Community Based Forestry Experience in Madang, Papua New Guinea – Governance and Decentralisation

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Abstract

This paper looks at the experiences of a group of forest resource owners from the Madang Province of Papua New Guinea (PNG) who embarked upon developing their forest resources themselves, in respect to governance and decentralisation issues. With the help from a local non governmental organisation called the Foundation for People and Community Development, the forest resource owners have formed an association called the Madang Forest Resources Owners Association (MFROA) in 1997. The MFROA members, currently 50 financial members, wants to develop their forest resources over their customary land, based upon the proper and controlled use of portable sawmills. Many similar groups with similar goals exist throughout Papua New Guinea.

Portable Sawmills are a small scale unit that can be dismantled and easily carried and or transported to the site for cutting logs into planks. Since 1995 there are over 2000 plus portable sawmill scattered throughout PNG.

Ninety seven percent of land in PNG is customary owned and eighty percent of the country is covered in some kind of forest ranging from mangroves on the coast to the montane forest at about 2300 meters above sea level. The current major players in the forest industry are foreign owned logging companies with round log exports as the main product. Currently Landowners have little to no part in actual development of their forests. It is against this background that the landowners wants to develop their forest resource themselves.

The governance and decentralisation issues faced by MFROA members in carrying out the course of their work is highlighted. The question on governments role in helping these landowners is presented.

The paper concludes with some recommendations on how to move community forestry forward as far as landowners issues are concerned.
1. Introduction

The 4th goal of the Papua New Guinea (PNG) constitution states that PNG’s natural resources and environment are to be conserved and used for the collective benefit of all citizens, and to be replenished for the benefit of future generations (PNG Constitution, 1975). The statement sets the foundation for the development and management of the natural resources of PNG.

Based on the 4th principle, the PNG Forestry Act 1991 elaborated further and made the following statement in its second objective:

“….maximize Papua New Guinean participation in the wide use and development of the forest resources as a renewable asset” (PNG Forestry Act, 1991).

The government’s position is therefore clear, at least on paper, regarding the direction for the use of natural resources and in the case of forestry, who the major players should eventually be. PNG has been independent since 1975 and forestry activities including logging have been important since 1908. Most of the logging activities were for local infrastructural development with minimal exports. (Saulei, 1997).

Logging did not pick up until after the 1979 policy where round log exports were encouraged due to high prices and market demand. The major players in the logging industry have not been nationals but largely foreign owned logging companies. (Bun et al 2006).

Forestry laws are geared towards managing large scale logging operations and round log exports. Many of the government forestry officers do not have straight answers for matters unrelated to large-scale logging.

Many landowners have seen and/or heard of the adverse impacts of logging on the environment and people in affected areas. Many have also seen the infrastructural development and services that have been provided for the logging companies. So there are good and bad sides of large scale logging. Many landowners are now in the position to make decisions about the future of their forests. One such group is the Madang Forest Resource Owners Association (MFROA) based in Madang. There are other similar groups being formed mainly with assistance from non governmental organisations, (In general, NGOs take time to listen and help), to find ways to develop their forest resources.

This chapter presents the story of MFROA members and their experiences in wanting to develop their own forest resources. The challenges and issues these landowners face as far as good governance and decentralization are concerned is presented together with suggested roles of government. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks and recommendations.
2. Madang Forest Resource Owners Association – its work and partners

2.1 Origin of MFROA

Many landowners in Madang wanted to develop their own land and forest resources, themselves. They sought help from the Foundation for People and Community Development Inc (FPCD), a local NGO involved mainly in community forestry work, to get them started. The Madang Forest Resource Owners Association (MFROA) was formed in 1998 and formally registered in 2001. Over 100 members signed up within the first few months of its existence, though many members have yet to renew their membership, which has to be done annually. Currently there are over 50 financial members. Membership of MFROA is open to all forest resources owners of Madang province with the one aim of doing forestry work themselves and using their respective forest resources.

Madang is situated on the northern coast of Papua New Guinea and has a land area of 28,732 square kilometres (sq km). The fertile coastal region contrasts with the inland areas, where the Adelbert and Finisterre Ranges comprise some of the most rugged mountains in Papua New Guinea. Madang’s forests are richly diverse, though much of the forested area is inaccessible due to the ruggedness of the terrain. 28,000 sq km of the province’s land area is covered by forest, of which 8,800 sq km (30%) have been identified as having potential for timber harvesting.

The province’s population of 290,000 predominantly resides in rural areas. There are 60 different languages and cultural groups within Madang Province, and Melanesian Pidgin is the main mode of communication between groups. The provincial capital is the town of Madang, which relies increasingly on business, revenues, and jobs derived from commercial logging enterprises within the province. The Provincial Government is based in Madang town (population 29,000) and administers most government functions.

Madang has experienced the one and only large scale clear felling logging operation in the country. The effects and impacts of this operation, in terms of environmental and social destruction, have been felt throughout the province. (MFROA members, pers com).
Appendix 1. Map of Madang and some MFROA Members Project sites

2.2 Who and what is FPCD’s role
FPCD is a local not for profit NGO, established in the early 1990s with the mission of improving and enhancing the quality of life for poor and under-privileged people. FPCD has worked towards that goal by implementing various integrated programs over the years. Currently, FPCD is focused on community forestry and supported by community development programs and advocacy / publicity work. Although it has national coverage, FPCD’s current target area is Madang province and work with members of MFROA. FPCD does capacity building of MFROA members mainly through the provision of training in forest and business management, and small sawmill technology operations and maintenance. Occasionally other courses are run, including good governance for the community leaders and others holding responsible positions in the communities.
In addition to assisting MFROA members, FPCD is helping to get MFROA established as an institution where it should eventually run its own affairs. The road to self reliance is not easy as many original members of MFROA found out already. However there are many MFROA members who are committed and FPCD will help them to achieve their goals. The story with MFROA and its members, is faced by many other forest resource owners groups throughout the country.

2.3 Community Forestry
Community forestry goes by a number of names in PNG. Some of the terms include ecoforestry; small to medium scale forestry; community based forestry enterprise, and community based forestry. Harvesting timber is typically by means of portable sawmills, with maximum benefits to the resource owners.

A portable sawmill is a small unit that can be dismantled and transported or carried by hand to the site where sawmilling can take place in situ. Portable sawmills come in various sizes and designs. Manpower requirements in carrying out portable sawmilling work varies from 2 – 7 persons. A typical sawmill weighs about 500 kg.

Box 1: Portable Sawmill example

Some key elements of community forestry in the PNG context are:
- Landowners own the forest resources and cut from their own land. Landowners live off their forests for their sustenance.
- Portable sawmills are small scale and less capital intensive than most logging.
- Portable sawmills are carried to the site and sawmilling is done in situ.
- Money earned from the sale of sawn timber is invested locally, mostly within the province.
(Salafsky et al 1997)

The only nationwide survey of community forestry was undertaken by FPCD in 1993/94, and showed the following:
- Over 2500 operators scattered throughout the country.
- Little or no link to local provincial forest authorities for help, support, extension work, and related matters.
- Cutting with no forest management plans in place
- All working in isolation, and left to their own devices.

It is important to point out that local people fit their forestry work in and around other social and economic activities; community forestry is not a full time vocation.

2.4 What MFROA Members have done

2.4.1 Training in Forest Management, Business Management, Sawmill Operations and Maintenance

MFROA members have undergone training in forest management, business management and small sawmills maintenance and operations. Such training has enabled MFROA members to be more informed in the course of what they want to do and/or are already doing regarding community forestry.

The understanding of their tropical forests and its global significance has opened a new level of insight and makes them appreciate and value their forests more. They are able to see the potential benefits they can earn from doing forestry work themselves compared to selling their forests resources to the state and foreign logging companies (Feedback from training courses).

Many MFROA members changed their attitudes as well regarding doing business. They realise now that they have to lift themselves up and out of their complacency and laid back kind of life to start doing things in a more business like way. In the running of their sawmills, MFROA members realise that proper operations and maintenance of their mills will ensure returns on their investment and therefore they have become more careful (Feedback from training courses).

2.4.2 Good Governance

The Good Governance training basically teaches participants their roles and responsibilities as leaders of their communities. It is aimed at those holding responsible positions, especially those on the boards or committees of the local church, schools, local business groups and other community based groups. With so much abuse and misuse by office holders, the training aims to bring in some guidance and help in the area of transparency, accountability and responsibilities by those holding leadership positions.

Participants who have undergone such training have been able to do their jobs with greater confidence. They ask the right questions, they ask for the right information, and even demand things be done the right way. There are testimonies of vast improvements in the running of their own meetings (Feedback from training courses).

2.4.3 Model Forest Management areas in strategic locations in Madang Province

Model projects pertaining to community forestry are set up in strategic locations throughout Madang province. Landowners wanting to learn certain aspects of forestry are able to visit these areas. There is a model house built with local materials from a forest management area. Money for supplementing non forest building products, such as cement, nails and roofing irons, came from selling of sawn timber from within the FMA.
Examples of forest management, following international Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards are also located in areas where access is easy for those wanting to learn about sustainable forestry practices. As resources are limited, a few good model projects are needed to become showcases for those wanting to go along the community forestry route. Madang already has played host to many visitors, both locally and from as far away as Africa, to see how community forestry is done.

2.4.4 Marketing of Ecotimber

Since 2001 MFROA members have been exporting “ecotimber” to New Zealand. This interim arrangement was made by Greenpeace New Zealand and the Imported Tropical Timber Buyers Group from New Zealand whilst waiting for full certification by the FSC of the FPCD group certification scheme in Madang.

The FPCD group certification scheme, ICF, has already undergone a full evaluation in June 2006. A draft report has been received from the certifier, Scientific Certification Systems of USA, which presented the corrective action requests (CAR) that needed attention. FPCD had already responded to the major CAR and is awaiting the result which should come soon. Members of MFROA will then be able to market fully FSC endorsed “ecotimber”.

The marketing of a fully fledged certified product under the FSC label will be a major milestone in forest management in PNG. Currently there is no large scale commercial forestry operations that is certified by independent third party bodies like that of the FSC. The government and other stakeholders will learn also from this exercise.

3. Forest Governance and Decentralization

3.1 1991 Forestry Act

The 1991 Forestry Act (and subsequent Amendments) came about as a result of the Barnett Commission of Enquiry into the Forest Industry in the late 1980’s. The 1991 Act was generally accepted by all, because among other things, it addressed the loopholes uncovered during the Barnett Enquiry.

Three of the six main objectives of the new act (PNG Forestry Act 1991) call for:

(i) the management, development and protection of the Nation’s forest resources and environment in such a way as to conserve and renew them as an asset for succeeding generations; and

(ii) The maximisation of Papua New Guinean participation in the wise use and development of the forest resources as a renewable asset; and

(iii) The utilisation of the nation’s forest resource to achieve economic growth, employment creation and industrial and increased down stream processing of the forest resources…

The key components of the 1991 Forestry Act included the following five provisions:

a. National Forestry Board

The National Forestry Board has comprised the following representatives:

- Managing Director of the PNG Forest Authority
- Two Departmental heads or their nominees
- Premiers Council Representative
- Chamber of Commerce Representative
- Civil Society Representative

The Board is the highest decision making body in the Forest Authority. Its main functions are (PNG Forestry Plan 1996):
- To provide advice to the Minister for Forests on forest policies and legislation
- To provide policy direction to the National Forest Service through the Managing Director
- To ensure sustainable forest Management in Papua New Guinea

b. Provincial Forest Management Committee
All 19 Provinces had a Provincial Forest Management Committee (PFMC). The PFMC was basically set up amongst other things, to provide a forum for consultation and co-ordination on forest management between national and provincial government, forest resources and special interest groups.

The PFMC comprises the following representatives:
- Provincial Administrator
- National Forest Service
- Local Level Council President
- Two Landowners
- One Environmental NGO representative

The main function of the PFMCs was to decide on how to develop the provincial forestry plans, pass them onto the National Forestry Board for endorsement, to be finally cleared by the Forest Minister.

c. National Forest Plan
A National Forest Plan was developed and is in place to guide the development and management of forest resources in the country. The plan was intended to be reviewed every 5 years – it expired in 2001 and needs to be updated. Essentially the National Forest Plan was to have emanated from the Provincial Forest Plans.

d. Obtaining Consent of Customary Owners
In order for the state to enter into an agreement with customary owners to develop the forest resources, consent had to be sought from the customary owners. This was an important clause as, if followed properly, it would have helped to deter and alleviate all the land related problems that are now predominant in the forestry industry today.

e. Board to consult with customary Owners
After the process of tendering the timber area and finally coming up with the successful tenderer, the Board should consult with the customary owners and the respective provincial government of its intention to award the Timber areas to the successful tender.
Details of the Forest Management Agreements will be spelt out and finalised before moving further to implementation of the forest management agreement.

**Discussions**

In general the Forestry Act 1991 provided opportunities for the customary owners to be involved in the forestry sector. The rather unsuccessful test has been the actual application and implementation of the Act on the ground.

At the moment, there is not a single landowner logging company operating at any of the current logging concessions in the country. There is nothing on the horizon to suggest that this will unless and until the Government makes a major U-turn and seriously starts finding ways to getting landowners to participate in forestry development, thus moving towards implementing objective two of the forestry act.

Almost 100% of logging operations and logging companies are foreign owned. In the government’s attempt to get landowner participation, there has been a process whereby landowners form a landowner company and are given a timber permit for their forest areas. The landowner company in turn signs what is called a Logging and Marketing Agreement with the foreign owned logging company to do the logging. This approach has failed; in reality the landowner company ends up paying all the bills and facing lawsuits whilst the logging company has little or no obligation (Barnet 1998).

The only sector where customary owners are fully in control of their forestry operations are those involved in small to medium scale forestry which includes community forestry. Basically these are customary owners wanting to do forestry work on their own land and primarily based on the proper and controlled use of portable sawmills. There are over 2000 small sawmill operators in the country (FPCD 1995). These people are left entirely on their own and badly need help to pursue their goals in forestry.

It is only in the last few years that the government has adopted a community forestry or ecoforestry concept and has been trying to implement it (EFP Program Documents 2002). There is still much to be done in bridging the gap between landowners wanting to do forestry work themselves and more experienced and better connected parties who could help them accomplish this.

**3.2 2005 Forestry Bill - Key Changes**

The new amendment 2005 Forestry Bill was introduced by the Forest Minister with some controversy. The point of contention was that the whole Bill did not go through the Forestry Board. Some key clauses were inserted without the Forestry Board’s knowledge and, despite public outcry, it was passed by parliament.

In the main, many of the 1991 Act remains the same. Three key changes of the 2005 Forestry Bill are outlined below:

- **a. Increases political control**
The new Forestry Board is now dominated by government representatives. Apart from the bureaucrats, other sectors representatives are done by the government. The comparative impartiality or neutrality that marked the earlier Board has disappeared.

The 1991 Act was a start in reforming the Forestry Sector. It had all the elements to address issues and cover loopholes that existed before. The involvement of the customary owners and the participation of the wider sector of the community as well as the consultative processes were key elements. They have all been more or less undone with the passing of the 2005 Forestry Bill. Basically the government will have full control of the board and decisions will most probably be biased towards the Government’s views.

b. Reduces landowner rights
The consultation and participation process of customary owners as well as other stakeholders including local authorities is now unclear. In some parts of the bill landowners’ views are sought whereas in some others they are not. The issue of informed consent by landowners to allow logging over their land is a crucial matter that needs attention. Any bypassing or short circuiting due process of getting included consent has and will always end up with disruptions to logging operations and finally ending up in the courts (ACF Celcor 2006).

c. Promotes unsustainable logging
There are clauses added to ensure that unsustainable forestry practices continue. Growth rates and silvicultural practices for assessing proper forest management regimes leave much to be desired in the forestry sector in PNG. Basically PNG forestry is like “creaming” and there is no sense of taking care of new crops that will be ready in the next round. The changes allow for easy access to new forest areas, calling them “extensions”.

The issue of resource sustainability for the collective benefit of all needs to be revisited. There are reservations about the accuracy of data for growth rates and estimating cutting cycles (Vigus 1993). Kingston (1989) pointed out that:

“in the absence of any real indications of mean stand composition or growth rates following selective logging, it could be assumed the productivity lies in the region of that experienced for similar forests in the South East Asia / Australian region, i.e., 0.4 to 2.0 cubic metres per hectare per annum. He goes on to conclude that:

“good control of selective logging can be expected to result in a stand which produces an average volume increment of 0.5 to 2.0 M3 of commercial log volume per hectare per annum and on this basis the forest could be re logged every 30 to 40 years.”

3.3 Discussions
The experience of Madang provides an instructive example of the kinds of problems and opportunities that exist in connection with communities and forests. These fall into four main categories: Growing awareness of environmental and social benefits, the division of labour and authority between land owners and the government, the issues of national vs foreign logging companies and bureaucratic red tape. In this section, I first discuss
these issues, followed by an account of what has been accomplished in Madang, concluding with a brief overview of some significant remaining constraints.

3.3.1 Environmental and Social Benefits

Madang is special in forestry as it is the first province in the country that had a large scale, clear felling logging operation. The Gogol Naru area totalling some 1,000 sq km of primary forests was acquired from landowners in the 1970’s, under the Timber Rights Purchase agreement. The concessionaire was Jant Pty Ltd, a Japanese company which basically converted all the non sawn timber wood into wood chips for pulp and paper.

The effects of the clear felling operation on the environment and the social aspects of life were felt throughout Madang and even throughout the country. Many locals did not want to see the consequences faced by their neighbours living in the Gogol Naru timber area to come to their areas (MFROA members, pers com). The once mighty Gogol River and its tributaries have changed forever due to heavy sedimentation and forest cover removal. Wildlife numbers have dwindled and the landscape has changed completely from primary forest to secondary re-growths and shrubs. The local people themselves have felt displaced and at times disoriented, leaving them feeling empty and disillusioned (Amele, pers com).

There have been other stories of logging experiences in other parts of the country but as a result of the Gogol Naru experience, many landowners began to value their forest resources more than in the past. They are no longer quick to sign over their rights to government authorities. However with changing times and the need for cash, many landowners are now challenged to make the right decisions for themselves and it is not always easy (Taksey pers com).

Although there are cases, where landowners jump at the first opportunity for some sort of forest related profit, even if it means selling their rights away, there has been a gradual shift by landowners in moving away from giving their rights to the state and wanting to be given the opportunity to manage their forests themselves. This is happening throughout the country. Unfortunately, government help has not come quickly enough and expectations have not been met, leaving many landowners disillusioned.

3.3.2 Division of Labour and Authority between Landowners and the Government

Why do I have to get permission to cut from my own land? This is a recurrent question that local landowners ask. There are clauses in the national law that are seen as foreign and as a relic from the colonial past that needs to be done away with. There are calls for a better law to clarify the roles, responsibilities and benefits distribution in a more equitable fashion (landowners pers com). There are also customary laws in place that are ignored in national law, to manage local assets. For example, people do not normally go out and cut any trees at any time to do whatever they want. Permission is asked and given, and trees to be removed are identified, as well as determining what to do after the trees are removed. There are rules in place in society to govern the use of the resources.
Although the people of PNG are the landowners, their use of this asset is seriously restricted by governmental regulations. There are three licences that landowners and forest developers have to apply for in order to harvest timber: a Timber Permit, a Timber License and a Timber Authority. The main differences are outlined below:

- **Timber Permit:**
  When dealing with customary land ownership, a timber permit is used. A Timber Permit usually covers large concession areas and is for a period of over 10 years. This is generally for large scale logging operations and covers all aspects of the management and governance of the operations. The Timber Permit is issued by the National Minister for Forests.

- **Timber Licence**
  The Timber License is issued by the National Minister for Forest to operators wanting to work on alienated land, which is either state land or private land. Licenses are issued with a maximum period of 12 months.

- **Timber Authority**
  The Timber Authority (TA) is issued by the Provincial Forest Minister and deals with forest under customary land ownership. TAs are issued to operators mainly for purposes of agricultural and road line clearance. Under the TAs, the law stipulates that the forest developer cannot cut more than 5000 m$^3$ per annum and that such timber must not be used for commercial purposes.

Although there is community receptivity to partnerships with the government in forest and land management, the current implementation is not providing a fair deal for landowners. Forest resource owners want full economic benefits from their forest resources. Landowners get an average of K10/ m$^3$ (1US$ = 0.234 PNG Kina) from the sale of timber under the current government system. Apart from timber, there are other benefits and uses of the forests. Landowners also want authoritative advice in identifying other non timber forest product uses of the forests and to help develop markets and uses for their products. Yet with the current system, the government provides little such support. Instead the government appears to be primarily interested in acquiring local landowners’ rights and giving their forest resources to the highest bidder. The government must approach this whole issue differently, if local people’s welfare is to be improved and if the environment is to be maintained.

### 3.3.3 National Logging and Foreign Logging

A big question is why, after more than 30 years of independence and with the 4th goal as well as the 2nd objective of the forestry Act, PNG citizen landowners have not been encouraged and supported by the government to do logging themselves? Instead foreign logging companies are encouraged to make agreements with local landowners and carry out logging on their behalf. Something has got to change this trend soon.

Current logging in PNG leaves much to be desired as far as sustainable logging and landowner benefits are concerned. The various standards of logging put out by the
Government including the national forest plan and the logging code of practices, to name two, are not being followed. Logging companies are here to do business and profit is their main motive.

On the other hand locals have a long term interest to ensure their forests are managed properly to continue to provide for their sustenance.

3.3.4 Bureaucratic Red Tape and Local Legal Knowledge

There is an inordinately large number of steps involved in getting the required government permits, (34), and the problems complying with this regulation have not yet been made clear. PNG is one of the world’s most rugged, mountainous terrains, inhabited by some 800 groups (most with different languages and cultures). Getting from one of these remote forest communities to the government offices where permits are available can be a major feat in itself. Compound that with the fact that the forestry officer is very likely not to be in, when the community person comes to begin the long process. The landowner can then wait (at considerable expense, in a strange community), or return home empty-handed. Actually obtaining any of the required permits is almost certain to require numerous trips to forestry offices.

But even if the landowner is able to comply with the legal red tape, perhaps with the help of NGO’s, he/she is disadvantaged in any kind of negotiation. Most villagers are illiterate; and even those who are literate are unlikely to have full knowledge of the laws that pertain to forest management in the country. They fall easy victims, in many cases, to unscrupulous negotiators (or even honest ones who assume that the villager knows more than he or she actually does know). In some cases, additionally, local elites have been bought off, eventually turning into representatives, or “front men” for companies and/or the government.

4. What are the issues MFROA Members are facing?

Given these attempts to improve forest management, both environmentally and socially, in Madang, there remain five particularly difficult problems / issues that local landowners are facing.

4.1 Not knowing their rights

Many of the problems that came about in the forestry sector came about basically because of the lack of understanding of forestry laws. Landowners are not given enough information, in simple language, for them to able to understand and apply.

For example, when landowners sign the rights over their forest resources to the state, they no longer have any control over that forest area until after the term of the permit period, which is usually ten years or more. There are certain restrictions in place during the term of the Permit period that Landowners need to know. Many landowners still think they can continue to hunt and live off their forests (pers communication with landowners).

Landowners have a right NOT to sign over their forest resources to the PNG forest authority. The choice of not going under the FMA should be clear to the landowners as
well so they do not feel they have no other choices. Landowners need to have this option presented clearly to provide time for them to consider what they would like to do.

4.2 Not knowing how to get involved in forestry work.
The PNG Forestry Authority needs to advise landowners that they need to be a Forest Industry Participant and register with the Forest Authority to be able to go into forestry businesses. Landowners need to know that they need a license to be able to cut timber for commercial purposes - that it does not matter whether you own the forest or not. There are rules in place for landowners wanting to get into forestry and authorities are not doing enough to help the local people to understand these rules. Many of these landowners find out after they entering the forestry business and or they seek help from non governmental organisations.

4.3 The decentralisation matter
Roles of the various government bodies need to be made clear. The role of the National Forest Authority, the role of the Provincial Forest Authority and in some provinces, there is a role of the National Forest Service.

Landowners need to know the roles and responsibilities of these various bodies so they can move forward in trying to develop their forest resources. Much frustration leading to resentment has occurred when, landowners are led on a merry go round by these various bodies and in many respects the various bodies are not working towards the same goal. The casualties from these differences within the various government bodies are the landowners who want to move ahead in developing their forest resources.

Under the 1991 Forest Act, the PFMC have the power to make decisions on forestry development matters in their respective provinces. Many of the NGO representatives and landowners representative on the PFMC do not know what their roles and responsibilities are (PFMC workshop reports unpublished 2005). If members of PFMC’s know very little to nothing about their roles and responsibilities, what chance have the ordinary forest resource owners have. It is the responsibility of the authorities to do the education and awareness and not left to non governmental organisation.

4.4 Lack of capital and technical support
Many landowners do not have the capital needed to get started in community forestry. They have the forest resources, the training and the desire to develop and manage their forest resources themselves but they cannot get started as they do not have the initial capital. Apparently even the lending banks are not helpful as their lending requirements raise the bar so high no average villager can afford it. Some creative organisations are needed in finding ways to bridge this huge gap.

The trend is for landowners running to NGOs for help in community forestry. The NGOs do not cover the whole country and their resources are very limited. There is a need for back up support and services. There is a need for regular extension visits and support to those in the field.
Those landowners wanting to undertake logging themselves have not always received the support they needed from the government. Why? Probably because it is a new thing and there is not much understanding or buy-in by the responsible authorities. This approach has not been tried and tested enough for the necessary bureaucratic changes to have taken place.

With community forestry the government will not be getting the kind of returns logging companies provide, especially in terms of Taxes and infrastructural services. Most of the financial returns from community forestry go back to the communities (Hunt 1999).

The government will fulfil objective two of its forestry act 1991 if it supports local people.

4.5 Hard work
Developing and managing one’s own forest resources does not come easily. Getting all members of a clan to agree to manage their own forests in the first place is in itself a major challenge, after which they often need to pool resources and/or make capital purchases. Who amongst them should be responsible for the assets? Who will be putting in time working, what should shifts look like? There are many such questions regarding the operations, and many other issues. Once the products are harvested, it is necessary to market them. After marketing, how can the group organise the income distribution? All of these steps require considerable commitment, faith, and persistence. This effort is not for the faint hearted.

5.0 What can the Government do?
The Forest Department is the authority on forestry matters in the country. There are many things it can do to help community forestry. This is an area where local people want to get meaningfully involved and the government will be fulfilling its Forestry Act objective number two if it pays attention to this sector. Below are six areas in which improvements should be made, in order to comply with the spirit of the law, and to improve conditions for both forests and people in PNG.

5.1 Laws/Regulations/Licences/Permits
Landowners wanting to develop their forest resources have to comply with the laws of the land. Current forestry laws are primarily made to support round log exports and large scale logging activities. The laws were created without considering the possibility that the people of PNG might want to do forestry work themselves. Nor were the various other forest services and benefits that can be derived from the forests factored in. It is high time that the laws are revisited, to accommodate the winds of change, which are gaining momentum. Many landowners want to be given the chance to develop their forest resources themselves. Many landowners now are already familiar with the adverse effects of large scale logging and do not want to repeat the same mistakes in their own forested areas (or what’s left of it). Increasingly, many landowners are also educated and well versed in the issues of forestry development, more aware than in previous times.
Laws and regulations need to accommodate the landowners’ desires to develop their own forestry resources. Current laws state that anyone wanting to go into commercial forestry must get a license and a permit from the forestry authority. Many say “Well and good if that forest area does not belong to you from the beginning. It is, however, a very strange situation that needs to be revisited when people wanting to cut timber from their own traditional lands have to get permission from the government.” This is particularly problematic when there is the feeling that the government does not in fact care much about them in the first place and does not have time, interest or funds to help them.

The recent changes in some key areas of the forestry law (2005) suggest a further pulling back of decentralization tendencies, when in fact what is needed is strengthening of decentralization, in response to the active interests of PNG’s landowners.

It is even more bizarre if you live in a place so isolated that flights go in once a week and you are forced to travel all the way to the capital because the local forestry officer is never at his office any way and even if he is, you will have to make an appointment which may be kept only if you are lucky. After all the hassles of getting to the capital and finally finding the head office, you are confronted by heavily armed security guards at the entrance of these government offices supposedly there to help you the simple villager. These security guards then take you on a merry go round before you finally find the person to talk to. Please make an appointment to meet with the officer. Hopefully you get to meet the officer as planned. All this trouble at your own expense!!

One of the most critical things that the government can do to improve the situation is in fact to follow its own law. There are clearly some benign laws in place. The public and critics are routinely reminded of this. If the law were followed, the government could contribute to the wider effort to support landowners as they begin to do their own forest management, including logging, themselves.

5.2 Use PFMCs
The Provincial Forest Management Committees (PFMC) are not functioning as they should. Many members of the PFMCs do not know their roles and their responsibilities (PFMC reports unpublished 2005). The PFMC is a key body in the decentralisation process. The power of decision making in forestry is now closer on the ground however it is not being fully utilised. This is an area that needs to be improved. The landowner representatives and the NGO representative on these committee need to be assisted so as to be able to play their important roles properly. To date, many of these reps show up at the PFMC meetings but do not participate meaningfully.

5.3 Categories of Forestry development
Forestry is the most important development intervention throughout most of the country. As over 80% of the country is forested with little or no road access, the development of forestry resources is also a major investment in opening up many parts of the country and making them accessible. The opening of these frontiers brings government services to rural dwellers as well and therefore is an important element in the overall development of PNG.
The government needs to develop programs specially designed for communities to take up logging and forest management. Landowners generally need time to develop the new capabilities needed for effective participation in the timber industry, as fully fledged forestry operators.

There is a big difference between getting landowners to do logging themselves and getting somebody else to do it for you. Getting landowners more effectively involved in logging and forest management will contribute to integrated development. The people’s forests are one of their central assets and are important for their future. The people are also concerned about sustainability and their own livelihoods, as a society. Good forest management is about access to goods and services, about the future of their children, about developing their districts and provinces in ways that fit with their ways of life. One can expect that landowners’ motives and initiative in doing forestry work themselves will be completely different to an outsider’s motives and attitudes toward developing the forests. The process and methods local people use in doing business will be vastly different from businesses led by outsiders. Local PNG landowners have yet to be given such an opportunity in any realistic way. In the few cases where local people have been able to become involved, this has made a significant, even vast, and positive difference in their way of life and the status of their forests.

5.4 Budget allocation
The Government must allocate funding to support the effort to strengthen landowners’ capabilities in forest management, including logging. There is no proper system in place whereby support can be provided to landowners in forestry. What little is provided is ad hoc and in some cases causes more harm than good. What is needed is an ongoing government system whereby budgetary allocations can be provided yearly to programs that support landowners for periods longer than 5 years (elections come every 5 years). Decentralization efforts around the world have been shown to suffer from this syndrome: They commonly devolve responsibilities, with no or insufficient budget; and we know that doesn’t work.

5.5 Extension support
The PNG government has forestry offices located all over the country. The government currently allocates a set of resources, available to all the active large scale operations in the provinces. In principle, a similar set of investments should be made available to local people wanting to develop their forest resources. Many wonder why the Government of PNG so actively and generously supports foreign logging companies, whose primary interest is in removing timber, while leaving its own citizens without such help.

The following story can give a flavour of the situation: In March and May of 2006, two landowners from the same timber area came separately to FPCD to discuss the timber permit that is going to be issued to a Logging Company over their respective timber area. Their position was that they are the landowners, and the Logging Company should be dealing with them first. Unfortunately no one in authority had ever explained to them that in signing their rights over to the state, they lost those rights over their forest...
resources. Basically this means the timber harvesters have no legal rights or obligations to deal with landowners and their issues, but are free to do whatever they want regarding the timber rights purchase area. This is but one example of many more similar cases occurring throughout the country. The authorities have not done their part. The process designed for getting landowners’ consent has not been properly or adequately followed. The landowners’ problems seem endless.

That the majority of the local populace cannot read or write complicates these issues, but these people are not ignorant or unintelligent. It is insulting and unrealistic for a government to think its own people are not able to make good decisions. If landowners are adequately informed they are able to make the right decisions, thus avoiding the many problems currently associated with forestry development and in fact with the development of the country. PNG is endowed with abundant natural resources but up till now, the government appears to be making decisions without proper, legally defined consultations with, or information dissemination to, the local owners of the resources!

Landowners wanting to do forestry themselves really need to have government authorities nearby to assist them. The story today in many parts of the country has been confrontational. Many forestry officers’ attitudes towards their fellow citizens, especially the notion that these citizens cannot do forestry work themselves, needs to be changed. Government officers are there to help the people.

5.6 Markets and Research
PNG is covered in tropical forest with over 200 species per hectare (Sekhran and Miller 1994). This rich biodiversity presents a unique challenge in its management. Attention should be paid to conservation of biodiversity, as well as the development options that may form important opportunities for local people.

The landowners needed to be educated in the value of the forests and to get a better sense of the many and varied benefits and services the forests can provide. As local people well know, timber is not the only product from the forest----but many imagine that timber is the only saleable product. This is far from true, but the potential of these forests to provide valuable products, with commercial values, that are useful elsewhere is inadequately understood. There is a need, particularly with the ongoing advances in modern science and technology and the shrinking of the globe, to study what may be more widely useful and what might be marketed. Additionally, the repercussions of bad management in such environments can be felt much more widely than previously thought. There is a need to be resourceful and mindful of possible negative impacts elsewhere.

What ever is known needs to be shared with PNG’s landowners; and adequate resources need to be put into research on NTFPs so that nothing is lost or destroyed and valuable benefits can be captured in a sustainable way.
6.0 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Land and forest are customarily owned. The rightful landowners need to be given the opportunity to manage their forest resources themselves. This has to done with the blessings and support of the national government. Since serious logging began in the 1970’s, no landowners have been given sufficient opportunity to develop their forest resources themselves. The rights of the customary landowners have been systematically taken away from them and given to foreigners to log their forests. This policy has not been good and the consequences of these arrangements have always left the majority of the landowners worse off than they were before and the state of the forests no better. It is important to remind us again the 4th goal of the constitution and the second objective of the Forestry Act 1991. The evidence to date is far removed from what has been written down and therefore there is need to take stock and make necessary changes.

The main question has been whether the forestry laws are suitable for the PNG situation or not. There may be a need to seriously revisit some of the more pertinent ones relating to land tenure.

The other aspect has been the full implementation of the law. It is important for both people and the government to go through the whole legal process instead of short circuiting the system. By following that process properly, the chances of achieving PNG’s goals will be higher and fewer problems will be encountered.

The following recommendations needed to be made:

a. The Government / Forest Authority needs to seriously assess whether the current forestry laws fit within the context of PNG society, especially on matters pertaining to land tenure and if not, to start making the necessary changes.

b. The Government needs to revisit the 4th goal of its constitution and more specifically the 2nd objective of the Forestry Act 1991 and assess how these goals and objectives can be achieved.

c. Landowners wanting to develop their own forests resources should be assisted as much as possible. Ultimately PNGans should be doing their own forestry on their own forest resources.
References


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