects, the foregoing concerns pose a double challenge: the challenge to reflection and the challenge to action. There is a need for reflection on recent developments in community forestry, its challenges, inadequacies and its effectiveness as a strategy for the sustainable and beneficial management of natural resources. There is a need for action directed towards rendering it concretely operational in space and time.

It should be recognized that Africa south of the Sahara is not a homogeneous entity. The realities are not identical from one country to the next. Thus, despite the many traits common to the countries in the process of development of community forestry, analyses should not be generalized. It is in this light that the present contribution has been made. It does not seek to assess in an exhaus-

tive manner the global process of development of community forestry in Africa south of the Sahara. Neither does it seek to exhaust the topical issues on this theme. It starts with a few structural, institutional and operational landmarks to generate and highlight exchanges between stakeholders in the community forestry sector, and, in particular, to challenge their current practices and inspire their future policies and programmes.

The meaning and challenges of community forestry

What definition can be given to community forestry within the actual context of Africa south of the Sahara? What challenges does it pose?

A definition of community forestry: multiple dimensions of a recurring problem

In the conventional view, community forestry appeared in the 1970s, following the oil crisis and the drought that highlighted the rural population's dependence on fuelwood and other wood products. At that time, FAO defined community forestry as an activity concerned with "all situations in which the local population is closely linked to the forestry activity. These varying situations include the creation of wooded plots in regions where there are no trees or other forest products to satisfy local needs; to the traditional activities of forest communities through the cultivation of trees on agricultural plantations for commercial purposes and the processing of forest products at the family, handicraft or cottage industry level" (FAO, 1978).

Such a restrictive approach, centred on the use of wood resources by rural communities to satisfy their needs, has evolved as a result of increased knowledge and the diversification and intensification of studies and research. A new and more encompassing approach to community forestry defines it as all the collective or individual activities and practices centred on trees and forests and carried out by local communities for the sustainable satisfaction of their wants. Any action relating to the rational and beneficial use of natural resources

(water, soils, flora, vegetation, fauna), designed and implemented by the population with the ultimate aim of sustainable development, falls under community forestry. It is founded on the empowerment of the rural communities in the management of natural resources with a view to satisfying their wants and promoting local development.

As a strategy in the sustainable and beneficial management of natural resources and the promotion of sustainable rural development, community forestry: supports the local communities in the control, management and use of forests and trees; explores the social, economic and cultural links existing between the local communities and the forests and prioritizes a participatory and decentralized approach to forest management; and acknowledges that the local population that thrives on and in the forest is better suited to manage it. In short, community forestry valorizes the dynamics of joint management and local self-management of the natural resources formally recognized by the policies and laws that integrate the forest management process, social considerations and issues of sustainability.

Considered in this light, and despite its fairly recent formal recognition in the forestry policies and laws of Africa south of the Sahara, community forestry is an established reality that is well known and lived by the communities at the grassroots level. How can its riches be determined within the actual context of forestry development in the region?

The diversity and complex nature of the riches and challenges of community forestry in Africa south of the Sahara

Community forestry is a topical issue. In nearly all the African states south of the Sahara it is the subject of the day. It is at the heart of the problems facing rural development. It brings together all the stakeholders in the management of natural resources. This does not mean that it is a new miracle solution to poor development and generalized poverty, but it is simply, within the current socio-political and economic context, an opportunity for political, economic, social and cultural change. It offers remarkable possibilities for the dismantling of forestry States, that is, those States which master and control all the processes, circuits and networks of natural resource

management and limit the participation of the population in forest management. It also offers the possibility of reshaping relations between the stakeholders in forest management (including States, business communities, local populations, non-governmental organizations [NGOs], and farmers' associations). Above all, it offers the possibility of initiating new institutional and operational dynamics of natural resource management.

The riches and opportunities of community forestry

In a fundamental way, community forestry is an alternative to the classic, authoritarian and centralist policies of natural resource management. Obviously, the forestry policies laid down in the colonial era and greatly strengthened at the dawn of independence produced only limited results. Today, community forestry shows that development in the area of forestry management is possible only if engineered by the communities, that is, those local stakeholders who have the tradition of the rational and beneficial management of natural resources. It asserts itself as an efficient opportunity for the alternative management of conflicts linked to natural resources, an appropriate means for the sustainable management of natural resources, and a tool for the decentralized management of natural resources and for the promotion of local development.

Community forestry, an effective opportunity for the alternative management of conflicts linked to natural resource management

An analysis of the 'four Rs' (rights, responsibilities, revenues and relationships) and a regional study carried out by FAO's Forests, Trees and People Programme (FTPP) between 1994 and 1999 made it possible to assemble the fundamental causes of conflicts linked to the management of natural resources under four major points:

- 1 the problem of integrating customary norms and practices in modern policies and laws;
- 2 the problem of the sharing of revenues derived from the exploitation of natural resources;
- 3 the problem of allocating roles and responsibilities among the stakeholders in the management of natural resources, and that of the weak capacities for action in some communities; and
- 4 faulty and conflicting relations among stakeholders in the field.

Community forestry, which develops the principles and measures involving and empowering all the stakeholders, could contribute to solving these problems differently and effectively. Through its participatory approach, it brings together and confronts the protagonists of conflicts and contributes to forums for consultation, dialogue, negotiation and partnership between the stakeholders of natural resource management. It pays particular attention to problems of minorities and other underprivileged classes, and takes into account cultural realities (the local expertise and practices of the grassroots communities), valorizes them and integrates them in the official policies and strategies.

Community forestry: an appropriate means for the rational and sustainable management of natural resources

Community forestry does not maintain that the State is the absolute, omnipotent and unchallenged master over natural resources. It empowers local communities, which consequently cease to abuse the natural resources and invest meaningfully in their conservation and protection. It permits the reconciliation of the exploitation industry with that of conservation. In fact, the target is not to limit the process of natural resource exploitation at all costs, but rather to exploit the resources and to conserve their ecological, social and cultural value.

Community forestry: a tool for decentralized natural resource management and for the promotion of local development

It is one of the appropriate means for raising awareness, dynamizing, monitoring and achieving the process of decentralization of natural resource management. It aims at promoting the transfer of skills in natural resource management from the State and local and

regional authorities to the population at the grassroots, and at promoting the access of the population to the benefits from the exploitation of natural resources. The traditional and modern features of community forestry make it a tool for building up and promoting local development. Its activities contribute to improving the living conditions of the rural population, reducing rural poverty and increasing the communities' organizational and operational capacities.

Issues surrounding community forestry

The issues surrounding community forestry are linked to the global issue of natural resource management. They are of a political, economic, social and cultural nature.

Political issues

Community forestry hinges on enhancing the role played by local communities and by the forest-adjacent population in the management of forest resources both at the decision-making level and at the level of definition of development policies, laws, projects and programmes. It raises the issue of power sharing, the legitimacy of entitlement to the natural resources and the transformation of relations between the states and the local communities in their management. There is need to create room for expression and decision by the local communities on the management of local natural resources, and to permit them to have a say in the process. All evidence points to the fact that the genuine participation of the local population in the planning and implementation of forestry activities requires a change in the manner in which decision-makers view relations between the local community and the natural resources. It requires a change of power structures. How can this be achieved concretely? Will forestry services agree to relinquish the prerogatives and roles that enshrine their power in the management of natural resources? Regardless of the clear intention of involving the local population in the management of natural resources, have they not maintained the same place in the process of natural resource management, and maintained *ipso facto* the pre-eminence of the State in this sector? Indeed, how far have they gone in the empowerment of local communities? Have they been able to acknowledge the legitimate entitlement of the local population to the natural resources? How can the varied and diverse interests of the stakeholders in community forestry be reconciled and managed?



Economic issues

The exploitation of natural resources brings many and diverse riches to all the stakeholders in the sector. They are both a vital resource and a source of income. For the population, they are their main breadbasket. It is in the forest and from forest exploitation that forest people, for example, draw an essential part of their food and commercial resources. The economic production activities carried out derive from forest exploitation, such as hunting, harvesting, fishing and farming. The economic importance of forests is felt even more by traditional healers, who use many plant species for various treatments. For them, as for the entire population, forest exploitation brings in revenue.

Besides the population, which exploits natural resources simply for local economic production reasons, there are the State and economic operators for whom these resources at present constitute the main source of revenue. In Cameroon the public authorities, faced with a prevailing crisis, falling oil revenue and lower coffee and cocoa prices, have turned to forest exploitation. In a 1990 letter addressed to the Minister of Agriculture, the President of the Republic prescribed forest exploitation as one of the solutions to the economic crisis. He wrote: "Faced with the worsening climate which for some time now has affected the world prices of our major basic commodities, forest exploitation seems to be one potential source of foreign exchange likely to sustain our efforts to relaunch the economy The Cameroonian forest offers enormous insufficiently exploited prospects owing to a certain number of constraints which prevent it from playing the full role that the State by right expects from this activity ..., which is rightly considered as an important reserve for progress." Thus, since the beginning of the 1990s, forests have become one of the main sources of funding of the State budget of Cameroon. In order to understand the sudden importance given to forests as one of the solutions to the liquidity problem, we must look at the statistics. During 1993/94 alone, timber represented 34 percent of Cameroon's exports, as compared with 27 percent in 1992/93 and 23 percent in 1991/92. Today, it is estimated that more than US\$190

million is collected as revenue from timber exploitation. For a country with an annual budget of about 1 billion CFA francs, this is a big amount, representing approximately one-tenth of the State budget.

Economic operators are those who seem to benefit most from forest exploitation, notably from industrial forest exploitation. In the 1980s, as noted by Adolphe Obam, the total surface area granted for forest exploitation stood at about 8 million ha for a total of 97 forest exploitation licences. Of the 8 million ha thus granted, companies actually managed by nationals accounted for a mere 13.25 percent, representing 34 exploitation licences, whereas foreigners/expatriates took the lion's share, with 72 percent, or 56 licences. State corporations took 14.5 percent of the market. Today, 15 years later, these numbers have largely increased. Cameroon has become a true forestry workshop. On nearly all roads, timber trucks go up and down, day and night, despite the limitation on the export of logs decided by the National Assembly and enacted by the government. It is said that there are more than 112 approved active forest exploiters, both nationals and expatriates. Business in this sector is thriving.

Forests are thus a real economic asset for the population, the State and economic operators. Everyone benefits from them to various degrees and in varying ways. Hence many conflicts arise among the various stakeholders. They fight to have control over the natural resources because it is clear that whoever controls them controls a sizeable part of the local economy. We can thus understand the State's reluctance to allow the population to take decisions on the management of natural resources. How can the economic interests of the local population be asserted in this jungle? How can states be convinced to relinquish their stranglehold on the sector and to empower the local communities?

Social and cultural issues

There is a scheme of relations between the local population and natural resources (forests, trees, etc.). Here and there on the continent, there is an observable process of social and cultural appropriation of natural resources by the communities. There is a double drive to

1. See the "Étude sur la zone forestière Dimako-Mbang", Final Report, SNV, May 1993; and "Les enjeux de l'exploitation forestière au Cameroun" in *La Voix du Paysan* (October 1994), 33: 13.

humanize and patrimonialize spaces and resources. In this context, the State's stranglehold on natural resources is viewed as usurpation, a banalization of the legitimate order of society and a negation of the rights of communities. How can we promote consideration for the anthropological links between the local communities and natural resources in the process of management of natural resources?

Outline of a balance sheet of community forestry in Africa south of the Sahara

On the one hand there are achievements; on the other hand there are limits and inadequacies.

Achievements in community forestry in Africa south of the Sahara

Despite its fairly recent juridical and institutional formalization in the countries of the region, community forestry is in vogue in Africa. There is an observable mobilization of stakeholders at various levels for community forestry activities. Concrete action has been taken in the field and many projects have been started. In general, these activities may be localized at two levels: activities relating to traditional forestry and those relating to conventional forestry.

Experiences in the area of traditional forestry

Traditional community forestry includes all forestry and agroforestry activities carried out by the population at the grassroots level. These include the exploitation of forestry resources for domestic consumption, the development of agroforestry practices and the setting up of agro-ecological plantations, such as palm plantations, fruit trees and fuelwood plantations. The population carries out these activities with a view to improving its living conditions. It is in this context that the activities carried out by farmers, development associations, CIGs and other community groupings in the villages must be placed. Efforts at restructuring the rural world and promoting the development of the grassroots populations by the State and NGOs contribute to monitoring these activ-

ities and accelerating the process of participation of the population in the management of forest resources and the use of such resources for local development.

Experiences in the area of conventional forestry

Conventional community forestry refers to all the activities carried out by specialized governmental organizations and NGOs. These relate to policy formulation, support counselling for activities carried out in the field, and the realization of projects in the community forestry sector. In Cameroon today, nearly 17 projects linked to the development of community forestry are being carried out in the field under the control of the Ministry of the Environment and Forestry (MINEF). To these must be added four institutional support projects in MINEF itself and five forestry research projects realized by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the International Cooperation Centre on Agrarian Research for Development (CIRAD), the European Union and the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF). This makes a total of 26 development support projects for the development of community forestry. They cover the entire forest zone of Cameroon, particularly in the centre, south, east and southwest. The activities cover various domains, including participatory management of forest resources, conservation, regeneration, integrated rural development, biological diversity, land management, non-migratory farming, forestry research and participatory ecodevelopment. NGOs are also active in the field. This applies to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the Centre pour l'environnement et le développement (CED), the Centre régional d'appui au développement des initiatives féminines (CRADIF), the Avenir des peuples des forêts tropicales (APFT), the Centre international pour la promotion de la création (CIPCRE), the Planet Survey and, above all, the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), which ensures the execution of about nine projects in the area of community forestry. They include Campo-Ma'an Biodiversity Conservation and Management Project, Lomié Sustainable Development Support Project, Yokadouma/Mbang Integrated Rural Development Project and Mayo-Oulo Village Lands Development and Management Project.

Development of institutional components of community forestry

At the regional level, there is an observable movement towards the installation and operation of networks dealing with general activities or activities specific to community forestry. Activities of a general nature include FTTP, which is a special action programme of FAO's Forestry Department set up, among other things, in six countries of Africa south of the Sahara: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, the Niger and Senegal. It aims to reinforce the capacity of local institutions in the sustainable and beneficial management of forest resources. Its principal activities include a review of community forestry, the alternative management of conflicts, and a genus analysis in community forestry, the participatory approach, decentralization and local practices.

For more or less specific activities, notably the development of the participatory approach in community forestry, we could cite the participatory action research 'networks' (*Méthode active de recherche participative* [MARPI]) or an analysis of the 'four Rs'. At the sub-regional or country levels, examples of active networks are many and varied. In Cameroon, for example, activities relating to community forestry are undertaken by governmental and non-governmental institutions. These include the central services, namely MINEF, the Ministry of Agriculture, local councils and the different projects carried out or controlled by the State. These include projects such as *Ecosystèmes forestiers d'Afrique Centrale* (ECOFAC), SIKOP, IUCN-DJA, LOKUNDJE-NYONG, GEF/CGB, SUD-BAKUNDU, API-DIMAKO, SO'O LALA, KORUP and Tropenbos. Most of these projects are part of the community forestry network put in place by the Community Forestry Development Project of MINEF. Non-governmental institutions include the growing number of NGOs, farmers' organizations and development and customary institutions. At this point, we may note the Nature Conservation Comanagement Project, which brings together under the umbrella of IUCN and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) all the projects for the sustainable conservation and management of the forestry ecosystems of the Congo Basin financed by these two organizations. The project pools the technical and methodological resources made available to the stakeholders in the field to improve the quality of their intervention.

Throughout the region, activities are still at the budding and experimental stage, and the institutions involved need to be reinforced in order to become truly operational. These changes are encouraged by the progressive transformation of the context of community forestry.

Red tape and limits to the blossoming and development of community forestry in Africa south of the Sahara

In nearly all countries of the region, recent forestry laws and policies have integrated the participation of the local population in the management of forest resources. This is a very important achievement. Particularly in the Gambia and Cameroon, an innovative tool aimed at a greater involvement of the local population in the management of forest resources has been developed. This tool is the community forest. In Cameroon, a community may request and obtain forest space corresponding to a maximum of 5 000 ha and manage it according to the prescriptions of the management agreement signed with the forestry services. As a legal concept, community forestry is a reality in the region. But at the practical and operational level, it still faces many problems. These are at three essential levels: political and legislative; structural and institutional; and technical and operational.

Political and legal limits

The political and legal limits include the mass of red tape that hinders the formal blossoming of community forestry in Africa. They may be found in the persistent State monopoly in the management of natural resources. The State's willingness to associate the population has not obviated its determination to remain the main master and beneficiary of the management of natural resources. Hence the lacunae, inadequacies and contradictions observed in new forestry laws and the absence of statutory instruments to implement the legal provisions relating to the process of involving the local population in the management of natural resources. It can be noted that



there are fundamental problems in relating and integrating customary law and modern law:

- the failure to take into account traditional practices in the management of natural resources in modern legislation;
- the dissonance between land laws and forestry laws, notably on landed and forestry property, and the claiming of forest space for the State;
- the equitable legal sharing of revenue derived from the exploitation of natural resources;
- the persistent voids and imprecisions in existing instruments;
- the divergences and contradictions in interpretation of existing instruments;
- the inadequacies of instruments written within the context of decentralization of the management of natural resources; and
- the absence of the political will of the states (political will seems more of intention than concrete action).

Structural and institutional limits

At the structural and institutional level, the limits are found in the weak capacities and limited means of action of the institutions operating in the community forestry sector. These institutions are seriously lacking in the basic human capacities and skills needed to develop and put in place the appropriate tools, methods and approaches for the development of community forestry. At the level of State institutions, NGOs and local communities, there is an insufficient number of specialists and professionals well versed and operational in the area of the participatory approach or community forestry extension work. Thus, despite relative developments in the political and legislative context, the operators in this sector tend to perpetuate the old interventionist and authoritarian approach, which favours control and repression instead of promoting dialogue, cooperation, consultation, partnership and joint management. Further, there are additional problems:

- the phenomenon of duplication of actions in the field and, consequently, diverse and often contradictory approaches, and the multiplication of apparent or latent conflicts between the different stakeholders;

- the existence of a multitude of institutions, without collaboration or coordination between them, at times lacking logistic and financial means;
- incapacity of the forestry services to implement the instruments;
- a plethora of planning executives, sectoral programmes and policies that interfere, intersect and at times oppose each other;
- conflicts of skills and interests among the administration, among the projects, and, at times, among the donors; and
- the inexistence or approximate functioning of the networks put in place and the administrative structures charged with the development of community forestry.

Technical and operational limits

The prospects of the populations participating in community forestry activities, particularly conventional community forestry, are limited. They are even more limited in that these populations are ignorant and loosely organized; at times they are even left to their own devices. They are not well informed about the rights to which they are entitled and about their obligations in the management of resources. Very few local associations succeed in integrating their community forestry development activities and their activities in the field. There is widespread ignorance of the forestry laws and policies among the local populations. Technical and operational constraints are also linked to such problems as:

- inadequate forestry extension work;
- difficulties in implementing the participatory approach (in the case of the lands approach, which contributes to subverting the forestry component of projects in favour of the social and economic components);
- inadequate development of training in community forestry in training institutes;
- the heterogeneous and complex nature of the local communities and institutions;
- the problem of legitimacy and representativeness of social units or of operational legal entities in the management of community forests (together with the con-

traditions between the proponents of tradition and the actors of modernity);

- the lengthy duration and high cost of the procedure to be followed in acquiring a community forest;
- the instrumentalization of community forests by the élite;
- lack of transparency in the management of the benefits from forest exploitation; and
- clashing interests and cupidity among the various stakeholders.

Challenges and prospects for the development of community forestry in Africa south of the Sahara

The challenges and prospects for the development of community forestry in Africa south of the Sahara are perceived more in terms of problems and interrogations. They may be classified in three categories:

- 1 the capitalization of achievements, and the development, dissemination and exchange of knowledge about community forestry;
- 2 the adjustment and improvement of the policies and laws on community forestry; and
- 3 the enhancement of the technical and operational capacities of stakeholders in the community forestry sector.

The problem of capitalization and dissemination of achievements, deepening and systemization of knowledge

In order to make community forestry an efficient system and tool for the sustainable management of natural resources, it goes without saying that a process should be developed for the capitalization of current achievements, for the piecing together of new knowledge, for pluridisciplinary analysis and for carrying out practical operations in the field. But how can the actual relevant experiences be valorized? How can we think out and

operate consultation, reflection, exchange and communication frameworks in community forestry? How, for example, can we rediscover customary systems for the management of natural resources, valorize them and use them to contribute to the renewal of the current approaches to the management of natural resources?

The problem of political, legislative and structural reforms

A review of the implementation of the forestry laws and policies of the 1990s seems to indicate that changes in the instruments and strategic guidelines have not brought about changes in the habits and practices of the various stakeholders in the field. Although it was necessary to put in place the new rules and institutions to promote the participatory management of natural resources, such rules and institutions have not sufficed to bring about the envisaged changes. The options chosen by States for community forestry are not yet effective on the operational level or, in any case, not in a satisfying manner. Therefore, there is need to adjust and adapt these provisions to the realities of our societies. There is need to give legal backing to the local/customary norms and practices for the management of natural resources. But how can this be done? How can we emerge from the sterile dualism between customary and modern law so as to integrate one in the other and vice versa? What can be done so that the transfer of competence in the management of natural resources from the States to the grassroots population resulting from the decentralization process may be accompanied by the transfer of resources? Realistically, what mechanisms and strategies should be put in place with a view to translating into concrete action the policies planned and the laws adopted? What needs to be done so that forestry services may finally abandon their repressive approach and empower the local population, and so that the exploitation and management of natural resources might become a factor of local development?

The challenge consists in putting in place policies and regulations that take into account the realities of our societies and are capable of generating new habits for



the management of natural resources, and are also capable of giving to the local communities the chance to be the inevitable partners in the process of management of natural resources. Whatever may be said or thought, there will be no community forestry without the effective empowerment of the local communities.

The problem of enhancing the technical and operational capacities of the various stakeholders in community forestry

As has been noted above, nearly all the stakeholders in community forestry face a problem of reduced capacity for action. To solve this problem, information, sensitization, education and training have generally been presented as appropriate remedies. Much as this may be pertinent, it is necessary to probe further into this reflection. Hence the following questions. Who should be trained first? In what? Is it sufficient to train them? What support/counselling approaches and strategies should be put in place and made operational? What roles should government services, NGOs and donors play in this process? After training, how will it be ensured that the message has passed, is retained and will be applied? Who shall see to this?

Also, who shall be the best local stakeholders in community forestry? Among the so-called traditional institutions and the local proactive organizations, which are likely to bear and keep alive the complex and delicate project of community forestry development? Which of them have a truly functional, social, decisional and operational impact on the participatory management of natural resources? How can the attitudes, behaviour and habits conducive to the blossoming of community forestry be generated in the lives of the various stakeholders?

Conclusion

In the long and winding road to the construction of community forestry in Africa south of the Sahara, important hurdles have been overcome; some have yet to be overcome. Some tasks have been accomplished, others are still to be accomplished. It is true that community forestry

has not yet reached the envisaged level of its practical phase, and its impact on the development of the local communities is still low. But it is clear that it has made considerable advances, mainly as a result of developments in the political, economic and social context of countries in Africa south of the Sahara. At present, new subjects of interest are emerging, and at the same time changes are occurring at the political and legislative levels, and the decentralization processes are being clarified and confirmed. These new subjects call for reflection and action that is likely to contribute to enlarging the knowledge and experience base on which the sustainable management of natural resources could be founded.

After much hesitation and many differences in schools of thought, community forestry is today fully recognized as an efficient strategy in the sustainable management of natural resources and in the build-up of development at the base. It should in future become an object of greater interest for the local communities and above all for the governments, notably those in the process of redefining the role of the State and those whose economies are in the transitional phase. In fact, all are looking for a means of conserving and valorizing resources, as well as offering the rural communities new development prospects and chances.

All evidence points to the fact that the success of community forestry and allied and connected strategies will derive from the will to draw profit from past and current experiences and to try out new approaches. Policies and regulations that give communities the possibility of assuming a greater role in decisions on forest management will be of prime importance. There will be need to develop at the country and regional levels a true culture of community forestry. Together we should face the challenge. At FAO, community forestry will continue to support the exchange of experiences through its activities and its networks and publications, in view of the partnership between communities, forest organizations and other parties concerned. Thus it will be possible to concretize the joint effort in the service of sustainability of natural resource management and of rural/local development.



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