

**SNAPSHOTS OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FORESTRY
NETWORKS: COUNTRY AND NETWORK STUDIES**

This is one of series of reports commissioned by CIFOR as part of its study of 'Learning from International Community Forestry Networks'. All these studies were carried out within a tight budget and very brief time frame, which necessarily implied an anecdotal and impressionistic method of data collection. CIFOR and the authors acknowledge that the findings in these studies are thus partial. In our view, however, they do provide interesting insights into the complex world of networking and advocacy and are thus being made available to help networkers and those promoting community forestry to reflect on and, hopefully, improve their work.

**COMMUNITY FORESTRY IN YUNNAN (CHINA):
THE CHALLENGE FOR NETWORKS**

Marcus Colchester¹

Community Forestry means that the local people manage forests to improve their living standards, with economy and efficiency and sustainably, while protecting their environment. In my opinion, in Yunnan we have not yet been very successful with Community Forestry. The only attempts have been made with outside funding. Once the funding stops the Community Forestry cannot go on.²

¹ Marcus Colchester, Director, Forest Peoples Programme: marcus@fppwrm.gn.apc.org

² Interview with forestry school professor, Yunnan, 23 April 2002.

Acknowledgements:

This study was carried out as part of the CIFOR project titled '*Learning from International Community Forestry Networks*' funded by DfID and Ford Foundation. I would like to thank Prof. Xu Jianchu and the staff of the Centre of Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge in Kunming for hosting and helping to organize this visit and also the many people who agreed to be interviewed including; Zhou Heng Fang of the Yunnan Forestry Department; He Wen Hua, Head of Administrative Bureaux of the Prefecture Forestry Bureau in Shangri-La (Zhongdian); Yuan Zheng Dong, Head of Nature Protection in Shangrila Town Forestry Bureau; Wang Li, Head of Nixi Township Forestry Station; Zhuiduo Wang Dui, Household head of the Tibetan Village of Tang Dui, Nixi Township; Shen Xue Wu and Luo Li Xin, of the Yi Village of Jiulong Zhai ; Li Bensheng, Liu Zhao and Ms. Han of the Yunnan Provincial Forestry School; Liu Ying Jie and Mao Fang Fang of the Yunnan Provincial Forestry School; Zhao Juncheng, Xuan Yi, Kang Yunhai and Mo Wencun of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences; Chen Fan of the Yunnan Environmental Monitoring Centre Station; Li Chun of the Kunming Branch of the CITES Authority; He Pi Kun of FCCDP; Zhao Yaqiao of CDS; Yi Shaoliang, Deputy Director of the International Cooperation Office of the South West Forestry College; Chen Fang, Lai Qingkui and Li Xianzhong of the South West Forestry College. I would also like to thank Ben Hillman of the Australian National University for some sharp insights. The exceptional help and hospitality provided by Ai Xihui of the Kunming Institute of Botany deserves particular thanks. I would also like to thank Mary Hobley and Ai Xihui for comments on the first draft. None of these can be held responsible for the interpretation that follows.

Executive Summary:

China's south-western province of Yunnan is a mountainous area of high biological and cultural diversity that was annexed into China relatively late in Chinese history. The province has lost over two thirds of its original forest cover and lost half of what remained in the last fifty years. Ethnic minorities make up about a third of the population of the province but predominate in forested areas. Chinese policy towards 'minority nationalities' at first recognized their right to self-determination but since liberation has oscillated between assimilationist and integrationist approaches. Despite strong central government control, the law grants them an important measure of cultural and institutional autonomy at the local level.

Nationally, forest policy has been highly centralized and geared towards timber production. Quota-driven overharvesting has depleted forests and led to serious soil erosion, local impoverishment, flooding and massive loss of life in the lowlands. While mass afforestation efforts have disappointed. Since 1998, the government has banned logging in Yunnan, allowing only a very restricted cut for domestic use.

Imprudent natural resource use is linked to the doctrine of State ownership of all lands and forests and the imposed structure of village collectives. Since the late 1970s, the government has progressively devolved land and then forests to local farmers to manage and enjoy use rights to. Massive increases in agricultural production have resulted, but the lesser degree of autonomy granted farmers with respect to forest land, combined with the top-down quota system, inadequate supervision capacity, poor delineation of forests and the slower rate of return on investment have frustrated social forestry initiatives. Farmers' skepticism that devolved tenure would really give them rights over timber has been confirmed by the logging ban. At the same time, in Yunnan, many upland farmers are being obliged to plant trees on their higher fields, with the aim of limiting run-off. The simultaneous loss of grain for subsistence and income from timber has hit farmers hard. The losses have not been made up with subsidies and grain handouts.

Local activists distinguish between the government's 'social forestry' and the 'community forestry' that has been promoted, since the late 1980s, by the Ford Foundation, international development assistance projects and the international networks, notably RECOFTC. Despite major advances in awareness raising, training, the development of forestry school courses and curricula, and despite numerous educational pilot projects, community forestry has not yet 'taken off' in the province. This can only come when the central government's policy changes.

Laws restricting civil society organizations are quite strict in China, yet despite these limitations an incipient provincial level network has evolved promoting participatory approaches to development. Efforts to promote a national level community forestry network have been less successful. Although Yunnan has had a relatively limited experience with international community forestry networks, local actors provide highly insightful lessons and suggestions about how such networking should be improved. International networking is valued as a source of information and inspiration but should be made more interactive, locally driven and strategic.

The main challenges now facing community forestry in Yunnan are achieving national policy reform, and building local capacity and awareness in both communities and forestry bureaux. Recent government moves to allow village level democracy and slim down the administration offer opportunities to give farmers greater initiative. Perhaps minority areas, where indigenous forest related knowledge is retained, and where more autonomy is, notionally, allowed, offer hopeful beginnings.

1. Yunnan's Forests: Historical and Social Context

Once a distinct kingdom known as Nanzhao on China's south-western borders, what is today the Province of Yunnan first fell under Chinese suzerainty in the mid-13th century. For the following two centuries, in common with many other 'tribal' areas in the south, the area was administered by indirect rule through local elites (*tusi*). However, during the Ming dynasty, these local chieftaincies were brought under the control of the Confucian bureaucratic regime and in the 18th century hereditary chieftaincies were, officially at least, abolished.³

Han (Chinese majority) migration into the area intensified in the 19th century and led to the steady loss of much of the best lowland agricultural land to these settlers, provoking a number of rebellions by the indigenous peoples, which were eventually suppressed. However, the weakening of Empire and rise of warlordism in the late 19th century and first half of the 20th century attenuated this pressure on the lands and forests of the province, only for it to intensify again in the second half of the 20th century. Yunnan, which was 50% forested in the 1950s, was left with only 24.9% forest cover by 1981.⁴

Notwithstanding, the forests of Yunnan remain extensive and diverse, especially in the more mountainous parts where the indigenous peoples, who make up nearly 13 million of the province's population of 40 million people, predominate.⁵ With an overall area of 394,000 sq. km, most of it lying above 1000 metres and 94% of which is officially described as mountainous, Yunnan includes a very wide variety of ecosystems. Forest types range from the dense tropical rainforest found along the Burmese and Laotian borders in the south, to mixed coniferous forests in the highlands bordering Tibet to the northwest, with a number of types of broadleaved evergreen and semi-deciduous forests lying in between.⁶ As a consequence, Yunnan is considered one of the most biodiverse provinces in China, containing about half of the nation's total number of species⁷ and with the tropical forest area of Xishuanbanna alone containing one sixth of China's higher plant species.⁸

Yunnan is also one of the most ethnically diverse areas in the country, host to 25 of the country's 55 recognised 'minority nationalities', who numerically make up about one third of the national population of minorities. An old Chinese saying holds that: 'Where there is a mountain, there is a forest; where there is a forest, there is an ethnic minority village'.⁹ The saying remains true today. Ethnic minorities, even though they

³ Mackerras 1994; Storey et al. 1998:811. Chinese administrative outposts were established in Yunnan in the 9th century and then eclipsed as the power of Nanzhou spread. Annexation to China was achieved by the Mongol khanate.

⁴ Mackerras 1994.

⁵ Dong Henqiu 1999:4. Satyawadhna (1990:87) gives the much higher figure of 32 million members of ethnic minorities in Yunnan. According to Mackerras (1994) nationally some 40% of China's forests fall in ethnic minority areas, even though these peoples make up only about 9% of the total population. He Pikun et al. note that 37.2% of forests by area are in ethnic minority areas – 56.3% by standing volume of timber (He Pikun, Yu Dejiang and Li Weichang 2000:7).

⁶ Richardson 1990.

⁷ Zhou Yuan, Zhou Dequn, Zhang Lichang and Zhang Jiaxiang 2000:92.

⁸ He Pikun, Yu Dejiang and Li Weichang 2000:27.

⁹ He Pikun, Yu Dejiang and Li Weichang 2000: forward (not paginated).

officially comprise only 9% of China's population occupy some 66% of the country's total land area, notably the more remote upland and isolated areas where pressure on resources has been less intense and transport less developed.¹⁰ The future of both China's forests and ethnic minorities are thus closely bound together.

1.1 Ethnic Minority Policy

Chinese policy towards ethnic minorities has been through many changes. The assimilationist approach that endured during the later stages of the Empire was ostensibly rejected by the early Republican movement under Sun Yat Sen. Despite a strongly nationalistic undercurrent, the historic Manifesto at the First National Congress in 1924, announced the Republican movement's recognition of 'the right of self-determination of all nationalities within China', which after the overthrow of imperialism and warlords was to be reconstructed as a 'free association of all nationalities'.¹¹

Although never effectively put into practice by the Republicans - and later repudiated by Chiang Kai Shek - the same policy of self-determination for nationalities was adopted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1931, with explicit recognition of their right to secede from China if they so chose. Only after its accession to power and its assertion of a 'One China' policy did the CCP change its approach to 'minority nationalities'. By the 1950s the official policy was strongly integrationist with local autonomy being granted under fairly strict central control. The 1954 Constitution contemplated offering regional autonomy in 'areas where people of minority nationalities live in concentrated communities'. However 'minority' areas that resisted integration were occupied by the PLA - the most contentious example being Tibet.¹²

The government's policy towards ethnic minorities hardened during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, during which time an overtly assimilationist approach was adopted, according to a logic that all ethnic differences were to be overcome as part of class struggle. However, following Mao Zedong's death in 1976, tolerance for local difference was again gradually encouraged and Han 'chauvinism', long criticized by Zhou Enlai, was officially recognized as a problem and cause of dissent. Once again communities were allowed to use their own languages and regulate their internal affairs according to custom. In 1984, these rights were formalized in the Law on Regional Autonomy for Minority Nationalities. While still subject to strict limits - and the impositions of the all-pervading CCP - the growth of respect for cultural difference is now a marked aspect of social change in rural China. Pride in identity has grown in the 1980s and 1990s.

2. Forest Policy since 'Liberation':

Forests presently cover some 14% of the national territory of China, with recent government statistics giving figures for forest cover, including plantations, ranging

¹⁰ He Pikun, Yu Dejiang and Li Weichang 2000:4 but see page 27 where the figure given is 55%.

¹¹ Mackerras 1994.

¹² Grunfeld 1987; Shakya 1999.

between 128 and 134 million hectares. At 'Liberation', all forest lands were nationalized and were subject to the Ministry of National Development, which promoted timber utilization especially, in the North, by sawmills. With the establishment of a Ministry of Forestry in 1952, plans for forest management, protection, utilization and fire control were promulgated. In line with national agrarian policies, a large proportion of forests were collectivized especially of degraded areas slated for reforestation. Reforestation and forest management, according to plans and targets of the Ministry and State Council, were first allocated to 'cooperatives' and later to much larger collectives. By 1960, some 80,000 forest farms had been established with a total labour force of close to 1 million people.¹³

However, management of natural forests remained more centralized and the forests were subjected to intense pressure to meet China's ambitious industrialization goals. The 'Great Leap Forward' of the late 1950s is now widely recognized to have provoked massive over-exploitation of forests, with severe consequences for soils and hydrological cycles. Serious deforestation and a national fuelwood crisis are mentioned as other consequences.¹⁴ The social problems occasioned for the ethnic minorities have received less attention but were equally severe.¹⁵ Some of these problems recurred during Cultural Revolution when party cadres felt entitled to override attempts by 'counter-revolutionary' forest managers to limit harvests. Widespread illegal logging, to meet industrial production quotas, and the control of large areas of forests by the PLA compounded the pressure. Rates of harvest surged ahead of official calculations of sustained yield. By the 1980s, China recognized that it faced a supply and demand crisis.¹⁶ Annual harvests in Yunnan were officially admitted to be more than three times that prescribed under the State Plan, not including fuelwood use and clearance of forests for agriculture.¹⁷

By the 1990s, China was beginning to suffer the consequences of this profligate use of natural forests. Soil erosion on hillsides was readily discernible, river systems became silted up and flash floods inundated huge areas of the lowlands, occasioning hundreds of thousands of people to lose their lives and a major loss in agricultural production. Yunnan announced a suspension of logging in 1998 and, in December 2000, the central government decided to prioritise forest protection, especially in upland and mountain areas. As part of this plan:

- Logging was to be prohibited in 60 million hectares of forests (half the national forest estate) in the upper Yellow and Yangzi rivers
- 8.6 million has. of new woodland would be planted over the next ten years.¹⁸

These programmes have had a number of major social impacts. State-owned logging companies have been wound up, machinery moth-balled and the labour force retrenched. About 1 million workers in timber processing industries became redundant, while local governments lost large proportions of their revenues, endangering social services.

¹³ Richardson 1990:171.

¹⁴ Richardson 1990:22.

¹⁵ Yin Shaoting 2001:478.

¹⁶ Richardson 1990:110.

¹⁷ Richardson 1990:111.

¹⁸ Mallee 2001:6.

At the same time the government intensified measures to transform the livelihoods of upland farmers and ethnic minorities. Campaigns to halt shifting cultivation intensified. A programme of 'Upland Conversion' to curb all agriculture on lands with a slope of over 25 degree was imposed, with the central government announcing ambitious tree-planting targets with a focus on 'pilot' areas. By the end of the year, 303 counties were implementing the programme. Under this programme, farmers were encouraged to plant trees on their steeper fields, and were offered free grain and cash compensation to make up the losses. Additional sums were advanced to establish nurseries and acquire saplings. Problems have emerged as the target-driven approach has been imposed without giving scope for local farmers' interests and views.¹⁹ As noted below, the programme also sets in jeopardy much of the progress that has been made promoting community forestry.

3. Community Forestry in Yunnan:

One of the puzzles of this study has been to decide what kinds of forest management in China in general, and in Yunnan in particular, should be treated as 'community forestry'. Many government officials, including some interviewed for this study, either reject the term 'community forestry' or see it as synonymous with existing programmes of social forestry.

On the other hand, the majority of academics, forestry teachers and NGO representatives interviewed see 'community forestry' as something quite distinct from the government's approach to social forestry. As one interviewee explained:

There is no private forest in China – all land belongs to the State. So community forestry never means full tenure of the forest land. Forest Bureaux always have a hand in things. There is very heavy government control of forest lands. All tree cutting requires a permit from the Forestry Department and its offices. In [real] community forestry, land belongs to the community. The villagers should have the authority, have a right, to control the forest and sell the timber and do everything, if it belongs to them. The communities should have the right to make their own decisions about their forests. This is very different from what happens in China. The government has very different goals and purposes from those of the farmers. Currently, the government is promoting the ecological functions of forests, while the farmers want economic returns, including environmental values. So there are three differences: ownership, goals and methods of management. The fourth difference is in the results. Although the government's project is to plant trees there is no sign of forests. During the past ten years enough trees have been planted to cover Yunnan three times over but in fact the increase in forest cover is minimal. [On the other hand] village tree planting operations have been more successful and wood lots have been established in the community level schemes.

¹⁹ Mallee 2001:7-8.

Another interviewee emphasized that in ‘community forestry’ the local users should be the managers of the forests and have clear rights to: make the decisions; participate in policy formulation; and have clear and well protected rights to land. In fact, however, none of these factors holds true in government run social forestry schemes.

Other interviewees also emphasised that community forestry should mean the revalidation and re-incorporation of customary forms of forest management. Yunnan’s huge ethnic diversity, with its rich variety of social groups with ways of life traditional adapted to making a livelihood from the wide range of forest types, should provide a major opportunity for community forestry, based on customary law, on traditional religious respect for nature and a wealth of practical knowledge and skills of how to make a living from forests.²⁰

However, for a very large number of reasons these customary systems of land use have been occluded by changes imposed by the central government: radical property rights reforms; the collectivization of land; changes in the administration; the prohibition of shifting cultivation; the impositions of forestry policy; conservation laws; assimilationist and integrationist social policies towards indigenous peoples; all have dramatically changed the relations between these peoples and their forests. The degree to which indigenous knowledge has survived these changes is therefore all the more remarkable and testimony to its value and relevance to local peoples.²¹

Mindful of the methodology agreed for this study, this report has therefore attempted to summarize the general context of community forestry in China. It looks at some of the main obstacles to effective community participation in the agrarian sector and then summarizes both the government’s ‘social forestry’ programme and the ‘community forestry’ that has been promoted in Yunnan by external funders and networks over the past 15 years. Only then, with this general context set out, does the report examine in more detail the Yunnan experience with networking.

3.1 Agrarian reforms

In the early years of the communist revolution, China underwent a far-reaching agrarian reform. Large landowners and even richer peasants were dispossessed of their properties and these were redistributed among the poor and landless. These reforms, while radical, affirmed the principal of private land ownership, including the right to buy, sell or rent land.²² However, from 1952 onwards China moved to an even more radical reform of agriculture – and one which in the medium term was to prove fatally inefficient. All land was taken over by the State and allocated to collectives. As Selden and Aiguo Lu note:

In practice, however, while collectives secured formal ownership rights, the state assumed tight control over transfer rights, including the sale, rent or exchange of land. Use rights... were vested in a collective condominium in which the collective exercised immediate authority but crop choice, availability and distribution of inputs , prices both of inputs

²⁰ Yin Shaoting 2001

²¹ He Pikun, Yu Dejiang and Li Weichang 2001; CBIK 2000, 2001; Yin Shaoting 2001.

²² Selden 1993:187.

and crops, and marketing all remained state prerogatives...Teams and brigades could not sell, transfer or rent their land except as directed by the state. Nor could they autonomously decide what to grow, or even not to cultivate unproductive land... The integration of peasants and land was so tight that one is almost tempted to say that the land owned the people. Collective ownership of the land empowered the collective to control the labor power of all members who lived on it... Collective members were bound to the villages of their birth not only in the sense that they were barred from migrating elsewhere but also in that they were legally obligated to labor for, and on terms set by, the collective.²³

From 1951 onwards this same process of land redistribution was also imposed on minority areas.²⁴ What Mao called the ‘high tide of collectivisation’ was achieved in 1955-1956, by the end of which period over 80% of all agricultural land had been collectivized and put under the control of village cooperatives.²⁵ Despite government promises to respect the customs of ethnic minorities, and Constitutional guarantees of regional autonomy for such areas, these policies were also rapidly imposed on the minority nationalities, starting with the Uygurs of Xinjiang between 1951-1953. During the mid-1950s, violent rebellions against these impositions flared up in a number of areas, such as among the Khamba, where the Kanding uprising resulted in rebellious Tibetans being bombed into submission,²⁶ and among the Yi of Yunnan and Sichuan, where the imposed changes, which included enforcing a prohibition on slave-holding, provoked a guerrilla war that lasted several years.²⁷ In other areas, these reforms were effected more peacefully, as among the Hani and Dai of southern Yunnan.²⁸

By the end of the 1970s, the failure of this form of agricultural centralism had become clear even to the leadership in Beijing. A third round of agrarian reforms was effected in which collective lands were allocated to the households. Under this system land remained state property but use rights were contracted to households. At first, these contracts were of very short duration but they were gradually extended once the government began to appreciate that only with a measure of long-term security would farmers take the risk of investing their own labour, initiative and capital in land improvements. Lately, farmers have even been allowed to lease lands amongst each other and pay for outside labourers to work their own lands. Massive gains in production have resulted to the extent that, in marked contrast to the famine years in the 1950s and 1960s, China now enjoys a substantial grain surplus. Notwithstanding, the farmer remains tied to his collective. The household still has to make payments of specified quantities of crops to the work team of which it is part. It must still pay a land tax and make contributions to various public funds and undertake unpaid labor to public works. Some commentators note, ironically, that despite all the reforms the Chinese peasant remains a tenant farmer now working for a new landowner, the state collective.²⁹

²³ Selden 1993:190-191.

²⁴ Shakya 1999:138.

²⁵ Shakya 1999:138-9.

²⁶ Shakya 1999:139.

²⁷ Heberer 2001:215.

²⁸ Mackerras 1994:199.

²⁹ Selden 1993:192.

3.2 Social Forestry:

As noted, the promotion of tree-planting by collectives has long been a central part of forest policy in the PRC. In the 1980s, the contract responsibility system, which was proving so successful in improving agricultural production and promoting rural industries, was adopted for forests also.³⁰ Forest boundaries were re-delineated to permit this reallocation of forest land. By the mid-1980s some 30 million hectares of mountain forests had been allocated to households for afforestation and management.³¹ By the year 2000, China's forestry areas were divided approximately equally between State forests, collective forests and household forests³² – the latter category mainly being barren areas allocated to farmer households for afforestation and reforestation. In Yunnan, where natural forests make up a greater proportion of forestry land, the areas of natural forests allocated to households is even less. Especially in the uplands, the promotion of collective forestry has gone hand in hand with programmes to ban millennial systems of shifting cultivation.

Interviewees point out that these transformations in tenure have confronted farmers with a bewildering series of institutional changes. In Yunnan, there has been five major changes of the main institution charged with making decisions about land. Between 1950 and 1959 lands were devolved from the 'township' to the 'village'. Then from 1959 to 1964/7 authority over land shifted to 'cooperatives'. In the next phase, 1964/7-1982/3, the main authority became the 'production brigades'. After 1983, 'cooperatives' were restored to authority and since 1990 the emphasis has been placed on the recognition of 'village groups'.

The important point that interviewees repeatedly emphasized is that despite the notional return of land use rights to the farmers through these reforms the degree of State intervention in farmer decision-making has remained very great. As Zhao Junchen notes of the collective system:

*The state owned the land and were managed and used by the so-called 'three-level administrative unit' ie the People's Commune, the production brigade and the production team, while the individual farmers just simply obeyed the demands and orders of the rural leaders. They neither own the use right of the land nor could they sell the products they obtained from the forest and land. So their activity of production was once frustrated to a certain degree.*³³

Social forestry operations remain subject to a complex set of permits and regulations and all cutting is subject to strict quotas which still derive from central government and are apportioned out down through the provinces, counties, townships and administrative villages down to the household level. The government had used the slogan 'He who plants a tree owns a tree' but in fact just getting hold of a quota to cut is hard and 35% of sales are payable to the Forest Bureaux. Subtract also the costs of harvest, transport and so on and the margins of return to the farmer are very low.

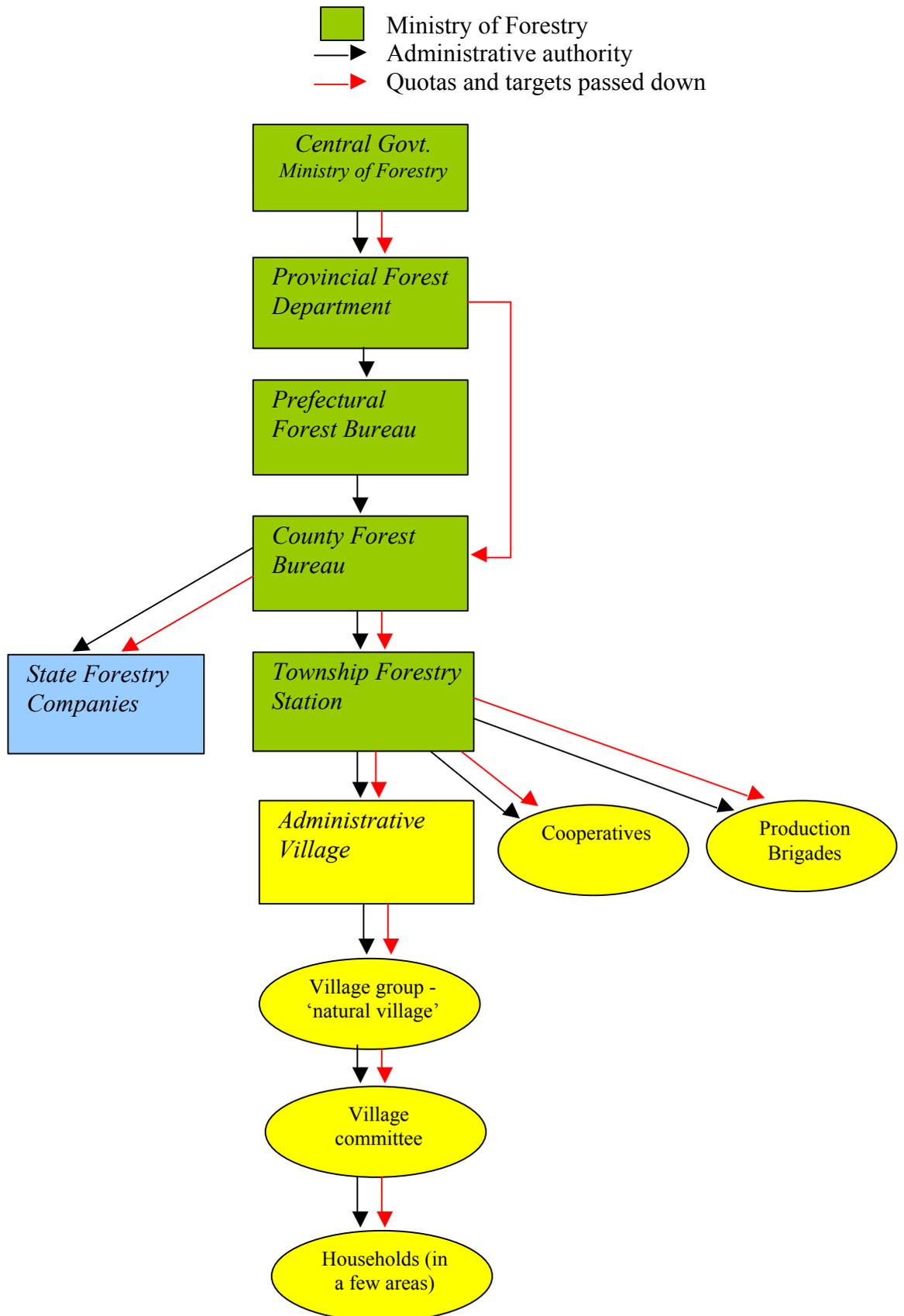
³⁰ YASS 1999a.

³¹ Richardson 1990:98.

³² Wen Haizhong 2000.

³³ Uraiven Tan Kim Yong, Zhao Junchen and Kang Yunhai 1996:147.

Figure 1: The Forest Administration made simple



Although farmers are given responsibility to plant and manage trees and the right to a share of the profits, they do not have free access to markets. All timber sales in Yunnan are controlled by the government. Furthermore, until the new Village Organic Law of 2002 is implemented, the village committee will remain essentially an organ of the government administration and not an independent organ of the community. Under the current system prevalent in collective forests, 30-50 year contracts to forest are entrusted to 'village groups' which then have the right to use and manage that forest land and secure the benefits. Rights are then allocated and managed by the Village Committee, which deals with forest rights, checks timber movement and oversees forest management. In reality, however, township forestry officials oversee nearly all these decisions and decide how quotas for timber cutting will be allocated. The top-down nature of the administration is illustrated in the simplified organigram on the previous page.

It is generally admitted that this system of social forestry has failed to achieve its targets. Lacking a sense of real security of tenure, farmers' collectives and households have failed to invest their labour, initiative and capital in either establishing viable woodlots and plantations or in natural forest management.³⁴ Initially farmers entrusted with forests have tended to overharvest them for short term gain and have failed to plan for the long term.³⁵ The government has tried to give farmers the confidence to plan for the future by lengthening the extent of contracts to 30-50 years in natural forests and for between 50 and 70 years for those restoring barren lands. The problem is that having experienced such rapid changes in land tenure and forestry policy over the past fifty years farmers have not felt confident that the new policies would last any longer. Senior foresters in Yunnan admit that when the *liangshan* (barren lands) policy was introduced:

*local people had no confidence in the sustainability of the policy and were unwilling to input their capital and labour for reforestation and greening.*³⁶

Another of the principal reasons for the failure of this system of social forestry to establish plantations and secure sound management of natural forests is that the system remains much too top-down. After household responsibility forests first led to overcutting, the government responded by tightening rules and stricter enforcement of.³⁷ On the other hand, the actual delineation of collective forests has taken a long time and is still not complete, the combination of strict rules, an overstretched forestry service and unclear boundaries has been optimal for promoting illegal cutting, collusion between local foresters and villagers: communities report conflicts over forests as a result. Senior academics point out that, despite the policy intent, participation in social forestry projects is really quite low.³⁸

³⁴ Zhou Yuan, Zhou Dequn, Zhang Lichang and Zhang Jiaxiang 2000:96.

³⁵ Zhou Yuan, Zhou Dequn, Zhang Lichang and Zhang Jiaxiang 2000:101.

³⁶ Zhou Yuan, Zhou Dequn, Zhang Lichang and Zhang Jiaxiang 2000:99.

³⁷ Uraivan Tan Kim Yong, Zhao Junchen and Kang Yunhai 1996:149.

³⁸ Li Weichang and He Pikun 1998.

Case Study 1: The Yi of Jiulong Zhai³⁹

The village of Jiulong Zhai, located about 80 kilometres east of Zhongdian, houses about 200 White Yi people. Like many of China's two million Yi, those in Jiulong Zhai (Nine Dragons Village) recall a long history of migrations in the mountains on the borders between Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou provinces. They arrived at their current site about 80 years ago. At that time the White Yi were still subservient to the dominant Black Yi, slave ownership was still common and hunting for deer and bear complemented the subsistence-based way of life.

Following liberation, owning slaves was abolished and the Black and White Yi groups were separated to break up 'feudal' relations of dependency. In 1957-8, the Black Yi of Jiulong Zhai were removed to the other side of the mountain which faces them and the remaining White Yi were reorganized as a collective. Despite these interventions their mainly subsistence-orientated way of life continued, although hunting declined and chickens, pigs and cattle were introduced. Gradually over the years the government has brought in new services. Today the village boasts schools - with Yi being taught in the elementary schools and Chinese at primary school level - electricity, piped water, and a clinic. A row of village-run shops and eating houses clusters alongside the narrow, twisting, metalled mountain road which runs past the village towards Lake Lugu.

The Yi remain proud of their traditions and culture. Their religion is vigorously maintained and each village still has its own ritual specialist, whose three-day-long chants accompany the departing souls of the dead on their journey to heaven. The Yi also keep their own lore books, long written down in Mandarin, and regulate their internal affairs according to customary law. Village justice is administered through a council of elders, made up of those - mainly men but including some women - who are respected, not elected, for their wisdom. Traditional annual torch festivals, celebrated according to a lunar calendar, remain important occasions when evil spirits are chased off and sheep sacrificed.

The current village is set high up in forested hills between spectacular peaks. The Yi cultivate upland barley on the lean shoulders of the high hills, and keep herds of sheep and numerous horses. They live in untidy log cabins that straggle along the ridges between the higher mountains. They have long been and still are today, they readily admit, poor. Mean cash incomes may be as low as 100 RMB/person/year, which they derive in roughly equal proportions from their livestock, from the sale of wild mushrooms, from off-farm labour and from eco-tourism.

During the 1980s, the forests in the area were reclassified and those nearby were reallocated to the village as 'collective forests', under the control of local forestry officials. The fir and pine forests were nevertheless steadily depleted. As the village grew, farmlands gradually extended up the hillsides. At the same time conflicts over timber theft were common as the boundaries between the cooperatives' allocations were often unclear. Cash from legal and illegal timber sales provided the main source

³⁹ Based on a one-day field visit and interviews with officials, villagers and eco-tourism operators.

income for most villagers. The establishment of the Bita Hai Nature Reserve in 1982 did not have much effect on the villagers, but in the late 1990s the near simultaneous sharpening of protected area regulations, the 'Upland Conversion' programme and the logging ban have now combined to heavily restrict their livelihoods and incomes. Nearly a quarter of their fields have already been replanted with slow-growing timber species. Now, with sales of timber banned, cash incomes have been much reduced. Free grain is being distributed to farmers to compensate for the conversion of their fields. Observes one resident: *'We are concerned about what will happen when the grain subsidies cease. We will definitely not have enough land to provide for our needs'*.

Forestry officials say that the only answer for these upland dwellers is to migrate to town to sell their labour or to open small businesses, meanwhile they have made arrangements for the villagers to make temporary camps during the summer months in the nearby Bita Hai nature reserve. There they are allowed to offer pony-rides to visiting tourists, who need help to return to their coaches having clambered down a two kilometre trail through the forests to admire Bita Lake. The income is not spectacular, however. Parks officials cream off 20% of the takings leaving the villagers to scrimp a profit from the remainder.

Senior foresters for their part admit that:

Strict restrictions were imposed on the silvicultural activities of the local communities and villagers. The policies motivating the participation of local population were wavering from time to time, leading to an ever-low level of participation among local people.⁴⁰

The problem is compounded by the fact that not only does the government provide little political space to farmers but also farmers are quite unused to occupying such political space or even to be being asked their point of view. Notes Deng Weijie:

Most farmers are accustomed to activities arranged by the Government and never consider expressing their opinions, ideas and comments on proposals. People are not willing to make comments although they may have relevant observations. So the farmers have not developed a sense of participation, and they are therefore completely at a loss when the rights to participation and decision-making are returned to them.⁴¹

A number of interviewees also noted that underlying this mutual miscomprehension between government and farmers is the strongly held conviction among forestry officials that farmers can't manage forests. Noted one interviewee:

They think that the farmers are responsible for forest loss through collecting for fuelwood, house construction and through clearance for agriculture. In fact, the main pressure on the forests came from the companies which harvest timber. Yunnan has long been one of the major

⁴⁰ Zhou Yuan, Zhou Dequn, Zhang Lichang and Zhang Jiexiang 2000:94.

⁴¹ Deng Weijie 1998:223.

exploitation zones. Huge national timber companies have cleared the forest for national use. The farmers thus blame the companies and the officials blame the farmers. The farmers think that if the only people with access to forests was themselves then they could control it. The government doesn't believe the farmers and so is reluctant to grant rights to them, thus they get no benefits and ignore the regulations.

Farmers' skepticism over whether they will see the long term benefits of government social forestry policies have turned out to be well founded. A number of other policies are simultaneously undermining the livelihoods and security of the farmers.

The first is the policy of 'Poverty Alleviation' under which upland communities, especially those practicing shifting cultivation, are resettled on 'suitable land'. However, government officials admit, given that 94% of Yunnan is upland it is not feasible to resettle all the people, so the emphasis instead is on promoting agroforestry with priority being given to conservation and subsistence for survival. Nonetheless pilot projects in resettlement are still being pushed forward at the moment. The government aims to evaluate the results later in terms of livelihood promotion and upland forest rehabilitation before deciding whether or not to extend the programme more broadly. The government notes that actually these resettlement schemes are very expensive and generate a lot of conflict. For these reasons it is not common in Yunnan.

The 'Poverty Alleviation' policy is linked to the policy of 'Upland Management' programme, also referred to as 'Upland Conversion', under which all traditional cultivation in uplands (lands with a mean slope of more than 25 degrees) is halted and the fields replanted with trees, either fruit trees ('economic trees') or timber species ('environmental forests'). The farmers are not provided alternative land to make up for what they have had to relinquish (there is none – if there was they would have chosen to cultivate it themselves) but are supplied with stock and seedlings to establish the plantations and given cash or grain compensation to make up for the loss of grain production. These benefits are provided for between five, in the case of field planted with 'economic trees', and eight years, for those planted with environmental forests. The extension of protected areas to embrace large areas of upland forest has further diminished the land security of the farmers.

However, the most severe upset to all these policies promoting 'social forestry', 'collective forestry', 'agroforestry', 'upland conversion' and 'regreening' has been the 1998 logging ban, which has severely affected the livelihood of the farmers as logging was a major source of income and provided the main incentive they had to plant slow growing timber species. Those farmers, who had been encouraged to take out loans to build up their growing stock and timber processing capacity, now find they cannot repay their loans because of the ban. Banks have foreclosed on these debtors and some farmers have even been jailed for failures to repay debts. Life has become very difficult for many farmers.⁴²

One interviewee noted that the abrupt imposition of the logging ban was an especially severe upset for ethnic minority communities, which had been using the forests

⁴² See also Zuo Ting, Chen Fan, Wang Jianhua and Song Yuan 2000 for more details.

sustainably for thousands of years. Even though cutting for fuelwood and for village house construction is technically still allowed, the quotas being offered to the households are very low. In practice, many communities cannot get quotas or access timber by other means. Interviewees also noted that the policy has also provoked more illegal cutting and in some areas forests management is now worse as cutting has now become indiscriminate.

While the farmers are opposed to the logging ban, they know that the policy comes from the top and cannot be usefully disputed with local or provincial officials. The ban however reinforces the farmers' sense of powerlessness, justifies their skepticism of the durability of policy impositions, weakens their security of tenure and, unfortunately, has also apparently justified the short-termism of those who harvested timber as quick, as they could and when they could, after forests were first devolved to them. They didn't believe they would enjoy control of the forests for long, and they were right.

3.2 Community Forestry:

The concept of 'Community Forestry', as defined by the majority of those interviewed for this study, was introduced into Yunnan from outside China. Interviewees point to three main influences in the evolution of thinking about community forestry in the province, which are, in diminishing degree of importance: the Ford Foundation; international development assistance projects; and the international community forestry networks.

According to those interviewed, the Ford Foundation commenced its sustained engagement in the province to promote community forestry in 1987, when, with Winrock International, it began to plan its first Community Forestry Project in Yunnan. The project finally got underway in 1990 and has since been followed up by a large number of other projects. Some of the main achievements of these projects mentioned by interviewees include the following:

- Training in participatory methods of research, including PRA, participatory decision-making and participatory forest management
- Training courses and training materials in land and forest tenure
- Training course in social ecology
- Funding of doctoral research into community forestry in the province
- Field surveys of the current social forestry programme
- Publications on many aspects related to community forestry in Yunnan⁴³
- Establishing community forestry training modules in the South West Forestry College and the Yunnan Forestry School for senior and field forestry officials and community leaders. These now train a substantial number of people each year.
- Exchange visits for government officials and academics to visit community forestry sites in foreign countries
- Overseas training in community forestry of many researchers, foresters and NGO actors

⁴³ Including a large number of those cited in the footnotes of this document.

- Support for emerging NGOs
- Support for national social forestry networks
- Visits by members of international community forestry network
- Pilot projects in a small number of communities to trial more participatory management systems, community development initiatives and promotion of economic alternatives such as non-timber forest products marketing, ecotourism and collaborative protected area management.

Ford's engagement is widely acknowledged to have been extremely important in generating awareness about community forestry among NGOs, researchers, academics, training colleges and forestry officials. The prevalent view expressed however is that on the ground – at the community level – projects have yet to achieve an enduring effect. In general, with the possible exception of the NTFP project, the alternative livelihood strategies and 'community forestry' techniques promoted by the projects only endure as long as the external funding lasts. Income from

Case Study 2: The Tibetan Village of Tang Dui.⁴⁴

The village of Tang Dui lies about 60 kilometres North West of Zhongdian in Nixi Township. It is an area of steep forested hills, bearing mountain oak, pine and fir trees, well watered and producing perennial streams which course down long valleys, where flatter grounds provide for grazing, farming and the construction of villages. Local residents of Tang Dui recount that their ancestors have lived in this area for thousands of years.⁴⁵ They settled in the current village site at least 200 years ago. In common with most other Tibetan communities in this, the eastern, part of 'ethnographic Tibet', the people practise mixed farming. The valley floors and nearer hill sides are farmed for maize, potatoes, buckwheat and highland barley⁴⁶, while the higher slopes and harvested fields are opened to graze herds of cattle and sheep. The farmers live in large, timber-framed, two-storey houses, walled in compacted earth and adorned inside and out with rich carvings. Byres of hay on the lower storey are filled during the late summer to maintain the flocks and herds during the long winter, while pigs are kept in the houses' leaf-mulched courtyards, below steep steps that lead up to the balconies and first floor rooms where the farmer families reside. Every spring the well-bunded fields are hand-ploughed with *maonui*, the yak-oxen hybrid now favoured by many upland farmers. Forests are integral, if not central, to this way of life, providing fuelwood, timber for house construction, leaf mould for fertilizer, mushrooms and browse.

Before liberation, the village site was isolated and remote from trade. The economy was subsistence-orientated, poor but self-sufficient according to the villagers, and did not suffer from onerous taxes or pressure from landlords. The valley sides were clothed in dense forests, which were managed according to custom by the villagers themselves. However, immediately following liberation, a road, linking Yunnan with Tibet, was cut through the upper slopes of the valley, well above the village site. In the mid-1950s the village was reorganized as a 'people's commune', and the ideology of communism was strictly applied. *'No personal property, not even chopsticks was*

⁴⁴ Based on a one-day field visit and interviews with villagers and forestry officials.

⁴⁵ Cf. Xie Hongyan, Wang Xiaosong and Xu Jianchu 2000 which corroborates this testimony.

⁴⁶ *Qingke*: *Hardeum vulgare* Linn. Var. *nudum* Hook. F (1886).

allowed', recounts one resident, *'the old people did not like it'*. At the same time all forests were declared State forests.

During the 'Great Leap Forward' and the early 1960s, most of the hillsides along and above the new road were intensively logged, leaving behind barren slopes which even today only bear a scrubby regrowth of mountain oak, stunted pines and some fir. *'The climate changed as a result'*, notes one villager. *'It got drier and the crops did not grow so well. The land is now drier than it used to be. The people did not say anything when the timber was taken away, but they thought it was bad. It was bad. We now hope that the timber will grow back.'*

Grounds for hope lie in the gradual change in forest policy in the valley. In 1983, the forests were reclassified, with about half, those that lay nearer to the village, being designated collective forests. Local officials admit that forest management in State forests was poor but problems have persisted in the collective forests. These forests have been managed according to a quota system, whereby the officials would hand out quotas to cooperatives and so to households without much consultation. Because of this lack of transparency and because the boundaries between households' forest lots were ill-defined, conflicts were frequent, forest regeneration was poor and the lower forests continued to be depleted.

In 1997, the village was finally connected to the road system and the following year the village was chosen for a Ford Foundation project, which aims to promote 'Community Forestry' and 'Upland Management'. For the villagers the most tangible benefits derive from their installation of an irrigation scheme, with project funding, which now brings water back to their fields. At the same time the project is seeking to re-organize the forest management regime, although no structural changes in institutional relations are being introduced. Instead, new participatory techniques of decision-making are being taught to the local forestry officials. Quotas are now openly discussed and decision-making is transparent. Replanting schemes are underway and trust between the officials and the villagers is, the officials hope, being restored. However, the long-term prospects are not clear, everyone admits. Forests grow slowly at these altitudes and change is not discernible yet. *'The benefits may not be tangible until the next generation'* says one local official. People lost a sense of responsibility towards forests when the new village structures and tenure regimes were imposed, officials note, *'Now, long-term rights and responsibilities are not clear. If the farmers had clearer rights they might manage the forests better. But in China all land belongs to the State, so the most that can be allocated is use rights.'*

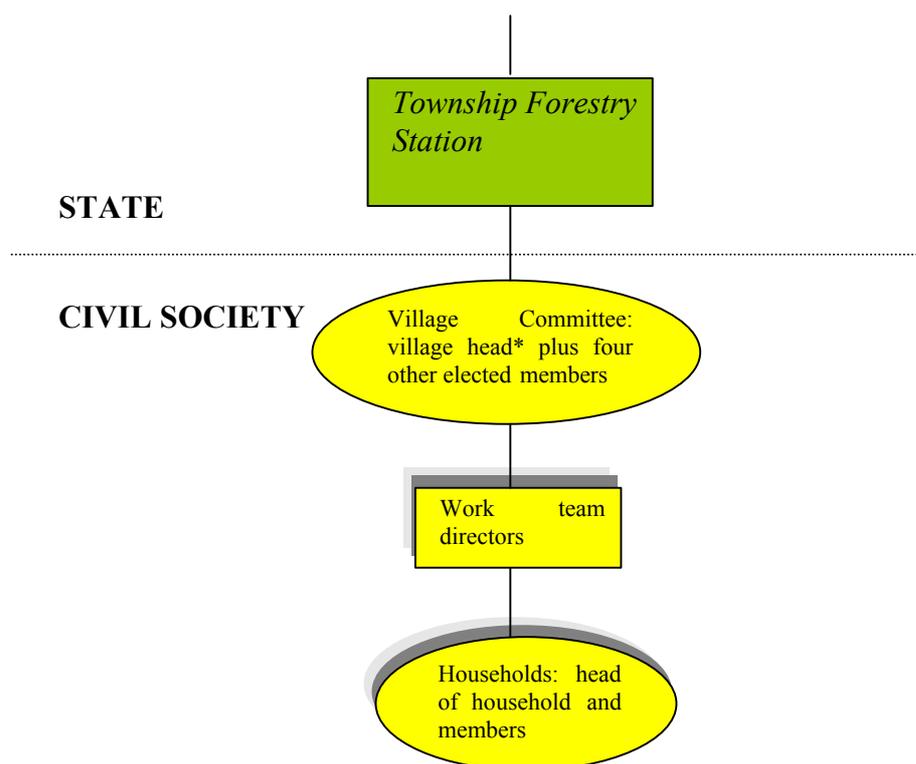
The main challenge to the scheme, however, comes from the government policies of 'Upland Conversion' and the logging ban. In line with the former policy, the upper fields of the village are being planted over with fruit trees – with very varied results depending on the skills and commitment of the different households. It is hoped that intensified production on the lower fields, thanks to the irrigation scheme, will help compensate for the losses in grain yield that result from taking the upper fields out of production. The logging ban, on the other hand, has sharply reduced farmers' cash income and removed the main incentive villagers have for caring for natural forests. *'The logging ban is a major constraint to the success of the project'*, a forester admits.

ecotourism, for example, has proved disappointingly low.⁴⁷ Fundamentally, the projects neither transform the institutional relations between the bureaucracy and the villagers nor the overall policy environment in which the projects are implanted.

Even in these community forestry projects, the dominant role of the local Forestry Bureaux remains paramount. One interviewee noted that many of the international aid projects reinforce this top-down process. The Sino-German Reforestation project, for example, although it incorporates a community forestry component,⁴⁸ nevertheless is still driven by targets from project conception down through the local forest bureaux down right to the villagers, who then have to implement these targets.

Asked to compare the kinds of ‘community forestry’ being attempted in Yunnan with experiences in other countries, a number of interviewees noted how different the Yunnan situation was from that achieved in Nepal. The pilot schemes in Yunnan, it was suggested, most approximately approach India’s Joint Forest Management. Figure 2 (below) simplifies the local institutional framework in which community forestry projects are being implanted in Yunnan.

Figure 2: Local level institutions in ‘community forestry’



* Only since 2002 has the village committee been subject to elections. Some social scientists see the committee as the lowest tier of administration rather than an civil society entity. The Village Head is considered the maximum representative of the community and receives a small stipend from government for a few days administrative work per year.

⁴⁷ Kang Yunhai 1999.

⁴⁸ Inclusion of a community forestry component was indeed a condition of GTZ involvement in the project.

A critical evaluation voiced by one of Ford's partners of Ford's engagement in Yunnan included the following observations:

- Very small amount of project money actually get to the villagers (most is soaked up by consultancies and training).
- A lot of people have been trained but this is now stopping. Those who have trained have tended to get jobs as consultants rather than do local level work with communities.
- New method has been introduced to Yunnan, more and more people understand what this is all about
- Training materials have been translated and disseminated
- New projects are beginning to adopt these approaches
- Some of these projects have brought local benefits, mostly as pilot schemes and model projects. They are not widespread.
- Other donors have followed Ford's lead, such as IDRC, and now train local project managers.
- The Chinese/GTZ reforestation project has also learned from this experience as the evaluation of the Yunnan component took account of what Ford had achieved and promoted. These lessons are now being applied in another project in Sichuan which now also has a community forestry component to it.
- The idea of community forestry has now been well introduced into the province and is spreading.

The main obstacle to wider success in community forestry is that the approach being demonstrated and advocated through these projects has not been adopted by the government. Although the government now permits foreign agencies to carry out community forestry initiatives, and the South West Forestry College now has a department geared to collaborating with development assistance projects, the government will not adopt this approach itself, on a large scale, as it is seen as too expensive and time-consuming. Indeed, as noted, other policies such as the logging ban and upland conversion, run directly counter to community forestry. Observes one senior academic:

It is very difficult to persuade the government to change its mind. They don't believe in the ability of farmers to manage forests by themselves. This will require changing the opinion of high government officials, who will then require lower level officials to adopt the idea. The director of the Yunnan Forest Department has not accepted the idea of community forestry. He has heard the arguments and seen the projects but he just listens to those who are in a high position like the Governors and Vice Governors. He takes the lead from them. He is afraid to lose his position as Director, so he just guards his position. The need is to train the [provincial governors] so that they then require those who work under them to change their approach.

Ford had tried to introduce a multi-stakeholder approach to training and project development but this has also had only limited success due to resistance by the Forestry Department. 'They are not keen on power-sharing', observes one NGO staffer.

Concludes another:

The idea of community forestry has really come from Ford and then from RECOFTC, who provided the information and training. Even if we have no real community forestry yet in Yunnan, we have learned a lot from this contact. This is why the people you have met know about community forestry. The experience has been quite widely shared. Also participatory surveys have become a government methodology, so the officials are now better acquainted with community views when they make policy decisions. However, the law has not changed much even though the policy and institutions have begun to change as a result of this [experience].

4. National and Provincial Networks:

The above sections have attempted to provide a summary of the institutional and policy context in which community forestry networking has developed in Yunnan. The final sections of the report go on to examine, the role of networks within this framework. This section summarizes the experience with local, provincial and national level networks and, the following section, turns to the province's relatively limited experience with international networks.

'Networking' within China on community forestry only really began in the late 1980s as a result of the introduction of these ideas from outside the country. At first, the main players involved were academics, forestry trainers and professors, and forestry officials. Only recently have any efforts been made to get the networking to reach down to the community level. One obstacle to this mobilization has been the absence of independent civil society organizations.

Indeed, establishing an NGO in China remains problematic. Informal networks, beyond the casual sharing of information, are illegal in China but neither is there any law that allows NGOs to incorporate as fully independent non-profits. Most 'NGOs' that do exist in Yunnan are actually registered with the Department of Civil Affairs as chapters of government research organizations. The Centre for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK), for example, founded in 1995 as a mechanism to link scientific and indigenous peoples' knowledge and to create bridges between these peoples and decision-makers, is affiliated to the Yunnan Forest Department and its dynamic Director simultaneously holds a post in the government administered Kunming Institute of Botany. In the same way, the Participatory Action and Research network (PRA) was legally incorporated in 1994 as a non-profit affiliate of the government's Bamboo and Rattan Association and then registered with the Department of Civil Affairs. The network's ex- chairman notes that in all it took one and half years to achieve this status. An exception to this rule of government-administered NGOs is CDS, which has instead registered as a commercial establishment with the Department for Industry and Commercial Development. After being formally investigated, shortly after it incorporated in 1998, the organization has

been approved and granted a concessionary tax rate of 5.5% of gross income per annum. The whole process took about two and half years to complete.

The PRA network, founded in 1994, has about 80 members, drawn from some 20 different institutions within Yunnan and includes people in four overlapping networks on forests, gender, health and land. The aim is to take PRA from being a tool of use to researchers to one that actually helps local people take part in decisions that affect their lives. The sub-network that focuses on forests is the nearest thing to a ‘community forestry network’ within Yunnan though its area of concern is with the social value of forests more generally. It lists its main activities as:

- Exchanging information
- Promoting exchange visits between communities
- Collaborating in study tour, for example, to Nepal and Philippines
- Annual Workshop
- Newsletter
- Seminars
- Training course with various modules
- Invited expert lectures
- Publications

Some members of the network complain that other members have merely used it as a means of getting consultancies with international development assistance projects rather than to pursue the shared goals of the PRA itself.

Network members also candidly note that the main weakness of networking in Yunnan is that it does not really reach down to the community level. There are many reasons for this: political culture; the level of education of community leaders; and the lack of autonomous village-level institutions. As one interviewee noted, there is not yet political space in China for sharing between farmers associations. Although both the PRA and the South West Forestry College have promoted exchange visits between farmers of different townships, these are carried out on a one-off basis. Inter-village institutions are not encouraged by the government authorities and it would be difficult or impossible to get these accepted or registered. *‘The government cannot understand or accept this yet’* notes one. Another speculates that it might be politically feasible to get government to permit the creation of membership associations if villagers joined as individual members only in order to facilitate the sharing of information. Ponders another:

Can we really build a local learning network? It may be more possible to promote more farmer to farmer sharing through women than through men, as the custom is for women to move to their husbands’ villages. In current networks information goes up and down levels better than horizontally. Horizontal sharing also implies helping farmers see things from other people’s perspectives: many of them have very locale specific understandings of what is possible.

A Ford Foundation-funded national network, which also has links to the FAO’s ‘Forests, Trees and Peoples Programme’ (FTPP), with support from RECOFTC, designed principally to disseminate information about community forestry, and

referred to by interviewees as the ‘Social Forestry Network’, does exist in China. Run by a forestry professor in the National Academy of Sciences in Beijing, the network was strongly criticized by interviewees. Its newsletter is roundly condemned as only promoting the personal idea and priorities of those in the academy. The content is said to focus on technical matters related to afforestation and reforestation, while the wider activities of the network are said to be decided on without reference to other members.

‘So we have had a bad experience with networks, locally’ notes one interviewee ruefully.

5. International Community Forestry Networks:

This investigation shows that the international community forestry networks are relatively unknown in Yunnan. Indeed, it seemed that only a small group of NGO activists, forestry professionals and academics were even aware of the networks. Linguistic and technical barriers clearly hindered the participation of those, including most government officials and foresters, residing outside the provincial capital, the exception being some foresters in the prefectural centres who had benefited from RECOFTC’s training programmes. Those who were aware of the networks, however, seemed to highly value these contacts, even though they only rarely developed into a two-way exchange of information. It was noted that the lack of two-way exchange was not only the result of lack of outreach and responsiveness by the networks but also the passive role of Yunnanese network members.

The main reasons for networking, given by those interviewed and who participated in the mini-workshop, include the following:

- Gaining information
- Identifying hot topics
- Sharing experiences
- Avoiding the repetition of mistakes
- Publishing findings and results
- Organizing workshops
- Gives people confidence in their work
- Encourages young people to engage in the work

During the interviews, discussions were held about each of the various networks being studied in this survey, to discover whether the networks were known, what peoples’ experience was with each network. Interviewees were refreshingly frank in their responses.

The following table compiles, in a succinct way, all the comments noted in the interviews and workshops about the specific networks. No attempt has been made to validate or corroborate these personal opinions and they are offered here only as food for thought: they are not the judgments of the author.

Learning from International Community Forestry Networks: China Country Study

Network	Pros	Cons
PRA Forestry Network (Yunnan)	Active at local level. Very participatory. Good information sharing forum.	Not yet strong enough to promote policy reform. Gets contracted by international organizations precipitating a scramble for consultancies. Members careless of work done in name of network but assiduous when working in own name or name of own institution.
Social Forestry Network (Beijing)	Linked to FFTP, with support from RECOFTC and Ford.	Not succeeding in acting as an exchange of information. Publishing about technical aspects of tree-planting. (Now being evaluated). Dominated by a single famous Professor.
Nature and People (Beijing)	Useful newsletter	Not active on policy.
FAO-FTPP	Valued newsletter. Useful website. Useful information. Participants in workshops received good training. Good collection of practical experiences. It would be bad if they were closed down tomorrow. It creates an image of community forestry at the international level. This has symbolic significance, like a flag.	No exchange programme. One-way information flow not real networking. Centralised planning. Little contact with focal point in Beijing.
RECOFTC	Very strong training and useful workshops. Good materials. Very good exchanges of information, ideas and experiences between countries. Useful publications. Carries out local needs assessments and helps then source resources to match needs. Good field collaboration.	More an organization than a network. Was very top-down but is now more open to local input and more strategic. Needs to follow up the initial introduction of broad concepts. Does not really train village level forest managers. Needs to diversify its local contacts.
IUCN-CIFM	CIFM network not known. Of IUCN in general: Good membership mechanism, does listen to local and national government members, a more mature mechanism.	The IUCN is a huge machine but it does offer space for engagement.
FSC	Not known	-
AFN	Helped set up the PRA network. Useful workshops and booklet in mid-1990s.	Not transparent. No local engagement in decision-making. Seems to be in a down phase. No contact for about a year. Newsletter is no longer being produced.
RDFN	Not known.	-
WRM	Newsletter in resource centers. A good source of information. Occasional meetings at international <i>fora</i> .	Not active within China.
ICIMOD	Takes lessons down to regional and local levels. Promotes questioning about policy.	-
SUAN	Survived longer than many because of good participation, real rotation of roles and openness about the budget.	Now considered more or less defunct

In general the following was noted about the value of networks:

- International contacts (ie not just the networks) have been central to the promotion of Community Forestry in Yunnan.
- The networks and international assistance projects have provided a platform for a lot of learning from outside. This has promoted participatory and interdisciplinary approaches. In this respect Yunnan is considered the most developed in China.
- Information coming into Yunnan has proved very valuable in order to compare the local situation with others' experiences
- The newsletters and publications are thus valued.
- More information has been secured through email correspondence.
- Training, both in country and abroad has been critical to developing thinking about Community Forestry in Yunnan.
- Exchange visits are highly valued and there is a demand for more of them.

Some general criticisms were also voiced:

- The connections between those active on community forestry in Yunnan and those outside are weak.
- Most of the links are with individuals and not with institutions.
- Most networks are driven by strong leaders (persons named as examples) in a top-down manner and so are not capturing the diversity of local issues.
- There is a lack of real transparency in allocation of budgets and decision-making. *'A key issue for networks is to maintain trust and this is often lost if people are not open and try to control or grab the budgets.'*
- Most networks lack Monitoring & Evaluation processes.
- Very few Chinese are really engaged in the international networks. The networks are a service not a real two-way partnership. The networks need to work more closely with Chinese institutions: there are obvious barriers and skepticism about Chinese capacity and there are real difficulties with human rights issues and the lack of political space and issues such as lack of acceptance of notion of 'indigenous peoples'.
- Chinese are also shy about participating as feel unconfident about their language skills. *'In an international meeting the Indians will always overwhelm the Chinese.'*

Broad consensus emerged in the workshop and in the interviews, including with senior forestry personnel, that community forestry will not really take off in Yunnan without a reform of the national policy, legal and institutional framework. Locally, the provincial actors have not found effective means of promoting this reform, although some have been engaged in a policy discussion about the impacts of the logging ban and upland conversion programme on upland farmers, ethnic minorities and the environment. It is not clear that the networks have the political space to push for policy reform directly.

However, it was noted that, as far as community forestry was concerned, international policy reform and standard setting, such as at the CSD and UNFF, had had no discernible impact on government policy to date. This does not mean that the

government is impervious to adopting ideas from abroad. Other ideas introduced from outside were noted, where change had been triggered and policy reform resulted due to external influence. Examples cited included the following:

- Microcredit schemes, based on Grameen Bank experience, have spread widely in China from 2 person in one village in the first year, to 25 townships in second, to 506 townships in the third and after five years was extended to the national level. Micro-credit schemes are now generalized throughout China.
- Inputs due to the Convention on Biological Diversity and through the GEF have helped people see forests not as just trees but as including a wider range of values that together comprise biodiversity. Awareness has been built up as a result of these international changes.
- Certification ideas and the idea of standard setting with Principles, Criteria and Indicators has provoked a lot of thinking locally and these ideas are now being adopted nationally and provincially

A number of more general observations were also made about networking:

- All networks are interest based. You need to select a network that suits your interest.
- Without the networks we would not feel sure of where we are. The networks provide guidance and something to measure the local experience against.
- We used to think that forestry was just about trees but we now see it is about everything – NTFPs, water, people – but most people still think about forests as just trees.
- The networks need to confront the real issues. For example in China the real issues are that reforestation projects always fail and illegal cutting continues. Maybe the networks can help share information about these matters.

One interviewee noted:

The international experience has introduced new methods and approaches to community forestry in China. In the past the emphasis was always on working with communities to reduce pressure on forests and protect the environment. But now we have learned of the need to focus on institutional and policy reforms, of the need to change people's attitude to the local communities and give more emphasis to local benefits.

6. Lessons Learned:

Despite the relatively limited experience with networking in Yunnan the workshop and interviews brought out a large number of lessons that local actors felt they had learned from this interchange.

I divide these observations somewhat arbitrarily into those relating to information exchange, institutional issues including those related to governance and structures, those related to local level linkages and an eclectic section of more general insights.

Information exchange:

As noted the networks are highly valued as sources of information by many of those interviewed. They also make the following criticisms and recommendations:

- Information received through networks is often not timely.
- To overcome the language barrier and in order to reach to more than a handful of community forestry actors materials need to be in national languages.
- The ‘digital divide’ is also preventing information getting to the local level.
- On the other hand, developing countries like China also need a digital library to consolidate all the information that has been provided over previous years which is otherwise often inaccessible.⁴⁹
- In general, there is a lack of resource centers and libraries where researchers and concerned people can access information
- Network newsletters tend to be sent to individual network members and not to libraries or institutions. This substantially limits the number of people who get to see them.
- New technologies like videos and CD-ROMs can facilitate direct participation in international discourses. The local communities are very excited by this.

Institutional issues:

A number of people noted that they don’t really know enough about networks or how the networks function to comment on their governance systems or how they might be improved. However, the following ideas emerged in discussions:

- The international networks need to make greater efforts to link to the national level networks.
- They need to take into account national priorities and activities
- Membership of the networks should include those who work locally and those in the media.
- Networks need to do needs assessments and identify the financial needs of members too – the costs of participating are often prohibitive – travel to meetings and to visit communities, making time to input and share data, acquiring computers, carry out translation, all these activities cost money.
- Networks must have active mechanisms to allow members to make inputs – newsletters, questionnaires and workshops.

⁴⁹ There seemed not to be awareness of the RDFN’s efforts in this regard.

- Feedback mechanisms are also crucial so members of networks can feel that their inputs are being fed back into the discussions.
- Gender issues are not adequately addressed.
- Networks seem to be very temporary – sometimes they just close down without any announcement.

Local level linkages:

The main concern of very many of those interviewed is that the information, ideas and networking is not getting through to the local level. The following observations were made, reflecting as much on the national and provincial network experience as the international one:

- There is a lack of regional and local follow up to international activities. There need to be more opportunities to take lessons down to the regional and then local levels. This stimulates local level discourse about community forestry with forestry officials and leads to questioning about which way to go forwards.
- The key level is the local level: the field level. The need is to steer the provincial level policy framework and this needs to be done in conjunction with local level networking. However, Farmers' Associations are not getting much attention at the field level : this is what is needed – small grants for leadership training, local NGOs and local networks. But promoting genuinely participatory approaches is a real challenge. Most 'participation' in China is not really participatory. The PRA network is trying to steer policy in this direction but does not yet have much impact on Policy, Law and Institutions. Also there is no real capacity to impact policy at the national level.
- The networks need to include field level people, local people and community representatives in order to ensure that networks also serve them. We need to provide better access and education to local users.
- Can communities themselves be part of networks? There is a need to help communities organize themselves.
- National networks are often over connected to the international level at the expense of links to the local level. This is an ethical issue. We have a responsibility to ensure real community engagement.
- Capacity building has been at the national and regional level not really at the local level. Even though local people do have real knowledge and experience to share, it is difficult: local people are not used to speaking out in public meetings and tend to sit silent while resource persons talk to them. This implies the need for community environment education and awareness building.
- There are no local level networks. PRA tried to establish a sustainable farming network among farmers associations but it was not that successful.
- Is networking for our interests or for the interest of the local communities?
- Network board members should not receive financial benefits from the network. Many networks become a small organization once funding is secured. Resources are not shared equitably and there is a lack of transparency.
- Local people become local 'famous experts' and then there is a problem of data theft. These experts then substitute for the local voice. Community level networking is what is missing in China/Yunnan.

- The main gaps in the national process for promoting reform are two fold.
 - Lack of local level networking, community organization and capacity building
 - Lack of national level policy advocacy. This will require international IGO support- for example by the World Bank or UNDP – to be successful. If the local voice is reinforced by such agencies then it may carry weight with the government. Otherwise the views of the local people are ignored.
- Pilot projects are mostly very local but scaling them up is problematic. Donors are poorly coordinated and government is not willing to change policy environment. The pilots need to be more carefully assessed and lessons conveyed more strongly to the government. Better explanation of lessons learned needed.
- Networks are not targeting the donor agencies enough to get them to change their policies on community forestry.

General insights:

- Networks seem to have a natural life cycle of about 10 years.
- Informal networks seem to last no longer than formal ones.
- It is true that the networks tend to be leader driven and so do not engage members enough in planning, the same problem is experienced by local farmers in national networks.
- Tell people about the networks. Broaden participation.
- Get more members in China
- Promote regional workshops and more regional exchanges
- Bring indigenous peoples into the networks
- Promote more visits by network coordinators
- Carry out more study tours to pilot sites to learn lessons
- Link to the communities themselves and do not only link via ‘focal points’ and via NGOs or research bodies
- Carry out more capacity building at the Prefectural, County and Township level before the communities can get involved.
- International networks should also have demonstration sites. Most international work is just collecting information and disseminating it.
- International networks need to work far more on policy and institutional reform.
- There needs to be more dialogue between the different networks to promote synergies. A coordinated strategy, for example linking the policy level advocacy of the IUCN with the local level training of RECOFTC, would be more productive.

7. Prospects and Challenges:

'The main challenge to promoting Community Forestry in the province is to change the way people think. Promoting Community Forestry is labour, cost and resource expensive but well managed forests do result.'

As this study has shown, despite the millennial knowledge of forests held by many local communities in the region, especially the province's indigenous peoples, the promotion of an officially sanctioned programme of community forestry in Yunnan is still in its earliest stages. International assistance has been crucial to what gains have been made and the international networks have made a modest and constructive contribution to this.

Although greater international development assistance and long-term engagement by external networks would apparently be welcomed by many local actors, the main obstacles that they identify as constraining further progress are: an inappropriate national legal, policy and institutional framework; an upland forest policy unduly focused on environment protection without adequate regard for local needs and knowledge; the lack of local networks and civil society institutional capacity; the lack of community level democracy. Few, if any, of these changes can be externally driven but appropriately sensitive support might help. Noted one government forester:

Community forestry has not been adopted at the national level. The aim is to promote it provincially and by demonstrating success influence the national level. If the international networks can influence the national level this would be useful... If good demonstration results this may help change national policies.

Most of those interviewed were strongly of the view that community forestry will not flourish in the province without tenurial and policy reforms that provide farmers with long term resource security, greater independence in decision-making and market access. As one forestry professor remarked:

Policy change is crucial, otherwise the government's afforestation programmes will not be sustainable. When the subsidies and grants finish, farmers will have nothing.

The policy reform advocated implies given stronger rights to farmers. However, just which institutions should be vested with these rights appears not to have been so much discussed (or my investigation was too brief to gain an insight into this question). One respondent emphasized the importance of tailoring community forestry user groups to suit local preferences and customary institutional processes: blanket solutions would not do. On the other hand, a number of forestry officials and forestry teachers who were interviewed also noted that the sudden lifting of restrictions on forest use and the devolution of authority over forests to communities and households could encourage short-term over-harvesting and deforestation. Indeed, this has already been reported from many parts when collective forestry was first introduced. Capacity-building of local farmers is therefore also stressed and the need to retrain forestry officials to shift

their perception of their role ‘from command and control to technical support and legal oversight.’⁵⁰ Clearly, the Ford Foundation projects and RECOFTC training programmes have been designed with substantially this goal in mind. However, the local view seems to be that this approach is unlikely to be effective, by itself, without more fulsome senior government support at the national level.

In the medium-term, profitable community-based forest management seems unlikely to achieve wide success without the partial lifting of the logging ban. People will not bother to look after forests if they can’t benefit from them and respondents noted that the widespread planting of fruit trees in the upland conversion programme was already leading to a glut of seasonal fruits and juices, which was depressing prices (and, presumably, farmers!). Senior provincial level officials themselves voice the opinion that a lifting or modification of the logging ban is required before community forest management could be seen as the way forwards. As a senior official noted:

The logging ban is the main problem that the communities now face. Farmers have lost a great deal of income. The government is trying to provide subsidies but it is much less than the income that they have lost. A pilot project is being considered to use traditional knowledge to strengthen decision-making. We cannot just conserve all the forests; we have to use them sustainably. It is possible that the ban will not be imposed for a long time.

On a more optimistic note, however, the top-levels of the national government are pushing ahead with two lines of reform, which promise to modify the predominant ‘command and control’ approach of the administration. On the one hand, senior government is promoting a process of political decentralization, with the twin aims of building ‘slim government’, by cutting government staffing levels, and of encouraging the evolution of civil society organisations. The goal is to increase efficiency and promote the entrepreneurial spirit by lessening the stultifying influence of the bureaucracy. At the same time, through the passing of the Village Organic Law in 2002, the government is experimenting, at the lowest administrative level, with democratic reforms.⁵¹ Under the law, villages may now elect their own village committee members. This should promote villager participation in decision-making and there are hopes that these reforms may later be extended to the township level. The expectation is that these two changes will free up the political space needed to give farmers and farmer user groups the initiative they need in order to give community forestry a chance.

Some of those interviewed expressed the view that these reforms had the best chance of succeeding in areas predominantly inhabited by ‘minority nationalities’. Not only do these communities retain the strongest ties to their lands and forests, but, in theory at least, the Law on Regional Autonomy for Minority Nationalities (see page 6.) already gives them greater powers to exercise their own authority and govern themselves according to custom.

⁵⁰ The quote is actually taken from Jon Anderson 2002:29 but some interviewees made what I took to be the same point in less succinct ways.

⁵¹ And see: ‘Seeds of Change? Deep in the countryside, China is experimenting with local democracy.’ In: A Survey of China, *The Economist*, 15 June 2002:7-8

Bibliography:

Anderson, Jon, 2002

Nature, Wealth and Power: emerging best practice for revitalizing rural Africa. USAID, Washington DC.

CBIK, 2001

CBIK Strategic Plan: Bridging Indigenous Knowledge, Community Livelihoods and Watershed Governance in SouthWest China. CBIK (draft), Kunming.

CBIK, 2002

Policy Review and Institutional Capacity Analysis on Environmental Protection and Poverty Alleviation: Executive Summary. CBIK (ms), Kunming.

Dong Henqiu, 1999

Successful Exploration of International Cooperation on Poverty Alleviation: Research and Action of Yunnan Upland Management Project. Yunnan Sciences and Technology Press, Kunming.

FCCDP, 2001

The International Seminar on Non-Timber Forest Products: China, Yunnan/Laos, Vietnam. Yunnan University Press, Kunming.

Grunfeld, Tom, 1987

The Making of Modern Tibet, Zed Books, London.

Harrell, Stevan, 2001

Perspectives on the Yi of SouthWest China. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Heberer, Thomas, 2001

Nationalities Conflict and Ethnicity in the People's Republic of China, with Special Reference to the Yi of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. In: Harrell, 2001:214-237.

He Pikun, Yu Dejiang and Li Weichang, 2000

Forests, Trees and Minorities. Yunnan Nationality Press, Kunming.

Kang Yun Hai, 1999

Participatory Community-based Tourism Development: a case study of Luoshui village beside Lake Lugu in Yunnan Province in China. Institute of Rural Economics, Yunnan Science and Technology Press, Kunming.

Li Weichang and He Pikun (Eds.), 1998

Social Forestry: Theories and Practice. Yunnan Nationality Press, Kunming.

Mackerras, Colin, 1994.

China's Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century. Oxford University Press, Hong Kong.

Mallee, Hein, 2001

China's New Forest Policies. In: Institute of Rural Economics, Yunnan Academy of Sciences, Kunming.

Richardson S.D., 1990

Forests and Forestry in China: Changing Patterns of Resource Development, Island Press, Washington DC.

Satyawadhna, Cholthira, 1990

A Comparative Study of Structure and Contradiction in Austro-Asiatic Systems of the Thai-Yunnan Periphery. In: Gehan Wijeyewardene (ed.) *Ethnic Groups across National Boundaries in Mainland Southeast Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore: 74-101.

Schliesesinger, Joachim, 1997

Hill Tribes of Vietnam: Introduction and Overview. White Lotus, Bangkok.

Selden, Mark, 1993

The Political Economy of Chinese Development. East Gate Books, ME Sharpe, Armonk, NY.

Selden, Mark with Aiguo Lu, 1993,

The Reform of Land Ownership and the Political Economy of Contemporary China. In: Selden, 1993:187-205.

Shakya, Tsering 1999

The Dragon in the Land of the Snows. Random House, London.

Storey, Robert, Nicko Goncharoff, Damien Harper, Marie Cambon, Thomas Hunti, Caroline Lou and Alexander English, 1998,

China. Lonely Planet, Hawthorn.

Uraivan Tan Kim Yong, Zhao Junchen and Kang Yunhai, 1996

Sustainable Management Study of Forest Land in Ailao Mountain, Yunnan Province. Institute of Rural Economics, Yunnan Academy of Sciences, Kunming.

Wen Haizhong, 2000

Overview of Participatory Forest Management for Policy and Human Resources Development in China. In: Anupam Bhatia, Lai Qingkui, Li Xianzhong and Luo Mingcan (eds.), *Policies, Human Resources and Participatory Forest Management: the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Forum for Forest Conservation and Management*. Yunnan Science and Technology Press, Kunming: 63-90.

Xie Hongyan, Wang Xiaosong and Xu Jianchu, 2000

The Impacts of Tibetan Culture on Biodiversity and Natural Landscapes in Zhongdian, Southwest China. In: Xu Jianchu: CD-ROM.

Xu Jianchu (Ed.), 2000

Links between Cultures and Biodiversity. Proceedings of the Cultures and Biodiversity Congress 20-30 July 2000. CBIK, Kunming.

YASS, 1994

Social Scientific Methodology in Rural Development Studies. Institute of Rural Economics, Yunnan Academy of Sciences, Kunming.

YASS, 1999a

Study of Compensated Transfer of Use Right over Collective Wasteland in Banliu Administrative Village, Yao'An County, Yunnan Province, the People's Republic of China. Institute of Rural Economics, Yunnan Academy of Sciences, Kunming.

YASS, 1999b

The Theories and Approaches of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems for Rural Development Projects. Institute of Rural Economics, Yunnan Academy of Sciences, Kunming.

Yin Shaoting, 1999

People and Forests: Yunnan Swidden Agriculture in Human-Ecological Perspective. (Translated by Magnus Fiskesjo), Yunnan Education Publishing House, Kunming.

YUEP, 2001

Multi-Agency and Local Participatory Cooperation in Biodiversity Conservation in Yunnan Upland Ecosystems – Project Newsletter No. 3. Institute of Rural Economics, Yunnan Academy of Sciences, Kunming.

Zuo Ting, Chen Fan, Wang Jianhua and Song Yuan, 2000

Preliminary Study on Impacts of Natural Forest Protection Policy on Communities in Xishuangbanna, China. In: Xu Jianchu: CD-ROM.