Annex V
Summary of working group sessions

The seminar participants were divided into six working groups to consider the same terms of reference. A facilitator was assigned to each group. Each group identified its own rapporteur who reported the group's findings to the plenary. Two working group sessions were held, one in the afternoon of Thursday, 29 April and the other in the morning of Friday, 30 April.

In general the working group terms of reference covered the following issues:

▶ identification of key elements necessary for successful community forestry in Africa;

▶ how community/participatory forestry could benefit the community and the forest;

▶ strategies for the promotion and implementation of community forestry in Africa; and

▶ recommendations for follow-up activities.

The following gives a summary of the findings of the working groups.

On key elements for successful implementation of community forestry in Africa

The basic elements identified by the working groups as conditions to be met for Africa to successfully implement community forestry can be summarized as follows:

▶ a conducive forest policy and legislative environment;

▶ existence of appropriate institutional arrangements and capacities, both at local and national level;

▶ presence of an appropriate ecological setting including the availability of land;

▶ adoption of an integrated approach that considers other developmental aspects and expressed needs of the communities;

▶ a conducive land tenure arrangement;

▶ existence of a willing population and committed politicians;

▶ adequate information and its dissemination;

▶ a committed forest administration;

▶ guaranteed security of ownership over the resources and benefits;

▶ participation of all actors including NGOs, private sector and community-based organizations (CBOs);

▶ respect for, and use of, traditional institutions;

▶ gender sensitivity;

▶ clearly defined roles and responsibilities of the actors; and

▶ a people-focused participatory programme.

Possible constraints for the existence of these elements were identified as:

▶ resistance to change, mostly on the part of policy makers and forestry administrators;

▶ complexity of tenure arrangement;

▶ poverty among community members, making them want to cut forest for revenue;

▶ lack of awareness;

▶ low priority accorded to community forestry in Africa (lack of political commitment);

▶ absence of relevant policy and legislation to legitimize community forestry;

▶ competing commercial interest, mainly promoted by governments themselves;

▶ insufficient perception of the value of the forests;

▶ poor institutional frameworks at the national level;

▶ inadequate knowledge and/or appreciation of the value of forest at the national level;

▶ difficulty in achieving a purely integrated approach to community forestry;

▶ lack of transparency, institutionally and financially, at most levels, including community levels; and

▶ inadequate capacity, mainly at the national level, to undertake country-wide implementation of community forestry.

For the purpose of capacity creation/strengthening, the following suggestions were made:

▶ training for the communities and the forest service staff;

▶ strengthening of local institutional and forestry service structures;

▶ information generation through research and the wide dissemination of this information; and

▶ adoption of a participatory approach.

On benefits of community forestry for the community and the forest

The issue of the benefits of community forestry for the community and the forest was addressed from the perspectives of why communities should be involved in the first place, who may lose and who may gain, what benefits exist for the forest, and what successful experiences exist.

The discussions culminated in the following conclusions.

▶ That community forestry benefits the local community by way of generally improved livelihoods in terms of:
- improved income levels through employment creation and sale of forest products;
- availability of forest products (both timber and non-timber) for domestic use;
- right of ownership of forests and access to its resources;
- facilitated involvement of all actors in decision making;
- facilitated decentralization;
- possibility of incorporating other development activities during community forest implementation;
- protection of species of cultural, economic and spiritual value;
- strengthened inter- and intra-community cooperation, therefore the possibility of local-level conflict resolution; and
- improved organizational and managerial capacities at local levels.

▶ As regards who may lose current benefits with the introduction of community forestry, the following were identified:
- (illegal) forest exploiters;
- corrupt officials;
- exploiters of restricted products;
- potential settlers and farmers; and
- sawmillers (as far as access to cheap products is concerned).

▶ Conscious of the fact that the communities stand to be harmed in the process of implementation of community forestry unless it is carefully introduced and fairly implemented, working groups suggested the following strategies of implementation in order to avert any such possible harm:
- the communities should have the sole right to determine access to the resources;
- accountability and transparency should prevail at the community level with regard to benefit sharing;
- community forestry should integrate other development activities;

- the role of government and other development agencies should be limited to facilitation and should not extend to making decisions for the communities; and
- all actors should be involved, including community members, local administrators, NGOs, CBOs, etc.

▶ Possible key benefits for the forests are:
- improved forest regeneration and productivity;
- increased biological diversity;
- increased forest soil moisture;
- improved forest quality/value (stocking level and timber quality);
- enhanced aesthetic value of forest; and
- possible increase in forest area.

Additional important issues identified by some groups, not in the terms of reference of the groups, but which deserve attention, were:

▶ benefits of community forestry for the government; and

▶ risks for the forest.

On strategies for the promotion and implementation of community forestry in Africa

Policy strategies

In order to create a positive environment for the elaboration of a permissive policy for the introduction and wide implementation of community forestry, the working groups advocated for:

▶ raising awareness amongst policy makers, politicians and local administrators as regards the value of community forestry, and lobbying for change;

▶ including community/participatory forestry in natural resources policy;

▶ adopting and implementing effective decentralization;

▶ harmonizing the forest policy with other related policies;

▶ strengthening the local organizations and their capacity to negotiate;

▶ elaborating and integrating land policies in the community forestry strategies;

▶ ensuring that community forestry policy is based on proven successful experiences and strategies developed at the grassroots level;

▶ involving local communities and other stakeholders in policy formulation;

▶ making sure that the policy statement commits government financially;

▶ taking advantage of the apparent support from the international community; and

▶ making sure that the policy statement provides for capacity building at all levels, and for all stakeholders.

The major constraints that were identified in relation to the above policy strategies include the absence of an enabling environment resulting from resistance to change on the part of the policy makers and administrators, the absence of successful experience to guide formulation, competing land use options, unsupportive land and tree tenure policies and laws, and a sectoral as opposed to integrated approach to development and planning.

Legislative strategies

The need to establish a link between policy and legislative requirements for community forestry to take permanent root in Africa was recognized. In view of this, the strategies proposed for developing an appropriate legislative framework were to:

▶ include provisions for community forestry in the forest legislation;

▶ recognize the important role of local institutions, their structures and by-laws, for the successful implementation of community forestry;

▶ ensure security of ownership of forest land and resources by the local communities;

▶ legally guarantee the incentives granted to communities;

▶ ensure devolution of authority for forest management by the community in the legislation;

▶ establish pilot (successful) experiences to guide policy and legislation and involve all stakeholders in policy and legislative reviews;

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- involve communities in the process of negotiating land laws;
- ensure a detailed conflict resolution mechanism in the forest laws;
- adapt the legislation to existing decentralized structures; and
- popularize and explain the legislation to the local communities for their understanding.

The constraints identified with regard to the legal strategies also relate to those for policy and include resistance to change on the part of the politicians, administrators and individuals with vested interest in the forest. Rigid and unsupportive land legislation may mitigate against community forestry legislation.

Implementation and institutional strategies

For successful implementation of community forestry the strategies proposed were to:

- clearly define and explain the rights of the different actors;
- implement pilot activities to develop experience;
- use local institutions, as much as possible, for work organization, implementation, conflict resolution and benefit sharing;
- incorporate other development activities;
- limit resources employed, as much as possible, to those (locally) available;
- employ management agreements with communities for implementation;
- create a community forestry unit in the forest service;
- continuously sensitize all actors and stakeholders;
- provide regular re-orientation training for forest service staff, collaborators and communities; and

- create capacity at the forest service and community levels to implement community forestry.

In relation to the above strategies, constraints that are likely to be encountered are suspicion by the local people of the intentions of government, low priority accorded to forestry by the communities due to perceived low tangible benefits, the absence of appropriate skills at both national and local level, insufficient resources, especially insufficient (or lack of) budgetary allocation for community forestry, competing commercial interest in forestry (usually supported by government physical policies), the long-term nature of the forest enterprise as opposed to people's short-term expectations, rural to urban drift, physical conditionalities imposed by outside forces (e.g. the International Monetary Fund), and difficulty in mobilizing a community force for implementation.

Economic strategies

Economic incentives have to exist for communities to involve themselves in forest management on a sustainable basis. Consequently it was proposed that:

- the economic values of forests should be identified, developed and promoted;
- markets should be found for forest products;
- community forestry should create employment;
- it should be ensured that community forestry has a positive impact on the livelihood of the people; and
- forest products should be processed for value addition.

Lack of transparency in benefit sharing and insufficient markets for forest products have been identified as potential constraints to these economic strategies. These also include poor product quality, and insufficient (or lack of) funding for value-added processing.