

YFF Seminar Series: “*The Promise and Practice of Community-Based Forest Management*”

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Talk Title: *Community Forestry: foundations and practices for improving lives and landscapes*

Answers to the publicly shared questions (14)

Q1. Who is currently managing the forest in the area where you are mentioning (government, individual, or company)?

I mentioned examples from the Asia-Pacific region to convey the diversity of community forestry models. In some of the models, forests are managed by governments (Myanmar), individual households (Viet Nam) or companies (Lao PDR). You can find the same kind of diversity of community forestry here in North America. However, a more important point than management of resources is the point on tenure and resource rights and how benefits and proceeds are shared from the products coming from forest management.

To bring up an example from my presentation, we know that governments of several ASEAN member states have been increasingly investing in community forestry, particularly in productive forests ([link](#)). They have set ambitious targets for community-based forestry for the coming years. They have also created opportunities for private sector investment in forest plantations for wood or timber supply. However, most of ASEAN member-states have kept their role in managing protection of forests for biodiversity conservation and public ecosystem services.

Q2. I'm curious about intersections between REDD+ and CBF.

There are many publications on the intersection between REDD+ and community-based forestry. I recommend [this one](#); it gives the best overview. For more hands-on definitions and practical training materials, I recommend reading this question-and-answer [handbook](#) designed to support grassroots facilitators to deliver training programs. It comes in eight languages.

REDD+ and community-based forestry have similar goals on sustainable forest management. In Indonesia, the government lists community forestry—known as social forestry in the country—as one of the core climate change mitigation strategies in the forestry sector.

Q3. I am very interested in the trade-offs between centralized and decentralized resource management. You mention that detailed plans with dedicated budgets have been developed in some regions. Can you comment on whether or not allocated budgets have changed (increased/decreased) with the shift to these decentralized forest management systems?

At least two countries in the Asia-Pacific region have increased their budgets for decentralized forest management systems—Nepal and Indonesia. Both countries have a national-level policy and have attempted decentralization before. Devolution does not usually entail transfer of the complete bundle of tenure rights, and budgets should not be the only indicator of success.

It's helpful to consider which rights are transferred and how they are transferred to characterize different community forestry models. It's difficult to distinguish a precise typology of community forestry. But we can categorize different types in terms of the rights and degree of participation, and hence potential empowerment, of communities in decision-making for planning and carrying out forest management activities and benefit-sharing. In order of increasing number and strength of rights, participation and empowerment, the spectrum of community forestry models includes:

- Participatory conservation
- Joint forest management
- Community forestry with limited devolution
- Community forestry with full devolution
- Private ownership (smallholder forestry)

I also would recommend looking at the RRI tenure tracking framework as an entry point to look at decentralized forest management systems globally. You can access it [here](#).

Q4. Is community forestry around the world mainly supported or pushed by third organizations like RECOFTC? Is it possible for a nation to have a national policy to promote community forestry?

Yes it is possible for a country to have a national policy to promote community forestry. Much of what is happening in Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand is supported by state policies. That was one of my main points about the community forestry movement in the region. Shifting from state control to community forestry takes some time for different reasons. In the initial stage, third parties and donors are still driving much of the piloting work on the ground. But the overall national policy trends are very encouraging.

Q5. Would love to hear a bit about the role of extension workers/foresters in these examples for providing technical assistance and demonstration. Thanks! By the way, I did my master's research with RECOFTC in 1989 in the early days- so nice to follow it for many years.

It is wonderful to reconnect and to hear about the Master's research you did with RECOFTC in 1989. At RECOFTC, we are very proud of the alumni of researchers and facilitators that have worked with us for more than three decades.

More than 60,000 officials, extension workers and foresters from throughout Southeast Asia have participated in RECOFTC workshops and seminars over the years. In our course on community forestry they learn how to empower local and often marginalized communities to manage and conserve the forests and wetlands they depend on to survive and thrive. The alumni of this course then return home from the RECOFTC training and drive community forestry forward as a solution to safeguarding forests

and helping communities overcome poverty. They transfer their new knowledge to colleagues, develop networks and set up pilot projects with local communities.

There is a strong role for this kind of government-endorsed community forestry when extension workers and foresters understand the importance of community forestry and help disseminate the information that they learned with us. To become effective managers of forests, community members need to have knowledge, skills and confidence. That is why learning and capacity building is so important for extension workers and foresters who are part of the delivery mechanism to provide technical assistance and support in participatory community-based forestry planning. The process needs to be balanced with community needs. It should not be a top-down process, with extension workers and foresters telling community members how to build local institutions or excluding certain stakeholders. The extension work and training needs to be culturally and community sensitive with meaningful participation of community members. We have observed evidence from several countries that these extension workers acknowledge traditional practices and are willing to integrate them in the community-based forestry management plan.

You can read testimonials from some of RECOFTC's alumni [in a story](#) we published on our website.

Q6. I work in North Sumatera, one of the unanswered challenges in implementing Social forestry/community forest is the fact our Govt provides the option of Agrarian Reform (TORA) which aims to redistribute state owned land/forest to the community, which is one of the main motive of palm oil expansion = deforestation. I'd like to know what you think of this problem :)

Every policy has two sides. It is important to look at the implementation and governance associated with the reforms in Indonesia.

Indonesia's land reform program in 2017 consisted of two major components: Tanah Objek Reformasi Agraria (TORA), or lands subject to agrarian reform, and Social Forestry (SF).

The TORA program targets nine million hectares of land. It involves distribution of land and formalization of land ownership, benefiting landless farmers or farmers with small landholdings.

The SF program grants local communities usufruct and management rights to state forest lands, targeting 12.7 million hectares of forests by 2019. This policy aims to reduce greenhouse gas emission under the nationally determined contributions (NDC) as part of the Paris Agreement. A rapid process to meet the targets pledged within a short period of time may cause frictions on the ground. We can anticipate good results as long as the implementation guidelines allow communities to manage their farms with support from extension agencies.

Q7. Can you tell us something about CBF models in cross-border landscapes?

Community-based forestry models in cross-border landscapes are under development. The best example is the Dawna Tenasserim landscape in Myanmar. RECOFTC and WWF are working there. For more information on this landscape, visit this landscape [factsheet](#).

Q8. How do the local people deal with degraded forest if there are nothing left for them to count on?

Communities that are initially granted degraded forest may require additional support and resources from relevant government agencies or third parties to successfully manage and restore their forests in the short term. For example, forest departments in many countries may provide seedlings and extension of

silviculture support. Also crucial is to establish and strengthen community-based forestry institutions such as community forestry management committees, community bylaws governing roles and responsibilities of CBF members, and local CBF funds. RECOFTC and other non-governmental organizations can support that process. For more information, read [this story](#) from our work in Cambodia.

Q9. I believe there was research that came out recently (would cite if I trusted my memory!) that suggested there is an inverse relationship between the level of formality (rigidity?) of community forest structures AND community benefit (i.e. less formal structures and agreements have promoted an increase in local innovation, social enterprise and ownership of outcomes)...Is this something you have observed in different models across SE/S Asia?

Community-based forestry regimes that are regulation-heavy and place a great deal of management responsibility on local communities without adequate support can greatly restrict the ability of communities to exercise their rights and to benefit in a tangible way from their management efforts. RECOFTC has looked into some of the effects of these regulatory barriers on communities and smallholders in various countries. For more information, see [here](#).

Q10. I wonder if you could give an example from the Middle East region?

I suggest visiting the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for good examples from the Middle East.

Q11. When talking about community forests, which ones are you referring to? Native forests or planted?

I am referring to native forests and planted forests. In my presentation I gave examples of both. I mentioned Acacia plantations in Viet Nam, teak plantations in Northern Laos and natural forests being managed by communities in Myanmar and Thailand. By contrast with the relatively recent emergence of collaborative forms of community-based forestry, smallholder forestry is a well-established and widely accepted forest management modality in Europe and North America. However, smallholder forestry has emerged as a significant form of forest management in the global South only in recent decades. This occurred primarily as a result of major forest tenure reforms, for example in China and Viet Nam.

Q12. Can you share again those countries where you were seeing an uptick in women elected into public office, who started in CBF? That's an utterly fascinating trend and a talking point I'd like to share with folks and leaders here in the USFS. Thanks!

This was mentioned in reference to Nepal's elections in 2017. Nationwide, 776 community forest user group (CFUG) members were elected to various government positions. Thirty-two percent of these elected officials were women. This shows how capacity development of community forestry leaders, including women, is linked to leadership roles in government. Here is a short [poster](#) documenting the importance of CFUGs for women's empowerment and gender equality.

Q13. Do you have any thoughts on how the principals you discussed might apply to communities in the United States?

I would imagine that the same principles can and should apply to communities in the United States that depend on forests to survive. There are many long-term examples of the same principles being used by various community groups and tribes. One example that has received attention is the Quincy Library Group (QLG), northern California. For more information on this particular location and how the principles

are adhered to, I recommend reading some of professor Tony Cheng's research on the QLG such as this [article](#).

I would also refer you to Caroline Scanlan of Yale's URI and the Urban and Community Forestry Program of the US Forest Service. As I recall, several members of this Urban and Community Forestry Program attended the YFF seminar series for this first kick-off session last Thursday. Gary Dunning and Colleen Murphy-Dunning may be able to connect you to both.

Q14. What are examples of the successes and challenges you all have seen in achieving financial viability of CFM initiatives?

In the countries where we work, secure tenure rights remain a big challenge for financially viable community forestry initiatives. Communities are typically allocated forests of poor quality in many countries. This is another reason that prevents communities from deriving significant economic benefits from community forestry in the short term. Regulatory barriers greatly restrict the financial viability for many communities practicing community forestry. The barriers can be in the form of restrictions on the processing and commercializing of various forest products, especially timber, or even lack of infrastructure, such as paved roads, that drive up the costs of accessing markets.

At RECOFTC, we recognize that the private sector has a role in supporting sustainable forest management. But for any enterprise initiative or community-private partnership agreement to move forward communities must have secure tenure rights—the foundation to manage the forest. Carbon rights and the benefit-sharing from any carbon-trading mechanisms is a good example. If communities have strong tenure rights, and there is an adequate resource base and an enabling regulatory environment, then local people can manage the forest and benefit from the forest's resources.

For more information on the financial viability of community forestry initiatives, read [this story](#) on RECOFTC's work with partners on community forestry credit schemes in Cambodia and [this story](#) on certificates of tenure in Myanmar.