



منظمة الأغذية
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para la
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y la
Alimentación

COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

EIGHTEENTH SESSION

Rome, Italy, 13-16 March 2007

PUTTING FORESTRY TO WORK AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

INTRODUCTION

1. Worldwide, most forests are publicly owned but there are trends towards devolution of management rights to communities and private sector stakeholders. Indeed, sustainable forest management benefits from secure access rights and the full involvement of local people, who depend on forests and trees outside forests. However, much remains to be done to facilitate management of forest resources by local stakeholders.
2. This note describes accomplishments thus far, examines the challenges, and identifies elements of policy, institutional and legal frameworks and mechanisms that support forest management at the local level.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

3. Progress has been made in participatory approaches and the devolution of management rights to local stakeholders, particularly to communities, through:
 - recognition of forest ownership or permanent tenure by community or indigenous groups;
 - management of select state forest areas turned over to local user groups;
 - joint or co-management of state forest land;
 - limited access and use rights by communities in state-protected areas or surrounding buffer zones;
 - lease of state land for forestry purposes; and
 - community concessions.
4. While secure tenure is a prerequisite to effective forest management at the local level, it must be accompanied by economic incentives as well as capacity building in technical, administrative, managerial and marketing aspects.

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CHALLENGES FOR FOREST MANAGEMENT BY LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

5. Lack of secure forest tenure and tenure systems which are unclear or discriminatory are major impediments to responsible forest management by local stakeholders. There is a need to better understand the implications of forest tenure and raise the awareness of policy-makers.
6. Legal regulations and bureaucratic procedures, including requirements for management plans, are often overly complicated and costly, making it difficult for local groups to comply. As a result they may be forced into illegal actions to satisfy their needs for forest products.
7. Even where an adequate legal framework is in place, local stakeholders, at least initially, need assistance with the technical aspects of forest management, the administration of small forest enterprises and the marketing of forest products. Economic incentives and information networks could enable smallholders to compete in the market place. Local forest administrations often do not have the capacity to provide the required assistance as they are understaffed and lack the knowledge and motivation to engage with stakeholders.
8. Growing demand for natural resources and competing interests increase the potential for conflicts which, if not addressed, may escalate and contribute to illegal activities and destruction of forest resources.

WAYS FORWARD

9. Over the past decades significant experience has been gained in implementing participatory approaches to forest management (www.fao.org/forestry/site/participatory/en). Because participatory forestry is not just about growing or protecting trees but about showing how sustainable forest management contributes to poverty alleviation, social development and local capacity-building, it requires a supportive policy, legal and institutional framework. Some key elements are described below:
 - clear, secure and diversified forest tenure systems;
 - simple, realistic and transparent legal requirements to facilitate forest management by smallholders and communities and to improve law compliance;
 - economic incentives, including microfinance and tax incentives to encourage smallholder investment in forestry, and improved access to markets and market information;
 - community-based enterprise development to increase benefits to local people from forest activities and contribute to poverty reduction;
 - capacity building of local people to enhance their technical, managerial, financial, marketing and conflict management skills; and of local officials to enable them to assist communities and smallholders in managing forest resources;
 - strengthened ability to identify and address latent conflicts before they erupt; prevent existing conflicts from escalating; and promote positive social changes;
 - Confidence building, including the need for forest administrations to actively engage with the local population, recognizing traditional local knowledge and management systems.
10. International partners, including FAO, the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and others have developed methodologies and materials in some of these areas, for example, on natural resource conflict management (www.fao.org/forestry/site/conflict/en), microfinance and simplified forest management plans. FAO is strengthening the capacity of small-scale forest enterprises to establish partnerships with buyers along the supply chain to help

capture a larger share of the added value and obtain better access to services and market information (www.fao.org/forestry/site/enterprises/en).

GUIDANCE REQUESTED FROM THE COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

11. Delegates are invited to consider how to better involve local stakeholders to achieve sustainable forest management and contribute to poverty alleviation. Special consideration may be given to:

- key elements of a policy, institutional and legal framework, including forest tenure and incentive systems, that support forest management by smallholders, communities and other local groups;
- tools and mechanisms that would increase the contributions of forests and trees to sustainable rural livelihoods and poverty reduction; and
- role of FAO in supporting participatory approaches and stakeholder involvement.