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## **Community Forestry Models in Southeast Asia and Cambodia: – A comparative study –**

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A shift from conventional forest management to community forestry is arguably a major development of forest management of many Southeast Asian countries in the last few decades. This study aims to provide a picture of community forestry models in Southeast Asia and Cambodia and draw upon what Cambodia can learn from experience of Southeast Asia. The study demonstrates that, based on the types of land use certificate issued to participants, community forestry programs in Southeast Asia can be classified into three types: (1) community forestry programs in which land use certificates are issued to individuals, (2) community forestry programs in which land use certificates are issued to communities and (3) community forestry programs as forest protection contracts. In Cambodia land use certificates in community forestry are issued only to communities. The study suggests that mechanisms for granting forest protection contracts and land use certificate to individuals in community-based forest management such as those found in Southeast Asia can also be applicable for Cambodia. The study also argues that although community forestry models in Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Philippines, Indonesia are those that emerged from their own social, economic and geographical conditions, most of them tend to have five key elements in common. These include 1) well-organized community organization, 2) security of rights on land and tree resources, 3) economic benefits to the rural community, 4) on-going evaluation and monitoring and 5) strong support from NGOs, central and local government. In Cambodia, however, many projects are underway without ongoing evaluation and monitoring. Thus, more efforts should be made to ensure that all projects are adequately evaluated and monitored in order to improve project implementation and to provide policy makers with data and information for future actions.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The last few decades have witnessed a dramatic change in the way in which forests are perceived in terms of their values and in the way in which they can be best managed. The move toward community-based forest management is arguably the most important forest policy development of the past century (RECOFTC, 2001). The process of learning about and improving the application of community forestry, however, is a continuous one and one in which we are at the relatively early stage on the learning curve (Arnold, 1991; Peluso, 1992; Stevens, 1988 ).

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Within a country, community forestry models may differ from one another depending on their practical conditions (Rao, 1989). In some countries community forestry is essentially a government program with some level of cooperation with local people. In other cases community forestry has emerged as a people's movement which challenges the control of forests by the state (Gilmour and Fisher, 1997). In terms of location, community forestry efforts in Southeast Asia can be found on both degraded and forested lands (Fox, 1997). Within these contexts there must be different kinds of usufructs that local people have on land and forest resources. Key questions are whether community forestry projects in Southeast Asia have principle elements in common determining their success. Equally important is that, since Community forestry in Cambodia is now at the starting point of development (Butterfield, R. 1998), what lessons Cambodia can learn from Southeast Asia in improving its community forestry implementation.

This study generally attempts to provide a review on community forestry models developed in Southeast Asia and Cambodia. It seeks to draw out features in common and differences among some selected community forestry programs and discusses the possibility of adopting community forestry models of Southeast Asia to Cambodia's situations. The study first examines the evolution of community forestry in both Southeast Asia and Cambodia. This is followed by an introduction of some selected community forestry projects and a discussion for policy implications in Cambodia.

## METHODS

A variety of methods can be used to conduct research under diverse conditions in order to meet different objectives. The key to getting the best result relies, therefore, in choosing the methods best suited to the type of information sought and to the conditions in which the information will be gathered, analyzed and used (Karen, 1995). This study is mainly based on secondary data for both Southeast Asia and Cambodia. For Southeast Asia, sources of information available in formal documents and case studies by individual researchers from Southeast Asia are relied upon. For Cambodia, a number of literatures related to forests and community forestry was collected from a wide variety of sources including Forestry Department, Ministry of Agriculture and a number of non-government organizations that work on community forestry development in Cambodia. These are supported by field survey on the Banteay Angkor Community Forestry Program in Takeo province in southwestern Cambodia. Interviews with some key informants of the project were conducted during field survey in order to obtain practical information on project implementation. Proceedings of international seminars, technical papers, reports and studies by international bodies and organizations such as FAO, World Bank are also relied upon in this study.

## RESULTS

### **The concepts of community forestry**

By the mid 1970s it had become apparent that development strategies narrowly based on industrialization were not working. In 1978, the World Bank issued its influential forestry policy which signaled a major shift in its forestry activities away from industrial

forestry towards environmental protection and meeting local needs (Arnold, 1991). A series of international meetings, notably the 1978 Eighth World Forestry Congress, which was devoted to the theme "Forests for People" serve to give the concepts of community forestry rapid and intensive exposure. Community Forestry should be designed in a way to meet basic needs for fuel, food, fodder, and timber and encourage self-reliance among the local people (Palit, 1996, Arnold, 1991). A community forestry programme should, therefore, be developed through consultations with the people and also be an integral part of rural development.

Yet, in 1978, the Food and Agriculture organization of the United Nations (FAO/UN) defined Community Forestry as "any situation which intimately involves local people in a forestry activity" (Arnold, 1991). Other terms of community forestry that are often used interchangeably in Southeast Asia and elsewhere are forestry for local community development, village forestry, social forestry, rural forestry, and participatory forestry (Gilmour and Fisher, 1997; Palit, 1996). Without categorizing the Community Forestry practiced in Southeast Asia as any of the above terms, this study uses the term of Community Forestry for all forestry programs that involve local people participation as defined by the FAO.

### **The evolution of community forestry in Southeast Asia**

Due to a wide variety of conditions, both natural and social, across Southeast Asia, social forestry programs exist in a myriad of forms that no one form, strictly defined, dominating the field (Fox, 1997). Efforts throughout Asia have been made to explore effective ways and means to involve rural people and local communities in community forestry activities. Community forestry practices in Southeast Asia have rapidly spread over as foresters come to recognize that conventional management of forest resources has failed and even worsened the life of rural people (Romm, 1986). In the last two decades community forestry in the region has become a multi-million dollar activity and the single most important forestry sector program to be implemented by the national governments, often with technical and investment support from international agencies (Rao, 1993). In March 1987, the Regional Community Forestry Training Center (RECOFTC) was established with funding support provided by the Asian Development Bank and the Government of Switzerland (RECOFTC, 1997). The main objectives of the center are to promote community forestry implementation throughout the region.

### **The evolution of community forestry in Cambodia**

Community forestry in Cambodia is at starting stage of development. Over the last century, Cambodia's forest policies have been primarily concerned with the extraction of timber for revenues to the government and concessionaires. These policies have resulted in rapid deforestation. In the last ten years there has been greater recognition of local people's ability and rights to manage forest resources (Butterfield, 1998). A number of community forestry projects are underway in Cambodia and their scopes of activities are increasing. It is seen that international donors and non-government organization are playing a very important role in supporting community forestry in Cambodia while the Department of Forestry still does not have strong supportive bases including community forestry guidelines, funds and human resources. The first community forestry project in

Cambodia started in 1994 on 500 ha of degraded forest areas in Takeo province (Sokh *et al.*, 2000). It is funded by a non-government organization called Mennonite Central Committee. Although national policies and responsibility for community forestry remain unclear, senior officials of relevant ministries have expressed support for community forestry development. Nearly all of the community forestry projects are linked to at least one government agency. Some of these co-management strategies involving conferring limited use rights in state forest lands to community-based organizations as long as agreed forest management are met (Henderson, 1998). Some others involve more substantial granting of rights in forest lands to local communities.

### Community forestry models in Southeast Asia and Cambodia

Community-based forestry efforts in Southeast Asia are generally found on two types of forest lands: degraded and forested. Degraded forest lands are areas where forest resources have been so degraded by continuous cutting and over grazing. Forested lands are areas forest stands which are still intensively dense. Since Cambodia has both types of these forest lands, it is worthy examining community forestry models for both situations. However, within these two situations of badly degraded and relatively good forest cover, community forestry programs can be further divided into three types based on different forms of land use certificates. They are community forestry programs in which 1) land use certificates are issued to individual households, 2) land uses certificates are issued to communities, and 3) land use certificate issued as forest protection contracts.

#### 1) Land certificate issued to individual households

The first type of community forestry is defined here based on land use certificates issued to individual households. These certificates recognize their inhabitant rights to manage and farm state-claimed forest lands. Vietnam and Thailand both grant land use certificates to farmers occupying state-claimed forest lands in areas that are suitable for permanent agriculture (Fox, 1998). Two examples of community-based forest management, each from Thailand and Vietnam are provided in Table 1 below.

In Thailand the land use certificate issued to farmers is known as Sit Thi Thamkin (or Right to Harvest). This certificate ensures the right to use and occupy land area of 2.8 hectares for 25 years and can be renewable for a second period. They, however, can not

**Table 1.** Two examples of community-based forest management systems within which land use certificates are issued to individual households

	Products and rights	Responsibilities	Restrictions	Participants	Tenure rights
<i>Thailand</i> Stewardship Certificate Program	2.8 ha of agricultural land use. Inheritance rights	Responsible land stewardship	Cannot cut and use forest trees, no grazing	Thai citizens, landless, small landholders.	25 years renewable
<i>Vietnam</i> State-forest Lands	Exchange, transfer, lease, mortgage, and inheritance rights	Manage land according to approved use	Use according to assigned practices	Individuals, armed groups, political and social organizations	50 years renewable

cut and use the forest trees or use the land for grazing (Pinkeaw, 1997). Eligible farmers are those of landless and small holders who occupied land before 1982. Strictly speaking this certificate, which allows farmers to plant agricultural crops on forest lands, is not a form of community-based resource management but are more closely related to private property than common property (Fox, 1998). In Vietnam, a community-based program under the Decree 02/CP which has been implemented on state forest lands does not recognize private ownership even to agriculture lands (Hiew and Cai, 1999). However, it gives holders of usufruct certificates broad rights to transfer land including rights to exchange, transfer, lease, mortgage and pass on land for inheritance. Usufruct certificates can be renewed for a second term of 50 years if both are satisfied with the results (Liedtke, 1999). Another interesting point is that while farmers in Thailand have few rights of transfer they are free to plant what they like on their lands during the 25-year contract. In Vietnam, however, the state reserves the rights to specify land use and recover land if it is not used according to its assigned purpose (Table 1). Community forestry programs in Cambodia do not offer individual usufruct certificates to farmers living or farming state-claimed forest lands. Instead they are issued to a whole community including one or more villages that participate in a specific project.

## 2) Land certificate issued to communities

The second type of community forestry classified in this paper is the community-based forest management systems within which land use certificates are issued to communities that have some forms of claim to the land (often through indigenous laws, long occupancy, and not through land title). Some of these lands are so degraded and some others are still covered by valuable forests.

The Decree No. 54/MAF on customary rights and the use of forest resources was signed in Laos on 7 March 1996. It defines customary rights as those right and obligations

**Table 2.** Three examples of community-based forest management systems within which land use certificates are issued to communities

	Products and rights	Responsibilities	Restrictions	Participants	Tenure rights
<i>Laos</i> Customary rights Decree No. 54/MAF	Exclusive use rights for forest products	Follow forest management plan	Not specified	Committee members	Not specified
<i>Cambodia</i> Banteay Angkor Community Forestry Program	80% of commercial timber, 90% of NTFP. Inheritance rights	form a legal association	Use according to agreements	Villagers from 12 villages	15 years for fast-growing species, 60 for long-term species. Renewable
<i>Philippines</i> Community Stewardship Agreement	Sharing of income from sale of timber, NTFP	Form a legal nonprofit organization	Not specified	Upland dwellers	25 years renewable

held by people that have their roots in custom and are accepted by law (Fox, 1998). These people are given exclusive rights on forest products from their land. Length of tenure on forest lands and restrictions of use are not specified in the decree. Nevertheless the decree provides protections against encroachers, recognizes local methods of resolving land and resource disputes, and provides for compensation in all cases where the users means of livelihood are affected. As long as this decree is not limited by other decrees or laws, customary communities in Laos have been empowered to protect and manage their forest resources (Fox, 1998).

In the Philippines, under the Community Stewardship Agreement (CSA), upland dwellers are provided with tenurial security and incentives to develop, use and manage specific portions of forest lands. Each CSA covers only a maximum of 5 ha and has a duration of 25 years renewable for another 25 years (Pulhin, 1999). Restrictions on use of forest lands as well as inheritance rights are not specified in this certificate of agreement. However, the community is charged with preparing a management plan and developing, conserving, and protecting forest resources. Forest committee applying for this certificate must prepare an application form accompanied by the forest community's constitution, article of incorporation, sketch map of the area, list of community members, a primary plan and a census of all individuals residing within the area applied. Nevertheless, CSA is perhaps the best articulated community forest management initiative in the region (Fox, 1998).

In the Banteay Angkor Community Forestry Project, southwestern Cambodia, 12 villages have been given a usufruct certificate on 500 hectares of severely degraded forest lands. Tenure rights are 15 years on areas where farmers plant fast-growing species and 60 years for native species. This certificate of land use can be renewed for the second term (Table 2). Responsibility of the recipients are that they have to form a inter-village Community Forestry Committee and plant trees and protect forests as agreed upon with the Forestry Department (Sokh *et al.*, 2000). According to the agreement the Forestry Department can revoke and retake the forest lands when it feels necessary but has to make compensation to communities. On lands that are already cleared farmers are required to plant fast-growing, soil-improving tree species and long-term high value native trees among their upland crops. On lands that are still under natural but degraded vegetation farmers are required to conduct forest enrichment with native species. After 30 years farmers can harvest these native timber trees where 20 percent of the timber harvested for sales belongs to the Forest Department and the remaining 80 percent to the farmers.

### **3) Forest protection contracts**

The third type of community forestry defined here is community-based forest management that is implemented based on forest protection contracts. The contracts usually specify the cooperation between the state (Forestry Department) and forest user groups. They spell out the specific rights and responsibility of both partners as well as the length of agreements. These contracts are often found in densely populated areas where villagers are willing to protect forests in exchange for the right to intercrop agricultural crops among the trees and the right to harvest some certain non-timber forest products.

The government of Indonesia recognizes some 6000 forest villages on Java containing at least twenty million people (Sumadi, 1989). Under the State Forest Corporation Program farmers are offered inheritance rights and rights to intercrop with timber species (Peluso, 1992; Pulhin, 1997). At the village level, a forest guard or community organizer works with local farmers to design and implement land management plans. Based on land quality and spacing, the state determines the primary forest species to be planted. Contracts are written in local language so that all parties understand the content. These contracts do not provide ownership on lands but they can be renewed every two years. Illegal felling, fires and encroachment are banned. Contracts are made with community members with priorities are given to the landless farmers (Table 3). In general forest protection contracts such as ones found in Java between the state and local communities have also been the most successful forms of community forestry in Southeast Asia (Pulhin, 1996; Peluso, 1989).

**Table 3.** An example of community-based forest management systems based on forest protection contracts

	Products and rights	Responsibilities	Restrictions	Participants	Tenure rights
<i>Indonesia</i>	intercrop with	Follow FD	Illegal felling; fires;	Community	No ownership,
State Forest	timber species (no	directions, repay	encroachment	members with	contracts
Corporation	rights to timber).	loans, guard and		emphasis on	renewed every
Social	Inheritance rights	protect forests		landless	2 years
Forestry					
Program					

## DISCUSSIONS

This study attempts to provide a backdrop of community forestry pictures in Southeast Asia and draw possible implications for Cambodia. There has been increasingly recognized that community forestry may serve as the best strategy in improving local economy and managing forest resources. Obviously, community forestry in Southeast Asia has to its credit a number of successes where the forest has been restored under local participation management.

The special historical and cultural backgrounds of each community group makes each situation of community forestry projects unite. Though it is useful to study other cultures, development and sustainable forest strategies, it is believed that there is no one best community forestry model that can be successfully applied to every case. The most successful models of community forestry seem to be those that emerged from certain local community conditions. However, Fox (1997) points out five principle factors existing in successful community forestry programs: 1) a well-defined community organization, 2) security of rights on lands and trees 3) economic benefits to local communities, 4) evaluation and monitoring on the projects and 5) strong supports from central and local governments. In Cambodia, evaluation and monitoring of community forestry projects are poorly enhanced (Sokh, *et al.*, 2000). Therefore more efforts must be made to ensure that all community forestry projects are evaluated and monitored. This would provide



data and information not only for project organizers but also for policy makers in establishing an effective community forestry policy for Cambodia.

Community forestry programs in Cambodia do not offer individual usufruct certificates nor forest protection contracts to farmers living on or farming state-claimed forest lands. The Banteay Angkor Community Forestry Projects, where land use certificate was issued to a community of 12 villages, has been a successful model. Nevertheless, Cambodia should look closely at the example from other countries, especially those of Southeast Asia where community forestry is implemented based on land use certificates issued to individuals or forest protection contracts. It is very possible that local communities in Cambodia would also prefer individual land title like those of the lowland Kinh in Vietnam. Mechanisms of forest protection contracts such as in Indonesia can also be useful in Cambodia. They are observed to have potential on high value forest lands where the state wants to maintain control of the lands and trees. In addition, the model of Laos which greatly simplifies the bureaucratic paper work required by both local communities and government administrators is also a good example. If it is, however, felt that a more comprehensive mechanism is necessary for recognizing the rights and responsibilities of local communities, then the policies existed in the Philippines should provide a useful model. Any adoption of community forestry models of Southeast Asia to Cambodia can be possible if attentions are carefully paid in modifying those models to suit the real situations.

It may be too early to draw conclusion on which type of community forestry examined here is the best model for Cambodia. The most suitable approach will only emerge from experiment and implementation. Rather than a single approach in which community forestry is implemented based on land use certificates issued to community, it is suggested that Cambodia develop a menu including other types of community-based forest options as discussed above. This would allow local communities and planners to easily pick up the models best suited to their preferences.

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