

A promising new forest proclamation in Ethiopia



Participatory forest management is now firmly on the agenda in Ethiopia.
Photo: Douglas Sheil

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Agricultural conversion, overgrazing, fuelwood collection and fire have all taken their toll on Ethiopia’s dry and montane forests, which now cover just 12 per cent of the country’s land area. The annual rate of deforestation is around 1.1 per cent, and the loss of forests is having a profoundly negative impact on the well-being of hundreds of thousands of people.

“Until recently, there had been little effort to research and understand the importance of these forests for local people,” explains CIFOR researcher Habtemariam Kassa, “but now there is considerable effort to put forestry on to the policy-making agenda. Our research is showing just how important these forests are for local livelihoods.” Besides providing a wide range of goods – livestock fodder, thatching grass, wild foods, firewood – the forests play an important role in safeguarding fresh water supplies and stabilising soils in mountainous regions.

In May 2006, CIFOR helped to organise a one-day meeting in Addis Ababa with officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, researchers from Wondo Genet College of Forestry, local NGOs and representatives of the private sector. One of the main areas of discussion concerned the lack of legal clarity regarding the role of local communities in the management of state-owned forests. The findings of research conducted by CIFOR and its partners demonstrated the legal problems with joint management. The researchers argued that greater clarity about ownership would not only benefit local

livelihoods, but lead to better forest management. As evidence, they could point to the experience of Chilimo Forest, in Central Ethiopia.

Between the fall of the old monarchy in the mid-1970s and the introduction of a decentralised federal administrative system in the mid-1990s, local communities had little opportunity to participate in forest management. Land clearance, logging and other destructive activities continued to cause serious forest loss. For example, Chilimo Forest was reduced by about 50 per cent between 1982 and 1994. The top-down method of forest management was clearly failing, and this encouraged a group of NGOs to pilot a new approach – Participatory Forest Management (PMF). Chilimo Forest was one area where this approach, involving joint management by local communities and local authorities, was put to the test.

CIFOR and its partners held a two-week workshop at Chilimo Forest, involving 19 researchers from numerous disciplines. They looked at the impact of Participatory Forest Management on the forest, and with the help of villagers they examined various scenarios for the future. “The research found that open access without Participatory Forest Management would provide high income benefits in the short term, but not in the long term,” explains Bruce Campbell, Director of CIFOR’s Livelihoods Programme. “We found that Participatory Forest Management provides the best option both for the long-term sustainability of forests and for local livelihoods.”

The research project found that when local communities were given a say in the management of the forests, they immediately began to manage them more wisely. Illegal activities were significantly reduced, only those people who were considered

very poor were allowed to collect and sell fuelwood. Had it not been for the new participatory regime, the *Eucalyptus* and *Cupressus* plantations would have been rapidly depleted, and the natural forest would have suffered likewise. As it is, natural forest cover is expected to increase over the coming years. The future scenario models also suggest that Participatory Forest Management will lead to an increase in household incomes.

The findings of this study, and evidence from other research projects, were presented to the workshop in May 2006. As a result, policy-makers agreed that the Forest Proclamation, which was under discussion at the time, should recognise the importance of participatory management. Until now, Participatory Forest Management had been possible in only three of the 58 National Forest Priority Areas,

one being Chilimo Forest in Central Ethiopia. Once the new legislation is approved, it will be much easier to introduce Participatory Forest Management in the other National Forest Priority Areas.

“Doing research that is relevant to policy is not a simple task, as engaging in policy processes must often be opportunistic” said Kassa. “Fortunately, the joint management research results appeared at the very moment the draft proclamation was being considered.”

Once the new proclamation is approved, it will be much easier to introduce Participatory Forest Management in the other National Forest Priority Areas. Besides recognising joint state-community ownership right, the new forest proclamation will give farmers tax incentives when they plant trees. This will help to restore degraded landscapes.

The forests of the Congo Basin

CIFOR scientists and partners have contributed to the first major overview of the world’s second largest area of tropical rainforest. *The Forests of the Congo Basin – State of the Forest 2006* was conceived and published by the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP). Launched at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg by 30 governments, inter-governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations, the partnership was established as a ‘call to arms’ to ensure that the vast forests of the region are conserved for the benefit of both its inhabitants and the world.

There are some 200 million hectares of forest in the six countries which are members of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership – Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo – and these are home to a great wealth of wildlife. Thirty million people live in the forests, and many more depend on them for fuel wood and other goods. A range of activities – poaching, road-building, logging, mining and agriculture – threatens the future of both the forests and people who live in and around them.

Until recently there has been a serious lack of readily available information about the state of the Congo Basin’s forests and the threats to people and wildlife. This has made it difficult to assess the effectiveness of management and conservation initiatives and determine priorities for the future. *The Forests of the Congo Basin* should go some way towards filling the gaps in our knowledge, and provide decision-makers with the sort of accurate information they need.

“The book is for policy-makers, journalists, researchers, students, indeed anybody who needs updated information about what’s happening in Central Africa’s forest,” explains CIFOR ecologist Robert Nasi, who wrote the chapter on the environmental dimension of logging, and helped to set up the scientific committee which reviewed the book. “This is a first effort to bring all the available information together, and it will be built on during the coming years by a web-based data-collection exercise managed by the Observatory of Central African Forests, or FORAF.”

CIFOR, one of the founders of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, is a member of the consortium which will establish and maintain FORAF. Nasi believes that this will have a considerable impact on the future of the region’s forests. “Nobody, be they governments, environmental NGOs, international donors or anyone else, will be able to hide behind the old mantra of ‘we didn’t know,’” says Nasi.

The Forests of the Congo Basin is available in English and French: www.cbfp.org

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Logs awaiting transport, Gabon. Photo: Terry Sunderland