Community-Based Natural Resource Management Land Use Planning : Lessons Learned from the CARPE Program

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Community forestry : A priority for CARPE and its partners

Community forestry as a management method is by definition not limited solely to the management of forests by local communities to produce timber. It also includes the harvesting of non-timber forest products, exploiting bushmeat, biodiversity conservation, and other environmental, social, cultural and religious services (Colchester et al., 2003).

On the basis of this broad definition, the concept of community management contributes to Intermediate Result 2 of CARPE Phase II that aims to strengthen governance within institutions, improve policies and laws related to natural resource management, and build the capacity of civil society and communities involved in the management of forest resources.

Involvement of communities in the management of renewable resources: Analysis of recent developments

Who should join forces with whom?

The issue of involving communities in the management of forest resources lies at the heart of a controversy that, to this day, is still unresolved – that is, participatory management. Who should join forces with whom? Participatory management is in itself the culmination of an evolution in policies on the management of forest landscapes in Central Africa. It marks a clear break from views held prior to the 1992 Rio Conference,

where protection (conservation) and exploitation of resources were the only pillars of forestry policy.

Whenever natural resource management is discussed in the context of the Congo Basin, it is difficult to dissociate the issue of resources from that of land tenure, since "a landscape only has economic stakes because of the resources it contains; and resources (land, water and plant) can only be important from an economic and social view point, on condition that they are useful", as an eminent socio-economist rightly once said (Weber, 1998).

This marks the switch from the notion of protection to that of management. Protection implied prohibiting human activity, and aimed above all at perpetuating the existence of animal and plant species. Environmental management entails accepting that humans are a dominant element in the natural environment and that the impact of their actions on the latter may and should be beneficial for all (Bahuchet et al., 2000).

Voluntary or imposed participation?

Powerful civil society lobbies had to bring pressure to bear on States to prompt them to adopt the idea that wildlife was only wild by name, given that in reality it is the result of a symbiotic relation between man and his biotope. Forests, as they appear today, are the outcome of several transformations induced by human actions in a perfect balance between disadvantages and advantages. Destruction causes a collapse of this fragile balance in several ways.

Involving members of local forest communities in the management of ecosystems that they have been living in for ages, in order to better conserve them, has therefore become a panacea since 1992. Man is no longer a secondary character in conservation programmes and has instead become a key actor.

Actors with divergent interests

This ecological viewpoint, derived from "ecological capitalism", is based on the ideas of resources, wealth and access. The more wealth

and wellbeing that resource use generates, the more users will be concerned about the conservation of these resources.

Unfortunately, in developing this new approach, a distinction was made between urban élites and rural people. The former should, according to this new way of thinking, be distanced from any sustainable development initiatives carried out locally, because they are liable to hijack them and subvert their original objectives.

As for the latter, the "real beneficiaries" of these initiatives, they should be prepared to take ownership of them and implement them, by using their traditional know-how and customary codes that may not necessarily be environmentally friendly.

There is a clear preference for local actors to the detriment of external actors even though their influence on the activities of local communities is obvious. Is this not one of the primary inadequacies of this conception of local development? Participatory management and all its derivatives seems to be based on the desire to establish equity; the desire to repair an injustice that until now kept forest populations away from all forestry activities and thus contributed to breaking the interdependence that seemed to prevail in all relations between forest dwellers and forest resources.

However, there is a lot of criticism with regard to how this involvement was conceived.

There are those who believe that the current strategy is implausible: that is, offering the local populations, dependent on forest resources, alternatives to their traditional activities so that they can turn away from the resources, but still have sufficient incomes to provide them with the necessary goods and services to support their livelihoods and wellbeing (Weber, 1998).

After more than a decade of attempting to balance participatory management with sustainable management, and trying to achieve local development while also conserving resources, the scientific community has been obliged to face up to some unpalatable truths: poor practices in the

environment have not stopped. The local population has not yet taken on board the participatory management methods that have been proposed to them. Poverty has scarcely been alleviated in conservation zones. Pressure has increased in quite a number of cases, influenced by factors that are external to the forest and that are generally driven by the market.

In conceiving participatory management strategies, it was thought that the individual should be relegated to the background and the group brought to the fore. The community approach was supposed to absorb individualism for optimum results, and to have effects on all individuals of the same group.

Unfortunately this has also been shown to have its limitations, due to social changes, characterized by a deterioration in the forms of community control (Lavigne-Delville, 1996), over private, individual and family property, at the same time as the influence of customary authorities is declining in forest zones.

Lessons learned

The three case studies presented in this chapter describe three different experiences of community management in three landscapes of the Congo Basin.

They consist of three multi-stakeholder partnership initiatives, involving civil society, the administration, and local communities, aiming to achieve the sustainable management of natural resources in the three landscapes. All three initiatives were facilitated by an international non-governmental organization working for the conservation of ecosystems.

In two of the case studies, land-use planning was carried out by the local population using participatory mapping. These two experiences were coordinated by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in the Lac Télé-Lac Tumba Landscape, and the Salonga-Lukenie-Sankuru Landscape, in areas where conservation objectives were at odds with the vital needs of the population. These two experiences describe the ups and downs on the road to arriving at an acceptable compromise for all actors; many difficulties required new and ingenious approaches to continue moving in the right direction.

The third case study describes supporting the acquisition and management of community forests by people living in the Sangha Tri-National (STN) Landscape, and was carried out by the WWF Jengi Program.

Of the three case studies, it is the one that best illustrates the difficulties of community management, because it deals with a case where the financial and political stakes were already clear, as compared to the other two whose populations were still at the initial stage of the project and could not yet perceive the outcomes. Instead of the potential or real benefits generated by the commercialization of community forest products boosting local development in the STN Landscape, in quite a number of cases they fuelled violent conflicts between the beneficiaries.

These three experiences are concrete examples of the types of partnerships that may make it possible to reconcile the conservation of ecosystems with the welfare of the local population. All three also demonstrate that community management is not in itself a panacea. The complexity of the legal status of protected areas, lengthy administrative procedures, the weak technical capacity of the local populations, and the financial and political stakes are just some of the obstacles to effective appropriation of the participatory management opportunities offered to the population within the framework of mitigating the negative impacts of conservation policies and objectives.

The STN Landscape case study illustrates well the fact that bad governance is far from being the preserve of public institutions, for community managers at the local level are just as likely to indulge in less than transparent practices.

From all of these developments, the main lesson learned is that the outcomes of participatory management are just some of the factors that will impact on the future of the forests. The city-forest relationship is another factor that contributes to

the ups and downs of forest management. This may be the moment to start developing strategies for the controlled involvement of the much-feared "urban élites" in local development and ecosystem conservation strategies. They are undoubtedly key actors in overcoming the numerous hurdles that remain to be tackled by all the actors who have for decades been seeking to integrate conservation and development successfully.

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