

ESTABLISHMENT OF A FORESTRY RESEARCH NETWORK FOR ACP COUNTRIES (FORENET)

CONCEPT NOTE FOR RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Research programme: Enhancing capacity of local people and institutions to manage forest ecosystems

Context

Managing forest ecosystems has been a way of life for many developing and third world countries, as these forest ecosystems have provided them with the necessities that has given life to its many inhabitants that depend on the forest ecosystems for their day to day survival. The forest ecosystem has provided them with direct benefits such as timber, food, shelter, medicine, fuelwood, sustainable supply of clean water, fresh air as well as other indirect benefits such as providing a place where protein can be obtained through hunting so that they could have a balanced diet. The forest ecosystems perform many services on people's behalf also, by delivering clean water to rivers, lakes and dams, hold soils together, store carbon, and provide habitat for a large part of the planet's terrestrial biodiversity.

Although indigenous inhabitants of these local forest ecosystems have been able to pass on their knowledge and experiences to the younger generation to manage their ecosystems for years, the current magnitude of disturbances to the forest ecosystems has been quite phenomenal and has gone beyond the knowledge and experiences of the past generations that was passed on to the present generation, so that they can be able to handle and manage the impact of disturbances to the ecosystems at present. It is quite evident in many tropical forest countries, that increase in mining, large scale forest clearance for development and agriculture, and logging activities over the years has been one of the main causes in forest deforestation which has had a direct impact on the forest ecosystems.

The impact of human activities on the forest ecosystems in recent years through activities such as mining, logging, shifting cultivation involving slash and burn practices, and large scale forest clearance for agricultural and other developments, and the extent of forest degradation is vast especially in the humid tropics. Countries involved in FORENET have lower population pressure on forests compared to other neighboring regions such as in Asia. However the rate of population growth in these countries is increasing, and therefore will exert pressure on forest use, so the need to plan ahead for better forest ecosystem management practices by local populations.

There is now widespread recognition that local people can contribute to improving production forest management, that their perceptions are important and that they have management strategies that are potentially valuable as an aid to revising the pure timber focus towards a more holistic approach. Many stakeholders are involved in the management of production forests, some directly (such as, indigenous people, migrants, local NGOs, timber companies, agro-industrial developers, local officers) whereas others less directly (such as international NGOs, national governments, end consumers, companies who trade wood or carbon credits). The rights and responsibilities of different groups are often ambiguous, as companies may be allocated use rights that overlap with those of local forest dwellers, which lead to divergence of perceptions and conflicting decisions. There is however scope for synergies in production forest management but usually this has not yet been fully realized.

Conceptual framework and research themes

Research should seek to understand the values, knowledge and perceptions of local people relating to the forests in order to facilitate the synergies and solve issues of conflicting land use rights to develop new models of shared responsibilities about and benefits from production forests.

Empirical research will require studies to understand values, knowledge and perceptions of local people relating to their forests while action research will involve working with local communities, local governments, forest industry and other relevant stakeholders in selected areas, to develop paradigms or models of shared responsibility and shared benefit from tropical forests.

The research should focus on the following questions:

1. What do local people (men, women, old, young, dominant and marginalized ethnic groups) value about the forests in which (or near which) they live?
 - a. Importance of forests goods and services to local livelihoods
 - b. Importance from cultural etc. point of view
2. What strategies exist and can be developed for bringing together the ideas of formal production forest managers and local community members (including women and other marginalized groups)?

For example:

- a. What strategies exist or need to be developed for shared or complementary management that contributes to Sustainable Forest Management?
- b. What strategies exist or need to be developed for empowerment or enhancing negotiation skills and conflict-resolution management of local communities?
- c. How to facilitate agreements in existing large and complex stakeholder networks around tropical production forests?
 - a. How collective actions enforce stakeholder commitments towards agreements?
 - b. Why agreements hold together stakeholders or do not? Is it due to the quality of the decisions, the quality of the process or the dynamic of the network which support the process?
3. What organizational arrangements are most effective in ensuring sustainable and equitable forest management under different forest management and tenure regimes?
 - a. Does government have a role to play in the governance of equitable community-corporate partnership arrangements?
 - b. What governance arrangements (rules, organizational arrangements, and processes) are required for equity and sustainability under different forest management / tenure regimes?

This research should be executed through engagement with existing networks, and local and regional stakeholders across the spectrum of government bodies, research, industry, civil society organizations and local communities.