

Chapter 6

Local-Level Monitoring in Decentralized Forest Management: Exploring the Spaces for Community Participation

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This paper explores a participatory monitoring process initiated in Kampong Thom province with 3 Community Forestry (CF) sites where CF development was facilitated by Forestry Administration (FA) staff and externally supported by German Technical Support-Rural Development Programme (GTZ-RDP). The paper details the methodology used and the key outputs produced during the process, it highlights the four main principles of the principle, criteria, and indicator Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) which are: (1) that forest health is maintained, (2) public wellbeing is improved, (3) community wellbeing is assured, and (4) external support is effective. The results show that in all three CF, the land integrity and the forest resource itself was improved between the baseline and follow-up surveys. Despite the positive results, many of the challenges and limitations were acknowledged including the difficulty in capturing all different points of view and opinions when there are such a large number of people involved and consulted as well as how this can lead to a slowdown within the whole process and is very expensive. The paper concludes suggesting that a local level monitoring system can help to build local capacity, improve decision-making, reduce conflict between local forest dependents and responsible authorities as well as empower local community members, especially marginalized groups.

BACKGROUND

Forest management modalities are being reshaped in Cambodia. The forest concession system implemented since the early 1990s is now at an impasse (IFSR 2004). The contribution of the forest concession system has been very

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limited in terms of rural development; it gave little consideration to the livelihood needs of forest-dependent communities living in or around forested areas. The serious degradation of forest resulting from uncontrolled logging inside the concession has also questioned the mere existence of these large commercial systems for the management of Cambodia's main natural assets. The Independent Forest Sector Review (IFSR) recommended in 2004 that the concession system should be entirely closed. They argue that it is unlikely that companies would engage in long-term forest management approaches because there are still no real economic incentives and property right security for such investments (IFSR 2004).

Since the late 1990s, the policy debate has opened up with greater focus on other forms of forest management, recognizing that more locally based management models are needed in order to enhance the contribution of forest utilization to rural development in post concession areas (Heov, et al. 2006) as well as in other permanent forest estates. Anticipating or following the policy dialogue, decentralized forest management emerged as a family of sustainable forest management options. The core objective of decentralized forest management is to involve local people and institutions in the protection and management of forest resources. The rationale of this approach is to grant land security and give secure harvesting and user rights over the forest to forest-dependent communities so that they have the incentives to protect and manage these forests in a sustainable way. Decentralized forest management is thus likely to serve as a basis for locally driven rural development in those communities.

The term decentralized forest management has emerged as an umbrella term denoting a wide range of activities which link rural people with forest and trees, and the products and benefits to be derived from them (Evans and Guariguata 2008). In Cambodia, the prevailing mode of decentralized forest management is widely known as CF. CF as echoed in the specific set of legal documents developed by the Forestry Administration, refers to "production" forest which is one of the three sub-categories of the permanent forest reserve (together with the "protection" and "conservation" forests). The user rights of CF group members are restricted to customary user rights prescribed in article 40 of the law on Forestry and the rights to sell and barter Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) as prescribed in the same law (RGC 2002). Nevertheless, other

forms of decentralized forest management are also being piloted in Cambodia. Three are noteworthy: (1) Community Conservation Forestry in the Forestry Administration administered protected forests, (2) Partnership Forestry for which the management is co-institutionalized between the forestry administration and a commune council and (3) Community Commercial Forestry aiming directly to generate revenue from the commercial (ie timber logging operations), yet sustainable, exploitation of the forest. Each different decentralized forest management modality has its specificity in terms of forest management and institutional partnership. They each rest on co-management principles, meaning that the management rights and responsibilities for forest management are shared by the local FA and the CF group.

The development of decentralized forest management is now embedded in a recently approved, though uncompleted, legal framework. The law on forestry passed in 2002 opened a space for communities to be involved in forest management (article 40). A year later, the sub-decree on the management of CF was approved, and in 2006, the prakas on the guideline for Community Forestry establishment. The sub-decree and prakas apply mainly for CF in the production forest. Other decentralized forest management modalities are developing under differentiated rather than unifying frameworks. The National Community Forestry Program coordination committee is now trying to develop a harmonized legal framework for all decentralized forest management modalities that enable rural communities to manage forests (NCFPCC 2008). Currently there are more than 400 identified existing and potential CF sites throughout Cambodia (Ty, et al. undated). Among those, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries has recognized potential CF areas in six provinces (Siem Reap, Kampong Thom, Kampot, Oddar Meanchey and Beanteay Meanchey and Koh Kong). Among those, only 71 CF sites are endowed with an area agreement duly signed by the Cantonment and the respective Community Forestry Management Committees (CFMC).

PARTICIPATION AND MONITORING IN DECENTRALIZED FOREST MANAGEMENT

Decentralized forest management suggests that local communities become real actors in the technical and social management of the forest. It creates spaces for people to participate and engage in various aspects of forestry management.

Community Forestry⁴ group members can lend their voice to the decision-making process to guide and influence community forest management. They directly elect the members of the management committee, as well as contribute to the design, approval and amendments of community forest regulation and management plans, including the forest benefit sharing mechanisms between the members of the community (individual benefits) and the CF group as a whole (collective benefits). A fundamental aspect of decentralized forest management is that the members of the CF groups can exclude others (non members) from their area to ensure the implementation of sustainable harvesting methods. This represents a shift away from open access regimes. CF members also become key operators of the technical management of the physical resources. They harvest timber and NTFPs according to technical norms (silvicultural systems) and harvesting levels specified in the management plans; they patrol the community forest to limit encroachment and ensure its territorial integrity.

By its nature, CF is multi-purpose oriented as it balances multiple benefits. Productive benefits such as timber and non-timber forest products are the most direct and obvious. These products can have either a direct livelihood value (for self-consumption or sale) or as an input to develop added-value processing activities (distillation, handicrafts, energy technologies etc). But CF also offers an opportunity to secure access to grazing places. CF contributes to the cultural and spiritual development of the community. CF also fulfils environmental services such as biodiversity conservation or watershed protection as it usually interacts with pastoral, agricultural, and fishing activities. In fact, forest resources are elements integrated into a more diverse land use pattern specific for each rural community. Due to these interactions, joining the efforts of the community forest protection and management can also be a means to influence the management of other land use components including the access to formal conflict resolution mechanisms. Not all members share the same reasons and rationale to participate in the CF efforts. The modalities of household contribution in CF are diverse and the recognition of this diversity is crucial to ensure that CF contributes to 1) increasing the productivity of forest resources, 2) promoting social justice in the way that forest benefits are distributed and 3) securing the environmental sustainability of the local ecosystem.

⁴ This chapter refers mainly to Community Forestry in production forest. Nevertheless, the conceptual framework, methodology and results are also relevant for other modalities of decentralized forest management, including Community in Protected Areas.

From a community view point, the participation in decentralized forest management and the responsibility exerted in forest management can be a driver for institutional development. New accountability links can be created with other community-based organizations and local authorities. It can play an active role in reinforcing or mediating relationships between the commune councils and the people who have elected them.

The new opportunities that arise from participation have also created new duties and functions for the co-management group, especially for the CFMC who are in charge of the daily management. First of all, there is a need to measure the evolution of the availability of forest resources to ensure that CF activities are implemented according to the CF regulations, agreements, and management plans. Second, the diversity of the different contributions and expectations of members with regard to CF also need to be captured and quantified to ensure sustainable forest management.

Local-level CF monitoring designed and implemented in collaboration with the CFMC, the FA staff, and the Community Forestry supporters can be an instrumental in fulfilling these new functions. It would provide evidence-based data on the basis of what proper decision-making can be made. Given that pluralistic partnership is central in CF, monitoring can be seen as useful to support the dialogue between different stakeholders involved.

This paper documents the process of a local-level monitoring of CF in Kampong Thom province. The goal of the initiative was to provide CFMC, members and local authorities at three pilot CF groups and local FA staff there with a capacity development opportunity to design a monitoring framework⁵ that addresses the different dimensions of Community Forestry management, assess its performance and communicate the results among the CF stakeholders.

The paper details the methodology used and the key outputs produced during the process. The paper also discusses the lessons learned from such an initiative and the opportunity to scale it up to other areas.

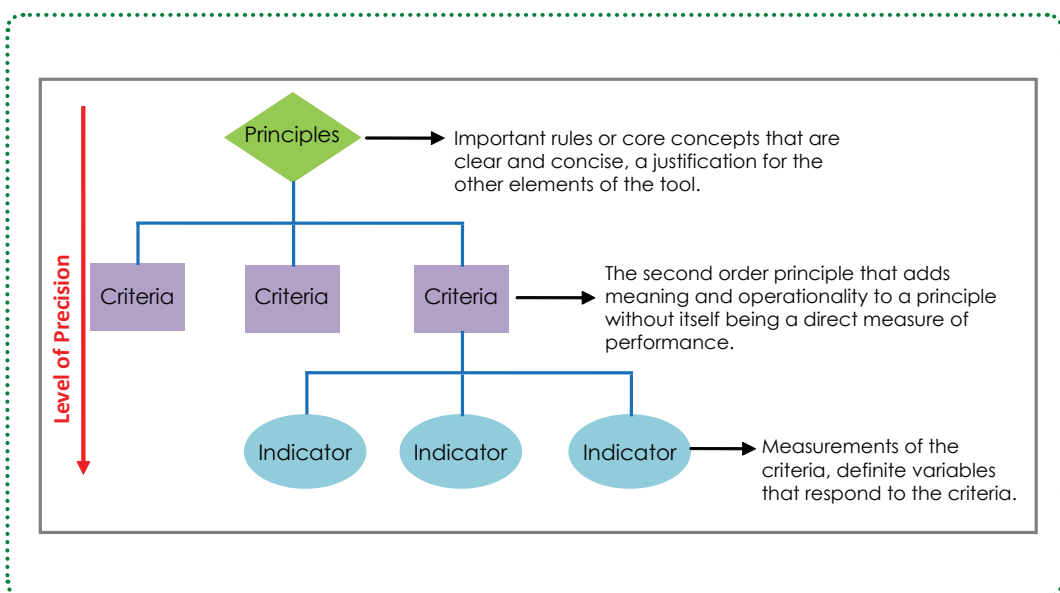
⁵ *The monitoring framework is the ready-to-use monitoring guideline and has to be considered as a product of the monitoring process, which has involved training, feed-back discussion, surveys and case study writing.*

METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

The local-level monitoring applied within this initiative is based on the concept of Principles, Criteria, and Indicators (PCI) for sustainable community based forest management. The tool originated from Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) which is a leading organization in forestry research and is experienced in such monitoring matters (Evans and Guariguata 2008). The PCI elements form a three-level monitoring framework which addresses all dimensions leading to decentralized forest management or sustainable community based forest management in particular. Principles are the most general aspects of the monitoring, Criteria constitute the intermediate level or second order principles, and Indicators give the most accurate monitoring feature. Figure 1 shows the hierarchical structure of the PCI monitoring framework with definitions of its key elements. According to the figure one principle is defined by several criteria. One specific criterion is detailed or conditioned by a few indicators.

Figure 1. Hierarchical Structure of Principles-Criteria-Indicators



In respect of sustainable CF management, four main factors, which represent the principles, are required. These include forest resources, individual or household well-being, community or institutional well-being of the forest dependent communities, and external actors. Each of these is further conditioned and specified by criteria and indicators to give a comprehensive view of its desired achievement (Srey and Diepart 2008).

The first principle (forest health is maintained) refers to the demarcation of the community forest, its zoning into specific management blocks, the use of timber and NTFPs, as well as the biodiversity and watershed management functions of the forest itself. The second principle deals with people's well-being. It depicts the benefits in-cash and in-kind that the CF group members obtain from forest resources. It details the system through which the members share the access to, and the benefits from, the forest and the diversity of forest products contributing to people's subsistence. The third principle apprehends the social governance of the community forest, namely the accountability of the elected CFMC towards the group members, the elected commune council and the FA. It specifies the internal regulation of the committee and the regulations fixing the appropriation rules of the forest products and their enforcement. The fourth principle represents the technical and legal supports to the CF group provided by the FA and other relevant stakeholders or facilitators.

Partnership

The local-level monitoring process was implemented within three CF sites and group members in a collaborative effort between the CBNRM Learning Institute and the Natural Resource Management Component of GTZ-supported Rural Development Program Kampot-Kampong Thom (GTZ-RDP) in close partnership with Kampong Thom Forestry Administration Cantonment and the Provincial Department of Environment. The CBNRM Learning Institute and GTZ-RDP acted as technical assistance. The local FA and CFMC acted both as training recipients and facilitators.

Sequence of activities

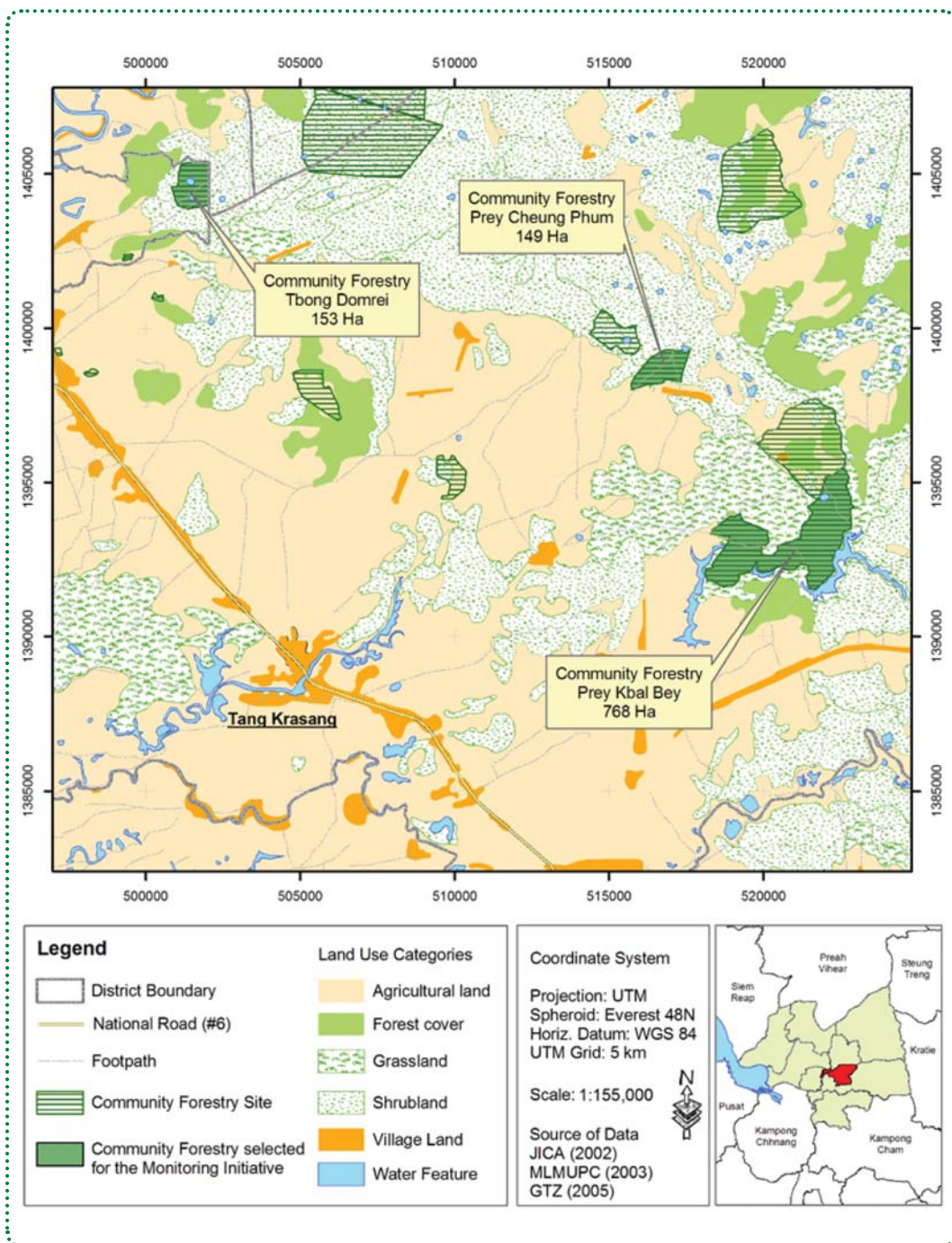
Throughout the course of this initiative, the implementation of activities at each pilot community contributed to the overall improvement of the forest management. The improvement was measured and quantified through repeated surveys (base-line and follow-up) conducted with a representative sample of CF members' households.

This pilot initiative took place over the course of 21 months from early 2006 to late 2007. A variety of different activities was undertaken and can be summarized into seven phases. These included (1) Introduction, (2) Monitoring framework design, (3) Baseline survey, (4) Monitoring framework review, (5) Case study production, (6) Evaluation survey, and (7) Monitoring framework finalization and the participatory monitoring guidebook development.

After selecting CF sites and defining both partners and methodology, the facilitators and CFMC designed the first draft of their monitoring frameworks based on PCI concepts (the complete framework is given in the annex). A baseline survey was then conducted to identify the level of Community Forestry development in the three CF sites. It consisted of a structured household investigation conducted with a sample of households (n=159), randomly selected and representative of the overall population in each village. The questionnaires were designed on the basis of the monitoring framework produced earlier, consistent with all principles, criteria and indicators. The data analysis was carried out with SPSS software and led to quantification of the baseline situation in each CF site.

The findings from the baseline survey enabled the CFMC and facilitators to review the monitoring frameworks and develop case studies. Exactly one year after the baseline survey, an evaluation survey was conducted on the basis of the baseline survey (same household sample and same questionnaire) to measure the development trends in those CF groups. Eventually, the lessons learned from the whole process allowed for the finalization of the monitoring frameworks and the development of an easy-to-use participatory monitoring guidebook. This guidebook is a simplified version of the whole monitoring framework that the local community and the local FA can easily use to monitor the progress of CF development.

Figure 2. Community Forestry selected for the M&E Initiative



Community Forestry site settings

Three CF sites in Kampong Thom province have been selected to pilot the participatory monitoring initiative.

The Prey Cheung Phum CF site is located in Choam Thnanh village, Tipou commune, Santuk district. This 149 ha two-block CF area has received good care from the villagers since the early nineties. The designation of the area as CF was a means to officially recognize their efforts. The site was selected for the monitoring initiative because of the enthusiastic involvement of the village leader and villagers to protect the forest (Srey and Diepart 2008).

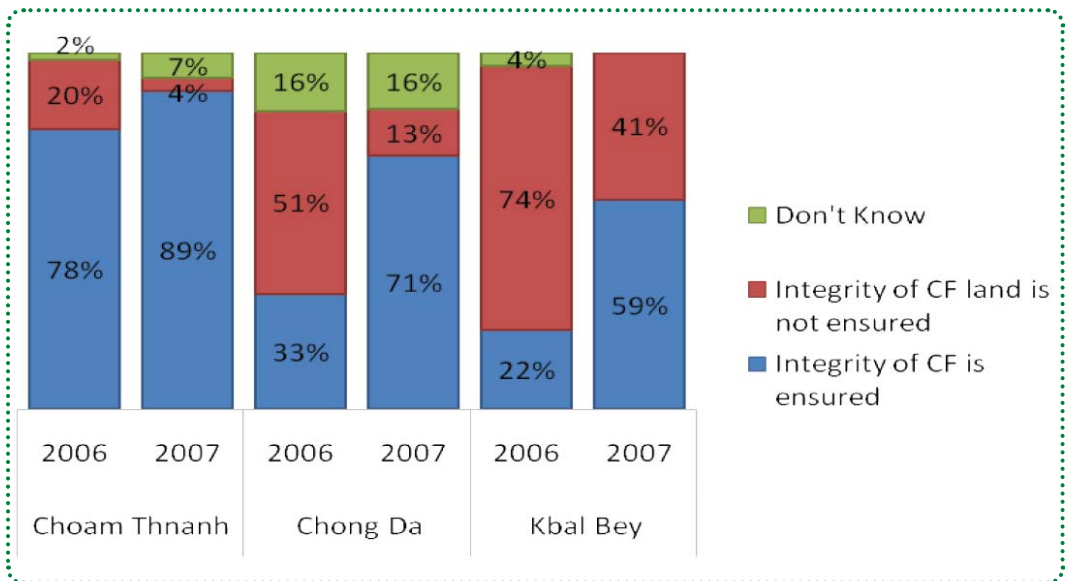
The Prey Tbong Domrei CF area is located in Chong Da village, Tbong Krapeu commune, Steung Saen district. The area is divided into two parts: a heavily degraded forest (148.5 ha) and a high value forest (4.5 ha). It is located 20 km from the provincial town. The overwhelming conversion of forest into chamcar plantation is significant in this area and has threatened the integrity of the community forest. The villagers were keen on establishing a CF to secure their access to non-timber forest products and grazing land for their cattle. This area was selected because of active involvement of the CFMC in dealing with land encroachment around the community forest (Srey and Diepart 2008).

The Prey Kbal Bey CF area is located in Kbal Bey village, Tipou commune, Santuk district. The community forest area size is 768 ha and is divided into four management blocks. The decision to designate the complete area as CF was to avoid putting pressure on any specific parts of the forest that would consequently result in degradation of the forest overall (Srey and Diepart, 2008).

RESULTS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the three CF sites, the perception about land integrity and forest resources was improved between the baseline and follow-up surveys. Figure 3 shows the thoughts of the CF group members relating to the protection of community forest land against encroachment. The number of people who thought the community forest land integrity is ensured significantly increased between both surveys. The efforts of the CFMC and members with support from relevant parties to consolidate the community forest boundary by means of

Figure 3: Judgment about Community Forest Land Integrity



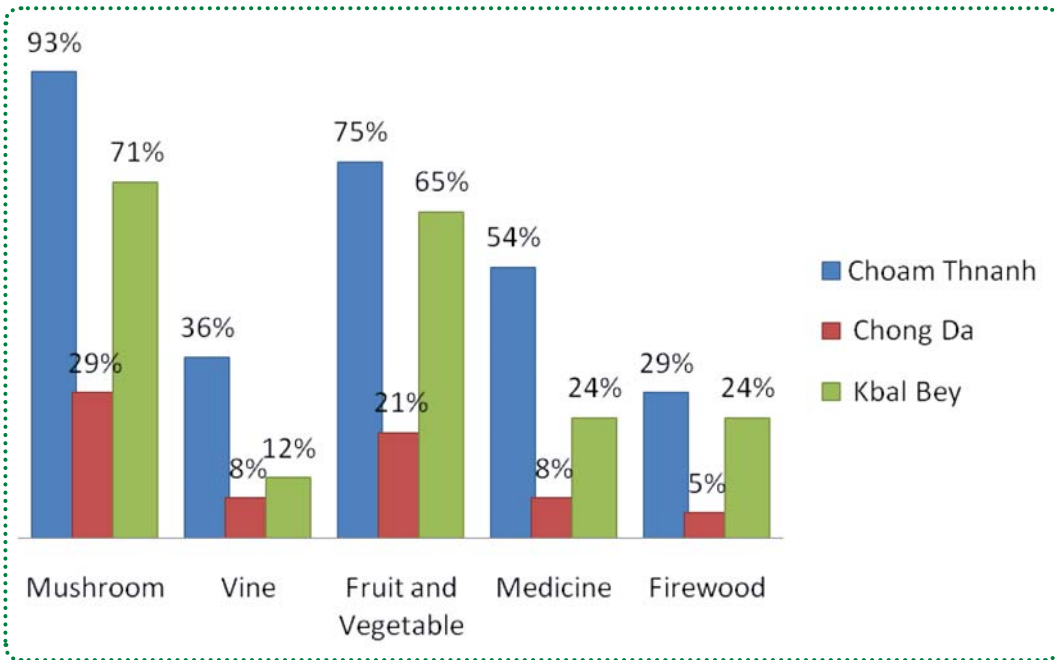
Source: Tol et al. 2008

cement poles, contributed partly to this result. This activity helped improve the knowledge of the CF members about the boundary through their participation in the demarcation days. It also helped to prevent conflict between the CF group and the adjacent land owners by providing the opportunity to clarify the boundaries before posting the poles. A patrolling system was another factor in pushing forward the protection of both forest land and the forest resources themselves. In general, CFMC are responsible for leading the patrol while the group members participate in every patrolling event, on a voluntary basis, or as a duty.

Nevertheless, the CF group members regarded the community forest for protection purposes mainly. The common understanding of members about the use of the community forest was to collect and consume NTFPs in a way⁶ that was harmless to the overall forest health. In this regard, they realized the importance of conserving the forest resources for future use. Nevertheless, detailed investigations revealed that the people in Chong Da did protect their community forest but at the same time cleared forest in other areas to supply their daily needs (Hou et al 2008).

⁶ Most CF members said they knew that they are allowed to collect NTFPs but not to cut down even one tree in the CF according to the regulations.

Figure 4: Diversity Use of NTFP inside the Community Forestry



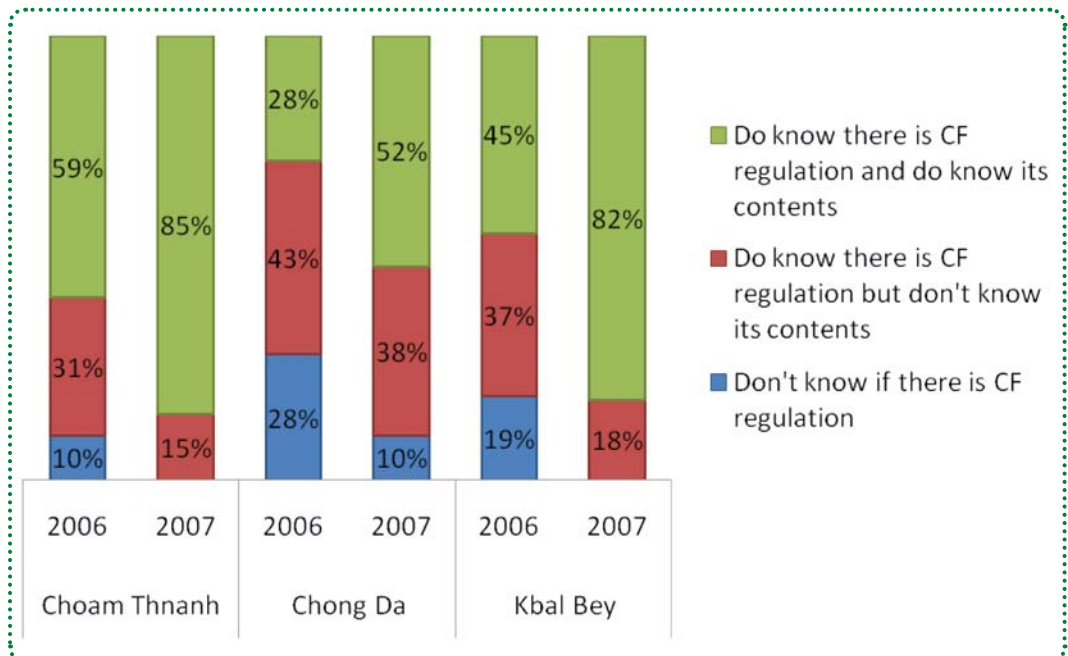
Source: Tol et al, 2008

It was found that the community forest is typically a multi-functional area which played important roles in supporting the livelihoods of the forest-dependent people. Among other benefits, NTFPs are crucial in the livelihoods of forest dependent people, especially the poorest. A case in Kbal Bey community forest showed that NTFPs enabled its members not only to save money but also to generate cash income through direct sale at the Kampong Thmar market. This case study also concluded that the forest activities were an integral part of the labor diversification strategies of local people throughout the year particularly during the dry season when they are not busy with farming (Nop and To 2008).

Figure 4 presents the percentage of the households collecting NTFPs from the community forest during the evaluation survey in 2007. Common types of NTFP collected were seasonally growing products such as mushrooms and wild fruits. In addition to providing the NTFPs for CF members to freely collect, the CF areas were very secure and peaceful grazing areas to feed their cattle, especially in the situation where surrounding forested areas have been privatized.

The CF regulations is one of the key management documents for the CF group as it specifies all appropriation rules of access and use of forest-based resources. Between the baseline and follow-up survey, there was a significant improvement in awareness of the CF group members with regard to the existing CF regulations (Tol et al 2008). However, the knowledge of the CF members about the detailed contents of those regulations was still scant because of limited dissemination by the management committee. Figure 5 presents the answers of the respondents in the three villages in respect of their awareness of CF regulations.

Figure 5: Knowledge of the CF group members about the community forestry regulations

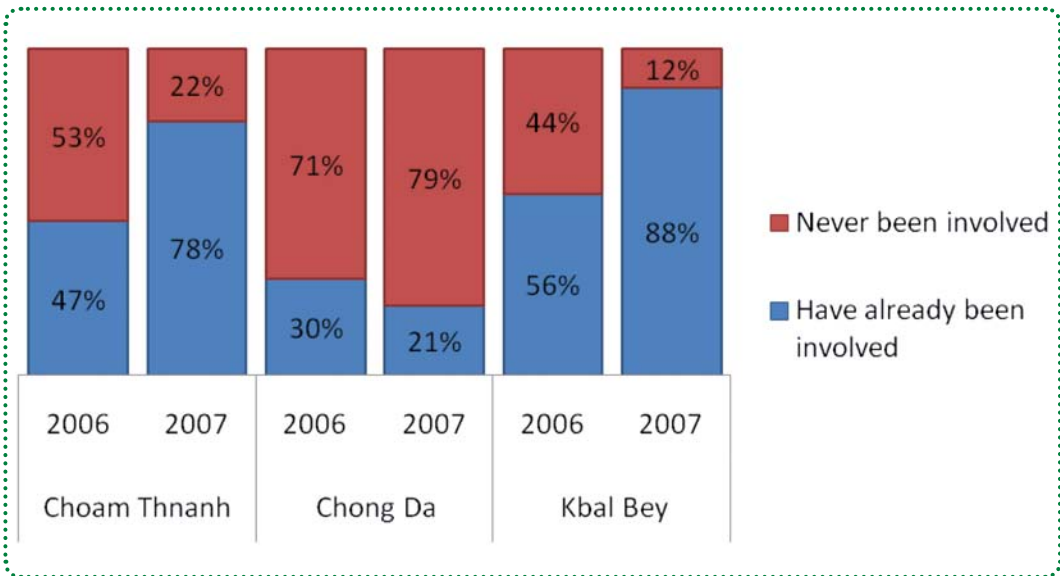


Source: Tol et al, 2008

Involvement of CF group members in CF activities was another aspect related to community well-being. The level of participation of CF members in the three CF sites was always improvable. As shown in Figure 6, the level of people's participation varied from one village to another. While the degree of participation of local people was satisfactory in Choam Thnanh and Kbal Bey villages, the situation in Chong Da village was very different. The main reason that prevented people from joining CF activities was the

overlap with other activities, which the members judged more important to their livelihoods (Tol et al 2008). Lack of information about conducting CF activities also affected the participation of the CF members. Establishing a clear information sharing system, formal or informal, can allow for more active participation in CF development and protection activities (Preap and Van 2008).

Figure 6: Participation of CF members with Community Forestry activities



Source: Tol et al, 2008

In addition, findings showed that the overall support of external facilitators increased in the period between the baseline and evaluation surveys. Training, CF-related dissemination information and meetings were conducted and this enhanced the awareness of the members (Tol et al 2008). Nevertheless, support was still needed to improve the technical skills of CF groups. It was also found that the commune council was an important CF development partner. The commune councils in the case of this initiative played crucial roles helping CFMC in their daily management such as combating illegal activities in the community forest. Integration of CF activities into commune development plans was a good indication of the interest of commune councils in protecting the forest in their territories (Tol and Meam 2008). Another factor considered as external support to the CF group was the market system of the NTFPs. This was closely associated with the livelihoods of the CF group members. According to the findings of the surveys and case studies, NTFP collection had become an

important livelihood strategy among the CF members, especially the poor, and yet the utilization of NTFPs was not very effective. A case in Choam Thnanh village revealed an opportunity to set up a system inside the village for NTFPs to be marketed. This case indicated that the price of the NTFPs sold to middlemen inside the village fluctuated according to individual negotiations between sellers and buyers. Setting up a depot for buying in and selling out all NTFPs within the community could be helpful for the villagers in managing the NTFP price. Furthermore, information about the market for particular NTFP types helped them to sell their NTFPs for an appropriate price (Meas and Im 2008).

DISCUSSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Stakeholder participation in Community Forestry monitoring

Community participation is required during all phases of the monitoring process because local knowledge and skills are the key elements to build on in order to achieve sustainable decentralized forest management. Participation in the monitoring process should allow for local communities to contribute their knowledge, experience and skills, including ecological, cultural and socio-political practices to address declining availability of natural resources and to solve conflicts associated with the control over forest resources.

The consideration and collection of knowledge of rural communities in the daily management of their resources is crucial information for facilitators and experts to propose approaches and methods that could lead to sustainable forest management. Therefore, the combination of technical experts and community local knowledge is necessary for successful sustainability to be achieved. In accordance with this new understanding, encouraging local people to identify their needs, set their objectives, and play an active role in the planning, managing, monitoring and evaluating processes can lead to sustainable forest management.

The design and implementation of the local monitoring process in three CF areas in Kampong Thom province relied on the participation of local people who provided valuable experience and perspectives. Nevertheless, community participation has some limitations. Indeed, it is difficult to capture the different points of view when there are a large number of people involved and consulted. This might lead to a slowdown in the whole process.

At the early stage, participatory approaches are expensive because they require more external support and are time consuming. The consultation process takes a long time and requires good facilitator support to reach consensus among different groups of people within the community and outsiders on how to manage forest resources in a sustainable manner.

On the other hand, participatory approaches tend to favor local elites and those who are better off, reinforcing their power, and therefore causing socio-political problems at the local level. The local elite and management committee members are usually the information gatekeepers of any planning and decision-making processes governing the future of the CF group. Therefore, the local poorest communities and members need to be encouraged and allowed to take a more active role in planning and managing their forests for sustainable income. Additionally, there is a need to ensure that forests belong to each local community, especially the marginalized groups including children and women in order for CF to be effective and sustainable.

Importantly, the monitoring system implies a 'two way communication' which enhances mutual understanding and consensus among the stakeholders. It should be a mirror of the whole diversity existing within rural communities, which particularly includes the marginalized groups such as women, the poor, widowers and cultural minorities who are the most affected by any decisions. It provides them with a mechanism for the coordination of information across ecosystems and sectors in the discussions for any progression and in the actual performance of CF decision making.

Furthermore, results from monitoring offer the opportunity to open up communication, allowing for dynamic learning, building on experience, learning from previous mistakes and making communication among stakeholders more transparent. This can be seen as a pre-condition that leads to achieving sustainable forest management in the long run.

Capacity Development and Institutional Strengthening

The ability of people to understand and adopt good practices and communicate with provincial or national institutions is fundamental to the long term success of decentralized forest management. In this regard, local-level monitoring can be seen as a useful tool for capacity development activities to be addressed for all CF stakeholders from local to national

level including government and local community as well as commune council. The capacity development activities conducted in the frame of this Kampong Thom initiative served to strengthen participatory commune land use planning and communication.

For long-term sustainable forest management to be ensured and for communities to have ownership over forest resources, a local management committee needs to be put in place with clear roles, responsibilities, and regulations. To empower and help communities to focus on the development and implementation of rules/regulations and to deal with conflict, the capacity of local people to understand the context and use the monitoring tools/framework needs to be enhanced so that local communities can be considered key actors in decentralized forest management.

The result of monitoring enables the local community to develop and improve their CF management and performance and also informs the local forestry administration and other stakeholders about the actual level of performance and the progression of CF. In addition, monitoring has the ability to strengthen, cross-sectoral links which can provide appropriate support mechanisms to local communities.

Policy Support

The current forest management policies and framework are emphasizing the increasing role given to decentralized forest management in Cambodia. The challenge facing local authorities at the provincial, district and commune levels is how to integrate CF into their development program when the legal framework and policy are incomplete.

However, the forestry sector is developing a new national forestry program and is in the process of decentralizing management tasks and reforming administrations to allow for greater integration with other forms of decentralized forest management. It is necessary to finalize the legal and policy framework relating to forestry, to develop human resources, and to improve the capacity of relevant organizations from national to local levels. In this regard, monitoring activities regularly conducted with CF groups can supply policy makers with first hand information and serve as a reference in the on-going discussion to develop the national forest policy.

In order to increase the effectiveness of decentralized forest management, a monitoring system must be established at the local level to neutrally monitor and evaluate the performance of all stakeholders including the CF committee, villagers, and third parties (external environment support). It would ideally lead to local management plans and law enforcement by all stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

It is widely recognized that sustainable decentralized forest management requires the participation of local communities to properly address their needs and aspirations and enable them to develop sound forest management practices. Local-level monitoring can help to build local capacity, improve decision-making, reduce conflict between local forest dependents and responsible authorities as well as empower local community members, especially marginalized groups.

It also provides a space for constructive technical dialogue between rural communities and stakeholders (forestry administration, NGOs and local authorities) to assist in solving institutional constraints and issues. Monitoring can promote local control and ownership over resources and lead to better forest management. Nevertheless, monitoring as implemented in Kampong Thom has its weaknesses, which include time and resource constraints which may delay the development process.

If local-level monitoring is to be successful for sustainable decentralized forest management, it requires a strong political will to involve local communities at the grassroots level in the planning and decision-making process governing the management of their forest resources. It also implies that trust is built among all the stakeholders involved in decentralized forest management.

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