



**Royal Government of Bhutan  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forests  
Department of Forests and Park Services**

# **National Strategy for Community Forestry The Way Ahead**

**May 2010**



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Social Forestry Division SFD  
Department of Forests and Park Services DFPS  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forests MoAF  
Royal Government of Bhutan  
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**Royal Government of Bhutan**

**Ministry of Agriculture and Forests  
Department of Forests and Park Services  
Social Forestry Division**



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Community Forestry**  
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## Acronyms

AAC	Annual Allowable Cut
AHL	Annual Harvesting Limit (term for AAC in CFMPs)
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CF	Community Forest/Forestry
CFMG	Community Forest Management Group
CFMP	Community Forest Management Plan
CNR	College of Natural Resources
DFPS	Department of Forests and Park Services
DFO	Divisional Forest Officer / Divisional Forest Office
DYT	Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogdu (Dzongkhag Development Committee)
DzFO	Dzongkhag Forestry Officer
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (of the UN)
F and NCA	Forest and Nature Conservation Act
FMU	Forest Management Unit
FNCR	Forest and Nature Conservation Rules
FORED	Forest Research for Development
FRA	Forest Resource Assessment
GFEO	Geog Forest Extension Officer
GRF	Government Reserved Forest
GYT	Geog Yargay Tshogchung (Geog Development Committee)
ha	Hectare
HH	Household
ICDP	Integrated Conservation and Development Project/Program
MoAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forests
MoF	Ministry of Finance
NWFP	Non-Wood Forest Products
PFMP	Participatory Forest Management Project
PM	Park Manager/Park Management

RECOFTC	Regional Community Forestry Training Center
RGoB	Royal Government of Bhutan
RNR	Renewable Natural Resources
SFD	Social Forestry Division
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
UWICE	Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environment

### **Description of terms**

Chathrim	Act
Dzongda	District administrator
Dzongkhag	District
Geog	Block
Sokshing	Area for leaf litter collection
Thram	Land title document
Thromde	An urban place
Tsamdro	Grazing area



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**Royal Government of Bhutan**  
**Ministry of Agriculture**  
**and Forests**



## MESSAGE

Given the importance of Community Forestry in Bhutan and the sharp rise both in demand for community forests and the number of newly established community forests in all parts of the country since 2007, this National Strategy for Community Forestry is indeed very timely. It strategically charts the way ahead to ensure that Community Forestry contributes to Bhutan's overall socio-economic and environmental development goals and to local democratisation, and thus guides the future implementation of the Community Forestry programme. It is based on a thorough analysis and reflection on the experiences gained with Community Forestry so far and on the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan's overarching goal of poverty reduction. I expect the strategy to guide all stakeholders involved in Community Forestry towards establishing an even more enabling framework for Community Forestry and simpler, but robust planning, implementation and monitoring procedures, so that Community Forestry continues to thrive for the benefit of the rural communities of Bhutan.

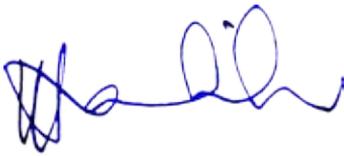
Over the next several years, we want to see all rural communities having their own community forest sustainably managed and fully empowered to take management decisions. We also want to see benefits gained from the management of community forests achieving positive socio-economic and ecological impacts. Community Forestry has a great potential to contribute towards alleviating rural poverty. There is tremendous scope for local people to generate income from the sustainable management of community forests through the marketing and sale of timber, firewood and non-wood forest products. In the long run, I envisage that a considerable part of the national forest can be brought under community forest management and community forests become a major source of commercial timber and non-wood forest products.

I would like to take this opportunity to assure all those involved in Community Forestry – rural households, local governments, dzongkhag administrations and Department of Forests and Park Services staff - my full personal support for the Community Forestry programme and the implementation of this strategy. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forests places high priority on the development of Community Forestry in its RNR Sector 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2008–2013) with the objective of empowering rural communities to sustainably manage local forest resources and

contributing to poverty alleviation, income and employment generation in rural areas.

I would like to express our sincere thanks to the people of Switzerland, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Helvetas for our fruitful collaboration and their continuous support to the development of Community Forestry in Bhutan in general and of this strategy in particular. I would also like to congratulate the Social Forestry Division and the Department of Forests and Park Services for bringing up this strategy document. I am grateful to all organisations and persons who contributed to the elaboration of this very important strategy and I look forward to its successful implementation.

Tashi Delek!



Lyonpo (Dr) Pema Gyamtsho  
Minister  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forests

May 2010



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**Royal Government of Bhutan  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forests**



**PREFACE**

Our country is fortunate to be blessed with a vast wealth of forest resources. This positive situation is the result of the wisdom of our forefathers and of the enlightened leadership of our beloved monarchs placing conservation and sustainable management of natural resources at the forefront of development.

Community Forestry is a programme that contributes to achieving many development goals: empowerment of local communities, sustainable forest management, good governance and poverty alleviation. Through Community Forestry, there is a reversal of the forest management paradigm from nationalisation and centralisation to devolution and decentralisation in forest resource management. Forest management is devolved right down to the local communities in the form of Community Forest Management Groups (CFMGs). Local people who have traditionally been involved in the management of forests again become custodians of local forest resources and effectively become forest managers with professional foresters taking on backstopping and facilitation roles. With the CFMGs, new local institutions are being formed that can play an important role in local development and improved local governance in future. Community Forestry also contributes to the conservation of at least 60% of the total land area under forest cover for all times to come, as required by the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

The impressive progress achieved with Community Forestry so far would not have been possible without the critical support from SDC and Helvetas and the assistance provided by other development partners such as SNV and Danida. I would like to thank all of them for their unfailing support and believing in us and the growing Community Forestry programme.

I very much welcome the formulation of this National Strategy for Community Forestry. I expect it to enable us to make Community Forestry a success in terms of its expected socio-economic outcomes like poverty alleviation and generation of income and employment in rural areas, improved local governance as well as of conservation of our rich and diverse forests. With this, I would like to invite all stakeholders to collaborate with the local communities and our forestry staff in the implementation of this strategy.

Tashi Delek!

Sherub Gyaltshen  
Secretary  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forests

May 2010



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**Royal Government of Bhutan**  
**Ministry of Agriculture and Forests**  
**Department of Forests and Park Services**

**FOREWORD**

Today, Community Forestry is a key component of Bhutan's forest policy and is developing very dynamically in our country. As per the end of 2009, there were 200 community forests covering an area of 24,997 hectares and involving 9763 rural households. Thus, Community Forestry has past its trialling and piloting stage and has become an institutionalised part of the system for the sustainable management of Bhutan's rich and diverse forest resources. The experience gained so far from the Community Forestry programme confirms that local communities indeed are effective forest managers.

The Social Forestry Division (SFD) of the Department of Forests and Park Services took the lead in developing this strategy. It has been formulated in a truly participatory way involving all relevant stakeholders and partners. A key step was the first National Community Forestry Workshop held on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2009 in Thimphu during which the participating stakeholders provided important inputs for the development of this strategy, based on their experience and visions for the future of Community Forestry in Bhutan.

Dr Don Gilmour supported the SFD in the development of this strategy with his vast experience in the field of Community Forestry and successfully facilitated the formulation process of the strategy. The Participatory Forest Management Project (PFMP) implemented by the SFD and Helvetas on behalf of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) provided financial and technical support, for which we are very grateful.

The Department of Forests and Park Services is fully committed to the implementation of this strategy. We wish everybody involved in its implementation and in the further development of Community Forestry for the benefit of the people of Bhutan satisfaction and plenty of success in their challenging, very important and fulfilling work.

Karma Dukpa  
Director

Tashi Delek!

Department of Forests and Park Services

May 2010



## 1. Executive summary

The past decade has seen a gradual change of emphasis in the management of Bhutan's forest lands. There has been a shift from a primary focus on protection and conservation towards a focus on balancing conservation with sustainable utilisation. Associated with this change of emphasis has been a move towards a more decentralised and people-centred approach to implementation, with a strong agenda directed at poverty reduction.

The regulatory framework for Community Forestry (which includes legislation, policies, rules and procedural systems—including implementation manuals and guidelines) is well developed and largely enabling, with communities being granted forest management and use rights under conditions set out in approved management plans. As at the end of March 2009, there were 131 Community Forest Management Groups (CFMGs), comprising 6,608 households (HH), managing about 16,379 ha of Community Forest. By the end of the year 2009, there were already 200 community forests covering an area of 24,997 hectares of forests and involving 9763 households. The area covered by CFs combines both timber and NWFP management, and it is projected that the number of CFMGs could rise to about 400 or even beyond by 2013.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2008-2013) adopted poverty reduction as its overarching theme and primary goal, and this has major consequences for policy orientation and medium term strategies in the forest sector. Among the strategic measures is one related to the: *"Establishment of Community Forests and expansion of commercial harvesting of Non Wood Forest Products (NWFPs)."* One of the two impacts set for the Community Participation Programme in the 10<sup>th</sup> Plan is: *"Reduction in the proportion of rural households living below the poverty line"* and one of the nine major targets set for the RNR sector is *"...4% of forest area to be managed as community or private forestry."* Thus, Community Forestry has a clearly identified place in the country's key planning instruments with strategic links to: (i) governance of Renewable Natural Resources; (ii) decentralisation and devolution; (iii) commercial harvesting of NWFPs, and (iv) poverty reduction.

The rate of establishing Community Forests increased greatly in 2007, with 2008 accounting for more than half the total number established. It is clear that implementation has now moved past the trialling and piloting stage to mainstreaming and institutionalising Community Forestry as a major part of the forest management landscape of Bhutan. Community Forestry has proved to be a viable policy option to complement the other key forest management regimes, particularly the commercial management of forests in FMUs, and the conservation of forest lands through protected area management. This strategy positions Community Forestry as a major contributor to the overall forest policy development goals of the country.

## **1.1 Development goal for Community Forestry**

One of the six objectives identified in the draft National Forest Policy (2009) relates to Community Forestry and it is stated as: *Rural communities able to meet the majority of their timber demands from their own community forests, and derive economic benefits from the sustainable management of their forests through sale of forest products and services.*

This objective would logically become the development goal for Community Forestry to which subsequent strategies will contribute. However, during the consultation process for this strategy it was suggested that additional issues need to be incorporated into the goal to reflect better the contemporary RGoB policy and national planning imperatives. These include: poverty reduction and empowering communities to manage their forests to meet their requirements for timber and other goods and services. Thus, it is suggested that the development goal for Community Forestry could be reformulated as:

**Rural communities empowered to manage their own community forests sustainably to meet the majority of their timber demands and other forest goods and services, derive economic benefits from the sale of forest products and services, and contribute to a reduction in rural poverty.**

This goal for the management of Community Forests will also contribute to the Constitutional requirement of a minimum of 60 percent forest cover for all time.

## **1.2 Principles for formulation of Community Forestry strategies**

A strategy is a plan designed to achieve a particular goal. This strategy should be thought of as charting the way ahead for the medium to long term (5-10 years), with immediate action needed to commence the process. Several key principles were identified to guide the formulation of strategies for the future focus and development of Community Forestry.

At the strategic level, Community Forestry should:

- Balance conservation with sustainable utilisation;
- Support decentralisation and devolution through empowerment of local communities to manage their local forests;
- Improve governance of Community Forests leading to improved forest conditions and the equitable distribution of benefits;
- Generate income for local communities through commercial harvesting of timber and NWFPs;
- Contribute to poverty reduction;
- Provide, as far as possible, timber for rural construction and maintenance.

In addition, some of the principles that were adopted while framing the draft National

Forest Policy (2009) are also relevant while developing Community Forestry strategies. These are:

- Underpin all aspects of forest planning and management with the application of good science i.e. by applying the best available scientific knowledge to all aspects of Community Forestry (planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) but in a way that is readily understood and applied by extension staff and communities;
- Make explicit attempts to bridge the research-management divide.

### **1.3 Vision for Community Forestry**

Building on the principles outlined above, the long term vision for Community Forestry is for a future that is sustainable, affordable, makes a significant contribution to rural livelihoods, poverty reduction and improved forest condition and is resilient to climate change. Specifically, the vision is for:

- Community Forests available to all rural communities that are able and willing to manage them;
- Community Forests managed sustainably to produce a wide range of forest goods and services;
- Community Forests managed to provide:
  - the majority of forest products needed to sustain basic rural livelihoods;
  - income from commercial harvesting and marketing of timber, NWFPs and environmental services;
  - a contribution to poverty reduction;
- Government forest officers trained as community advisors and extensionists to support management of Community Forests by CFMGs;
- The management of Community Forests based on good science.
- Management carried out in an adaptive, flexible, action learning manner to respond positively to uncertain social outcomes and unintended consequences as well as future shocks from climate change or other events.

During the formulation of the strategies, consideration was also given to mechanisms by which other sector policies, such as watershed management, can be taken into consideration in conjunction with Community Forestry. It was concluded that the vehicle for this integration should be Dzongkhag and Geog level development plans.

### **1.4 Community Forestry strategies**

The participants at a national Community Forestry workshop held in Thimphu in April 2009 identified critical policy, institutional and technical issues that currently inhibit the implementation and expansion of Community Forestry. They went on to consider a series of strategies that would collectively contribute to the attainment of

the Community Forestry development goal. These strategies are:

- Strategy 1.** *Enhance the regulatory framework for Community Forestry to ensure that it is enabling rather than enforcing*
- Strategy 2.** *Manage Community Forests by applying principles of Sustainable Forest Management to achieve both conservation and development outcomes*
- Strategy 3.** *Manage Community Forests to generate income as well as a wide range of other goods and services*
- Strategy 4.** *Manage Community Forests to contribute to a reduction in rural poverty*
- Strategy 5.** *Meet rural timber requirements from Community Forests to the greatest extent possible*
- Strategy 6.** *Base the management of Community Forests on principles of good governance (embracing transparency, accountability, participation, predictability, empowerment, inclusiveness, equity and benefit sharing) and in line with decentralisation and devolution policies*
- Strategy 7.** *Improve awareness of the general public and Government staff about all aspects of Community Forestry*
- Strategy 8.** *Build capacity to plan for and manage Community Forests*
- Strategy 9.** *Base technical and socio-economic approaches to Community Forestry on good science*
- Strategy 10.** *Monitor and evaluate the biophysical and socio-economic outcomes of Community Forestry*

### **1.5 Conclusion**

Numerous challenges will need to be addressed while implementing these strategies. Communities need to be encouraged to invest time and energy to become involved in government supported Community Forestry initiatives. The basis of such an approach is to: (i) build a relationship between government officials and the community based on mutual trust and respect (rather than the more traditional regulatory relationship); (ii) minimize transaction costs for the community and government partners; (iii) maximize authority for communities to manage forests and distribute benefits; and (iv) ensure that benefits flow as early and as equitably as possible. Some of these aspects can be built into regulatory frameworks while others need to be addressed through associated capacity building and reorientation activities and improvements

to overall governance.

Several key points can be made in conclusion:

- Good progress has been made in implementing Community Forestry since 2001 and the program is heading in a sound direction—moving from piloting to institutionalisation of a national program which has the potential to significantly contribute to the country’s national development goals.
- The regulatory framework for Community Forestry is generally enabling, but many aspects could be improved to simplify the procedural systems and lead to greater empowerment of CFMGs to manage their forests to produce a wide range of forest goods and services, to generate income and to reduce poverty.
- The potential exists for Community Forests to contribute to income generation and poverty reduction but activities need to be more clearly targeted on achieving the outcomes.
- More attention is needed to address governance issues (including empowerment, inclusiveness, accountability, transparency, equity and benefit sharing).
- On-going capacity building is needed to support implementation and address increasingly complex issues such as income generation, poverty reduction and payment for environmental services
- Solid research support is needed to backstop the Community Forestry program so that biophysical and socio-economic aspects needed for planning, implementation monitoring and evaluation are based on good science.

Community Forestry is a practical example of democratisation in action, and it has the potential to have a much wider impact than just among the key actors of community and Department of Forests and Park Services staff. By providing an example of good governance and encouraging the establishment of these principles into Dzongkhag and Geog development planning, CF has the potential to be a positive influence on the evolution of participatory democracy, decentralisation and devolution.

## 2. Introduction

The approach to forest management in Bhutan has gone through fundamental changes during the past 50 years. During this time the country has moved from a feudal society with locally relevant institutional arrangements for natural resource management, through a phase characterised by nationalisation of forests and the adoption of scientific management via central controls, to the present situation where significant power is being devolved to decentralised government institutions and local communities.

This Community Forestry strategy is framed at a time of rapidly changing political events in Bhutan. Democratisation and on-going decentralisation and devolution are themes that will impact on many aspects of forest planning and development in the years ahead. Many of the strategies discussed below foreshadow some of these changes, but policy instruments in the medium term must be framed in a flexible manner so that they can adapt to and support the on-going changes, some of which can be predicted, but many of which are difficult to foresee at the present time. Sound policy directions that are pro-active can also contribute to national development in a changing world by setting appropriate framework conditions. The initial sections of this paper place Community Forestry in the context of the wider political and policy landscape of Bhutan, and the later sections identify specific strategies to advance Community Forestry so that it can contribute to the long term development goals of the country.

Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) has been explored in Bhutan for several years, and a solid conceptual framework has been developed based on thorough analysis of field case studies. CBNRM is seen as a practical expression of decentralisation and an approach for improving the governance of natural resources at the local level. It is also a practical approach for improving livelihood security and environmental sustainability. Conceptually, it conforms to the Government's Middle Path approach to the management of Renewable Natural Resources (RNRs) with its focus on the need to develop the economy while maintaining the rich cultural heritage, traditional values and the natural resource base.

The CBNRM framework emphasises mechanisms whereby stakeholders work collectively to:

- Strengthen and utilise knowledge and capacity for community level management of natural resources including the establishment of community based organisations;
- Strengthen the rights of local communities to regulate access and use of their natural resources and to benefit from them;
- Support the re-structuring of State-community relationships by changing the role of the State from centralised control to decentralised governance including community based institutions for the management of RNRs.

Community Forestry conforms to the conceptual framework developed for CBNRM and is a practical example of operationalising CBNRM concepts. During the past decade Community Forestry has proved to be a viable policy option to complement the other key forest management regimes, particularly the commercial management of forests in Forest Management Units (FMUs), and the conservation of forest lands through protected area management. This strategy positions Community Forestry as a major contributor to the overall forest policy goal (as expressed in the draft National Forest Policy, 2009) of:

**Forest resources and biodiversity are managed sustainably and equitably producing a wide range of social, economic and environmental goods and services for the optimal benefit of all citizens while still maintaining a minimum of 60% of the land under forest, thereby contributing to Gross National Happiness.**



### 3. Regulatory framework for Community Forestry in Bhutan

The regulatory framework includes the legislation, policies, rules and procedural systems (implementation manuals and guidelines) that provide the formal framework within which Community Forestry operates. The following paragraphs describe the key changes that have taken place in recent times, and the contemporary situation.

Prior to the 1950s forests were managed by local communities largely as open access resources primarily to fulfil their subsistence needs, although they were nominally under the control of local authorities. In many areas indigenous institutional arrangements were in place to exercise locally relevant controls over access and use rights (Kinley 2009). Most of these systems were suppressed following nationalisation of forests in 1969 although some, such as *ridam* (indigenous sanctions), survive to the present time (Tshering 2003) and would be useful building blocks for incorporation into contemporary supported systems of local forest management. During the 1960s and 70s some controls over commercial timber harvesting were exercised through civil offices.

The Forest Act of 1969 was the first Act passed by the National Assembly after its inauguration. This Act mandated that all forests belong to the State, and there should be no private rights to any part of them. All lands not registered under an individual's *thram* (land title document) were considered to be forest lands and were nationalised. The first formal forest policy for Bhutan was approved in 1974, and this remains the only officially approved policy statement on forests. Prior to 1974 a series of general principles was observed for the management of forests, and these were derived to some extent from the Forest Act of 1969. The 1974 policy followed the directions in the 1969 Act and set a framework for the scientific management of the country's forest lands. Approaches were laid out for the key areas of forest conservation, afforestation, resource survey, utilisation and wild life conservation. This policy also contained the first mention of the objective of maintaining "*a minimum of 60 % of the total land under forest*", which was later included in the Constitution.

A new National Forest Policy was drafted in 1990 under a Master Plan process, but this remains in draft form without having been officially approved. Even though the draft was not officially approved it was still influential in guiding policy direction. The primary policy objective of this draft was on conservation of the environment, and only thereafter on deriving economic benefits from the forests. A major thrust was to bring the reserved forest under effective and scientifically prepared management plans, and approved management plans are now a requirement for commercial harvesting. All policy documents to date have provided for the on-going supply of timber to rural households. In spite of the policy intent to balance conservation and sustainable utilisation, interpretation of the policies and implementation tended to emphasise the conservation and protection aspects of forest management.

The 1969 Forest Act was repealed in 1995 and replaced with the Forest and Nature

Conservation Act of Bhutan 1995 (RGoB 1995). This currently provides the primary authority for forestry activities in the country. This Act has separate chapters on soil conservation, Community Forestry, protected areas, protection of wildlife and a list of totally protected species of flora and fauna.

The 1995 Act recognises the traditional and cultural rights of local people to access and use forest resources, and this reversed the trend of the earlier 1969 Act. The 1995 Act also makes provision for private forestry to be practiced in privately registered lands and for Community Forests to be established on government forest lands, with the communities being granted management and use rights under conditions set out in approved management plans.

The Community Forestry Chapter states that:

- *“The Ministry may make rules for the establishment of community forests on Government Reserved Forest.*
- *The rules for community forests may provide for the transfer of ownership of the forest produce in the community forest to appropriate groups of inhabitants of communities adjoining the forest.*
- *The group to which community forests have been transferred shall manage them for sustainable use in accordance with the rules for community forests and the approved management plan.*
- *Permits, royalties and other charges, as well as assistance to Community Forestry, shall be governed by the rules for community forests.”*

A review of the National Forest Policy was carried out in 1999, and this review stressed the need to manage forests on a systematic and scientific basis. It was noted that effective management will require the allocation of land for conservation, watershed protection, production forests and community forests. The focus of the review was on:

- Timber marketing and pricing, which was introduced in 1999;
- Supply of subsidised timber for rural house construction, and
- Community Forestry, which was introduced in 1995.

These changes in forest policy need to be seen in the context of the wider decentralisation agenda of the country. The Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogdu (DYT) Chatrim (2002) and the Geog Yargay Tshogchung (GYT) Chatrim (2002) spell out a wide range of powers, authorities, resources, responsibilities and functions delegated from central agencies to DYT to formulate, approve and implement Dzongkhags and Geog plans. For example, under the DYT Chatrim, the DYT is the highest level forum for local policy and decision making (Article 8). Under the GYT Chatrim, Geogs are given the power for *“..custody and care of communal lands, community forests...and prevention of...encroachments in such communal lands as well as on Government land and forests.”* (Article 9, 7). The GYT is also mandated to prepare Geog development

plans for which technical backstopping must be provided by the Dzongkhag sector staff (Article 9, 1).

The Land Act of Bhutan 2007 is an important piece of legislation that has major implications for many aspects of forest management including Community Forestry. Those sections of the Act that have relevant policy and practical implications include:

- Chapter 6 (99) confirms that trees, either naturally grown or planted, in registered land shall belong to the landowner.
- Chapter 8 (184) provides for the leasing of Government Reserved Forest land.
- Chapter 10 (235) requires that all *tsamdro* (grazing) rights shall be deleted from the *thram* (land title document) and revert to Government land if in *thromde* (an urban place) or to Government Reserved Forest (if in rural areas); and further (236) the reverted *tsamdro* in rural areas shall be converted to leasehold, while that in *thromde* shall remain as government land. Article 240 provides for the leasing of reverted *tsamdro* to individuals or communities owning livestock, with preference being given to previous rights holders (241). Article 247 requires that grazing and pasture development on *tsamdro* be permitted based on a management plan, with the Department of Forests and Park Services, the Department of Livestock and the lessee responsible for its preparation.
- Chapter 11 (255) requires that all *sokshing* rights (the rights to use forest land for collection of leaf litter) shall be deleted from the *thram*, and that *sokshing* shall be maintained as Government land in *thromde* or as Government Reserved Forest in rural areas. Article 256 provides for the reverted *sokshing* in rural areas to be converted to leasehold land at individual or community level, with preference given to previous rights holders (but only to those who have agricultural land-257). However, land categorised as *sokshing* where there are no trees shall not be leased. The management of *sokshing* shall be carried out in accordance with a management plan, with the Department of Forests and Park Services, Department of Agriculture and the lessee responsible for its preparation.

The Land Act places a considerable burden on the Department of Forests and Park Services to facilitate the development of management plans, often in conjunction with other departments, communities and individuals over very large areas of land that were previously managed as *tsamdro* or *sokshing* under customary rights. However, procedures to carry out this mandate have yet to be formulated.

The Forest and Nature Conservation Act 1995 is given operational focus through the Forest and Nature Conservation Rules. These were first formulated in 2000 and revised in 2003 and 2006 (DoF 2003 and DoF 2006). Among other things, the Rules specify the conditions that apply to the selection of Community Forests, and these

include a requirement that: “...the forest area allocation shall not exceed more than 2.5 ha per household. However, for the purposes of management of NWFP, the area allocation may be more than 2.5 ha per household depending upon availability of the land.” This requirement has been included in the Rules since their inception.

The 2006 Rules signal the intention of sourcing rural timber supplies from Community Forests in the longer term, when these forests are capable of yielding sufficient timber. Until that time, members of CFMGs remain entitled to obtain their timber needs from Government Reserved Forests. The Rules also recognise the importance of selecting areas for Community Forests that are: “...traditionally used and managed by the community...”

The Rules spell out the role of government officials in supporting CFMGs in all aspects of Community Forestry, from identifying suitable forests, to developing, implementing and monitoring management plans.

Key changes to the Rules between 2003 and 2006 are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1. Key changes in the Forest and Nature Conservation Rules between 2003 and 2006\*.**

Topic	F and NC Rules 2003	F and NC Rules 2006
Preparation of CF management plans	CFMG shall prepare the management plans with assistance from DzFO (Article 29-3)	DzFO shall prepare management plans in consultation and collaboration with the CFMGs (Article 28-3)
Administrative responsibilities and powers of CFMGs	CFMGs shall mark the forest produce (Article 34-1)	CFMGs shall request the DFO/PM to mark the trees (Article 33-1)
Management of NWFPs	NWFP management not clearly defined	NWFP management more clearly specified, e.g. the area for NWFPs Community forests can exceed 2.5 ha per HH (Article 27-2 (d))
Type of forest land available for CF	Equal ratio of degraded and good forest, where ever possible (Article 28-2 (e))	No qualifications on type of natural forest to be handed over, although plantations raised by the Department shall not be included (Article 27-1)

\* Adapted and expanded from Tempa *et al.* (2007)

The 2006 Rules are currently (April 2009) being revised and there are expectations

that some of them will be modified to make their application more flexible and adaptive. For example, some of the Rules that define the number of households that can constitute a CFMG and that limit the area of Community Forest per household may be modified. The present Rules constrain small communities from establishing themselves as CFMGs and limit the ability of CFMGs to generate significant income from their Community Forest and to provide for timber for rural construction and maintenance.

A Community Forestry implementation manual in four parts was produced in 2004 based on experiences in countries with similar conditions to Bhutan as well as early field experience in Bhutan itself. This has been used to guide field implementation and cover the topics of:

- Initiating Community Forestry
- Community Forest Management Planning
- Silvicultural Options for Community Forestry
- Record Keeping and Institutional Strengthening for Community Forestry Management Groups

In addition to the CF manual, guidelines have been issued for resource assessment and management of six NWFPs.

Article 5 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan (2008) makes it clear that: *“Every Bhutanese is a trustee of the Kingdom’s natural resources and environment”*. The Royal Government is enjoined in the Constitution to conserve and improve the environment and safeguard the country’s biodiversity. It is further directed to secure sustainable development while promoting economic and social development. The Constitution further charges the Government to ensure that a minimum of 60 percent of Bhutan’s total land area is maintained under forest cover for all time.

### **3.1 Critique of Bhutan’s regulatory framework**

There is considerable experience in Asia and elsewhere which can be used to assess the potential effectiveness of regulatory frameworks for Community Forestry in implementing national programs (Gilmour *et al.* 2005). Among the key lessons that have come from several decades of experience are:

- Regulatory frameworks for Community Forestry should be **enabling** rather than **enforcing**. Thus, they should **enable** rural communities to improve their own livelihoods and the condition of the forests in their vicinity by removing any constraints that inhibit them from doing so. Government agencies should adopt a supportive and facilitative role to support communities in these efforts.
- Lack of legitimate and effective control over resources by communities inhibits their ability to manage forests effectively. Governments, through Departments of Forests, often retain the major **authority** (the most

power), while giving **responsibility** for sustainable forest management to communities. Responsibility without sufficient authority will not enable communities to manage forests effectively;

- **“Soft”** rights (see Box 1) are not sufficient incentive to encourage communities to invest human and financial resources into forest management.

**Box 1. “Soft” rights**

“Soft” rights are rights that cannot be defended, such as those that can be withdrawn at the discretion of the forest department. By contrast, “hard rights” are those that can be defended, such as the inalienable right to own land. Communities that only receive soft rights are less likely to invest substantial human and financial resources in developing forest assets that can easily be taken away from them by the government.

An assessment of Bhutan’s regulatory framework against the three criteria outlined above is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Effectiveness of Bhutan’s Community Forestry regulatory framework.**

Criteria	Bhutan’s conformity with criteria
Regulatory frameworks should be enabling rather than enforcing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many aspects are enabling: the rights of communities to manage local forests and use the benefits are guaranteed in the Forest and Nature Conservation Act and the FNC Rules.</li> <li>• Some aspects are less enabling: compliance requirements for planning and management are relatively complex and inhibit the ability of communities to take effective control.</li> </ul>
Communities should be given effective authority (empowerment) as well as responsibility to enable them to manage community forests effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CFMGs have the authority to manage CFs, distribute benefits and generate income which can be used for both forest management as well as community development.</li> <li>• Under the 2006 FNC Rules the authority to develop management plans was shifted from CFMGs to DzFOs, thus effectively disempowering CFMGs as effective forest planners and managers.</li> <li>• Under the 2006 FNC Rules the CFMGs should request the DFO/PM to mark trees for felling, although in practice most CFMGs hold the hammers and mark trees themselves in collaboration with GFEOs.</li> </ul>

<p>Rights of access and usage need to be sufficiently “hard” to encourage communities to invest resources into community forest management. “Soft” rights are insufficient incentive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Forests and “groups of inhabitants of communities adjoining the forest” (CFMGs) have recognition in both the Forest and Nature Conservation Act and the FNC Rules with communities being granted management and use rights under conditions set out in approved management plans.</li> <li>• While CFMGs are guaranteed rights to manage Community Forests under the Forest and Nature Conservation Act and the FNC Rules, these rights can be suspended by the DFO/PM and the Dzongkhag Administration if they deem that the CFMG is unable to manage the CF according to the management plan or the Rules (although this right has never been exercised).</li> <li>• CFMGs have no rights of redress under the Act or Rules, although the Department may appoint a review team to report on the suspension.</li> </ul>
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It has become accepted practice that CF Management Plans will be for a period of 10 years, although this is not specified in the Rules.

The Forest and Nature Conservation Rules are a critical part of the regulatory framework for Community Forestry and it is evident from their frequent revision (2003, 2006 and 2009) that there is a strong institutional desire to learn from implementation experience and to adapt the Rules to make them more realistic and effective. For example, the 2003 Rules contained a requirement that the forest land allocated for Community Forests would: “...comprise of both degraded and good forest with equal ratio, where ever possible.” This suggests that at that time a major part of the policy intent of the Rules was to use Community Forests as a mechanism to restore degraded forest land. This requirement was removed in the 2006 revision. One can assume that this was done because of the recognition that it would inhibit the achievement of other key parts of the objectives for Community Forestry related to income generation, the provision of rural timber supplies and particularly poverty reduction, all of which were receiving greater policy attention.

Rasul and Karki (2007) quoted in Kinley (2009) carried out an assessment of community based forest management approaches in India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. They concluded that Bhutan’s regulatory framework allowed for a relatively low level of participation by communities and that the contribution to governance and social development was also low.

The current rural timber supply policy could limit the interest of communities in becoming involved in Community Forestry because they already have entitlements to obtain timber from GRFs.

The limit of 2.5 ha of forest per household member of the CFMG has been the basis of determining the area of Community Forests to be allocated to a CFMG since the time of the 2000 Rules. Wangchuk and Beck (2008) suggest that this limit is too restrictive for several reasons: (i) it does not take into account the considerable variation in forest growth and yield in different zones across the country, and (ii) it is insufficient to yield timber in excess of that needed for local usage, and will consequently limit income generation opportunities. Some Community Forests contain areas of degraded land, and income generation will not be feasible until forests in such areas are returned to a productive condition and, in the case of severely degraded sites, this could be several decades.

Some of the changes between the 2003 and 2006 Rules in the authority and responsibility of CFMGs and DzFOs summarised in Tables 1 and 2 effectively **decrease** the authority of the CFMGs to manage their own affairs and **increase** the authority of the DzFO. This may be necessary in the short term, until the capacity of the CFMGs to develop management plans and mark trees for harvesting is improved, but it is likely to have negative effects in the long term as it clearly signals that the government still retains the major power and influence, i.e. devolution of power to plan for and manage Community Forests is only partial and communities have been disempowered in some key areas.

The reasons for the changes described above also raise questions about the complexity of the compliance requirements. Many countries, even during the early stages of developing operational modalities for Community Forestry, require a very high level of technical and organisational compliance and record keeping, often higher than they demand from their own officials managing government forests. Experience suggests that it is best to commence with a relatively simple set of procedures for implementation and build complexity based on the ability of the partners, both government and community, to take on increasingly complex tasks and, in particular, on the **need** for complex procedures. Quite often, simple procedures are adequate, particularly when management is focused on protection and subsistence use, rather than utilisation of commercially valuable products. Starting with too much prescription and undue complexity and detail can inhibit the efforts of community groups to actively participate in the process and therefore to **own** the process. Such requirements can be disempowering. In addition, there is often a tendency to combine the compliance requirements of government with the needs of communities to manage their forests. It is useful to separate these two aspects when designing management frameworks.

Social learning on both the government and community sides has progressed since the inception of Community Forestry in Bhutan, and it has become evident that communities can be trusted to act in their own best interests by managing their Community Forests sustainably. The adaptive process of modifying the Rules has resulted in them becoming more progressive in some areas, and consequently more

likely to achieve their strategic socio-economic and biophysical objectives. However, there has also been some regression as shown in Table 1, where government forest officers have been given considerable powers to control Community Forest planning and implementation outcomes.



#### **4. Community Forestry in the context of national development planning**

The vision for the future contained in “Bhutan 2020” re-affirms the notion of Gross National Happiness as the central development concept for the country (RGoB 1999). This organising concept is translated into objectives that give strategic direction to policy making and implementation. One of the five objectives relates to environmentally sustainable development, where it is noted that, while the approach to environmental conservation is uncompromising, the country’s rich biodiversity should also be regarded as a development asset. However, emphasis was given on keeping alive the link between environmental conservation and cultural heritage. Another of the five objectives, governance, emphasises that development must take account of the devolution of new powers and responsibilities to the Dzongkhag and Geog levels.

The country’s five year plans translate the vision and milestones articulated in Bhutan 2020 into sector plans, strategies and programs. The 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2008-2013) (RGoB 2008 a) adopted poverty reduction as its overarching theme and primary goal, and this has major consequences for policy orientation and medium term strategies in the forest sector. The Plan emphasises the importance of mainstreaming environmental issues into the development planning process to maximise both sustainable utilisation and conservation of natural resources. It also recognises the growing challenge of balancing development and livelihood opportunities against the need to conserve the environment. One of the five specific policy objectives of the 10<sup>th</sup> Plan is to: *“Conserve and promote sustainable commercial utilisation of forest and water resources”*, and it is noted that *“more than any other sector, the RNR sector has the deepest linkage to the Tenth Plan’s theme and objective of poverty reduction and the best prospects to address it.”* Among the strategic measures included is one related to the: *“Establishment of Community Forests and expansion of commercial harvesting of Non Wood Forest Products (NWFPs)”*. This measure is clearly aimed at making progress in both devolution and poverty reduction within a broader sustainable development framework. One of the two impacts set for the Community Participation Programme in the 10<sup>th</sup> Plan is: *“Reduction in the proportion of rural households living below the poverty line”* and one of the nine major targets set for the RNR sector is *“...4% of forest area to be managed as community or private forestry.”* This is translated as requiring the establishment of about 400 Community Forests.

Agriculture, including livestock and forestry, is the largest sector in the country, contributing about 30 percent of GDP. Data presented in RGoB (2005) indicate that almost 70 percent of Bhutan’s population live in rural areas, where most depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Further, about 29 percent of these rural dwellers suffer from food poverty and 41 percent from income poverty. Ninety-six percent the country’s poor live in rural areas, making poverty an essentially rural phenomenon.

These figures underline the importance placed by the Government on addressing rural poverty as a policy priority and making it the primary goal of the 10<sup>th</sup> Five year Plan.

Community Forestry has a clearly identified place in the country's key planning instruments with strategic links to:

- Governance of Renewable Natural Resources
- Decentralisation and devolution
- Commercial harvesting of NWFPs
- Poverty reduction

The central level plans need to be linked to Dzongkhag and Geog level development plans so that there is compatibility between the various levels.



## 5. Evolution of Community Forestry in Bhutan

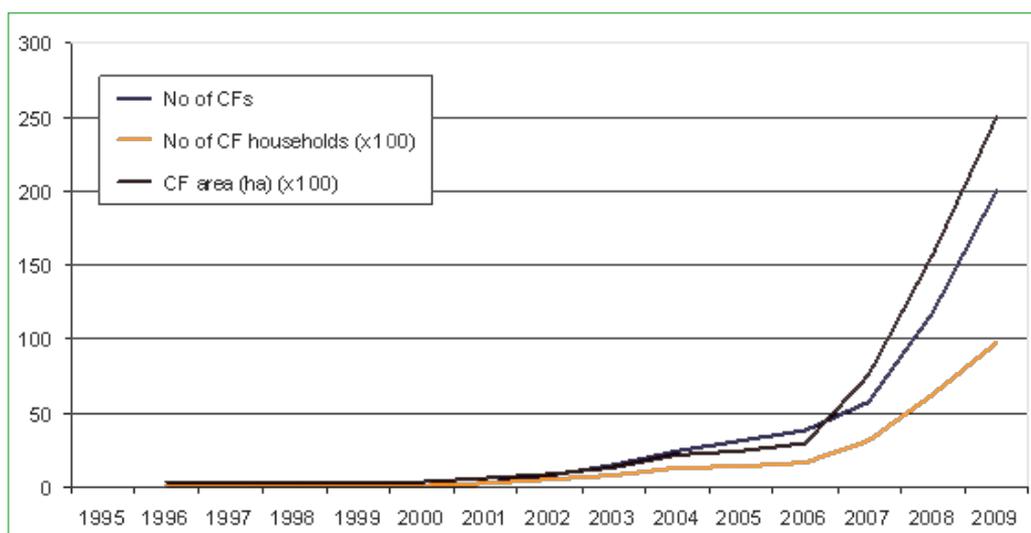
Social forestry made its first appearance in Bhutan in 1979 with a Royal Decree from His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo (RGoB 2008 a). However, little progress was made during the following decade due to limitations in the regulatory framework which had a primary focus on forest conservation and mandated that all forests belonged to the State. There was also no legal provision for allocation of Government Reserved Forest to communities, though it was an important signalling of the intent to change the forest management paradigm from a centralised top down one to a decentralised and devolved bottom up one. Activities at this time were largely limited to planting free tree seedlings on privately registered land and schools. Real changes began with the adoption of decentralisation policies in the early 1990s when the importance of people's participation in protection and management of forests was recognised. The decentralised activities included development and management of community and private forest, protection of forest from fire and encroachment into *sokshing* and *tsamdrog*, allocation of dry firewood, and sanctioning of subsidized timber for rural construction. Forestry extension units were created in the Dzongkhags with trained Geog Forestry Extension Officers (GFEOs) to assist in the implementation of decentralised forestry activities. Social Forestry evolved during the 1990s and a Social Forestry and Afforestation Division was created in the Department of Forest in 1989. This was renamed the Social Forestry Division in 2002 to provide an organisational focus for community and private forestry.

Extension officers at the Geog and Dzongkhag levels (DzFOs and GFEOs) now facilitate implementation of Community Forestry and support Community Forest Management Groups (CFMGs). However, in the early years there were severe limitations in the capacity of Dzongkhag Forest Officers to conceptualise the dimensions of decentralised and devolved forest management and to provide the necessary level of support to communities. In addition, the common mind-set of forest officers at all levels was conditioned by training, often in India, to operate within a government directed, centralised and top down approach to forest management. Progress in establishing Community Forests was initially slow for two main reasons: (i) communities were sceptical about whether the Department of Forest would actually hand over Government Reserved Forest for their management and, (ii) government staff had severe reservations about the ability of communities to manage forests sustainably without causing forest loss and degradation (Temphel and Beukeboom 2006). The move to a more people-centred approach is still on-going, but considerable progress has been made since 2001, and this is evident from the impressive increase in the number of functional CFMGs in recent years, which is related to the substantial improvement in the capacity of Dzongkhag level staff to support decentralised forest management and to a realisation among communities that the government is serious about handing over government forest to communities for local management for local benefit.

Various modalities of Community Forestry were piloted by several projects during the

past decade, often in addition to more mainstream RNR development activities. These projects included the UNDP/FAO Forest Resources Management and Institutional Development Project, the Third Forestry Development Project, the Wang Watershed Management Project, a GTZ supported RNR project and, since 2002, the SDC/Helvetas supported Participatory Forest Management Project (PFMP). Experience from all these projects was drawn on in 2004 to develop the four part Community Forestry manual that has provided the detailed field guidance for implementation since that time. The support of the PFMP has been critical since 2002 in providing focused technical and financial support for piloting, operationalising and mainstreaming Community Forestry.

Year by year details of the establishment of Community Forests are given in Annex 1. Figure 1 illustrates the trends in establishment (number of Community Forests, number of households involved in CFMGs and area of Community Forests) since 2001.



**Figure 1. Trends in annual establishment of Community Forests since 1996**

It is evident that the annual rate of increase expanded greatly in 2007<sup>1</sup>, with 2008 recording more Community Forests established than in all previous years combined. In that year a total of 61 CFs were established covering 7,890 ha as against 56 CFs covering 7,246 ha for all previous years combined. As per the end of December 2009, there were 200 CFMGs comprising 9763 rural households (HHs), managing 24,997 hectares (ha) of Community Forest. This area combines both timber and NWFP management. Figure 1 suggests that implementation has now moved past the trialling

<sup>1</sup> The increase in CF establishment in 2007 had its origins partly in the revision of the Rules in 2006, which provided a more enabling framework. Field activity greatly increased in 2006, leading to the greater number of formalised CFs established in 2007.

and piloting stage to mainstreaming and institutionalising Community Forestry as a major part of the forest management landscape of Bhutan. It is projected that the number of CFMGs could rise to about 400 by 2013 (covering about 4 percent of the total forest area).

Community Forests have been established in all 20 Dzongkhags across the country, with the numbers ranging from 2 in Dagana to 28 in Trashigang (see Annex 2 for details). They also cover all major forest types except for Fir Forest, most of which is located at high elevations and not close to settlements (Table 3).

**Table 3. Coverage of Community Forests by forest type (data per end of December 2009)**

Forest type	Number of CFs	% of total number of CFs
1. Sub-tropical forest	3	1.5
2. Chir pine forest	33	16.5
3. Warm broadleaved forest	57	28.5
4. Blue pine forest	7	3.5
5. Cool broadleaved forest	45	22.5
6. Mixed Conifer forest	38	19.0
7. Fir forest	0	0.0
8. Exclusive NWFP CFs*	17	8.5
<b>Total number of CFs</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

\*NWFP Community Forests are listed separately and not according to forest type.

Management objectives are agreed to at the time of preparing management plans. Most plans list multiple objectives: 69 percent of all plans have income generation listed as a major management objective, 69 percent list conservation, 41 percent list rehabilitation and 77 percent list protection (as per end of December 2009). However, in many cases, only some of these objectives are actively translated into activities. Nonetheless, it is important that management intent is identified during the initial planning discussions.

A series of case studies has been conducted since 2006 covering a wide variety of topics associated with Community Forestry. These currently (April 2009) stand at 20, and the writing of most of them was supported by the PFMP, the CBNRM program and RECOFTC. These have provided an excellent opportunity to critique, analyse and document Community Forestry experiences by those most closely associated with

them, and to provide feedback into policy thinking.

### **5.1 Critique of Community Forestry implementation**

While there have been some impressive gains in implementing Community Forestry across the country in recent years, numerous issues have been identified that are likely to inhibit future expansion and thus limit the achievement of the overall policy objectives set in the national planning and other frameworks. A thorough analysis by Tshering (2009), that consolidated the views and experiences of all Dzongkhag Forestry Officers, gives detailed examples of policy, institutional and technical bottlenecks in implementing Community Forestry, along with recommendations for future improvements.

Wangchuk and Beck (2009) argue that the blanket application of the ceiling of 2.5 ha per household as the maximum area for a Community Forest fails to take account of the large differences in the growth and yield potential of different forest types in the country. The ceiling also severely limits the ability of communities to manage their forests to produce an excess of timber that can be sold to generate income. They recommend that the ceiling be removed and that the area of Community Forests be based on locally specific conditions and the willingness and ability of communities to manage the forests in their immediate location.

Wangdi (2009) provides evidence in support of the arguments given by Wangchuk and Beck that the cap of 2.5 ha per household limits the ability of CFMGs to manage their forests for income generation. He also noted that some CFMGs harvest less than that allowed under the Annual Harvesting Limit (AHL), especially in those CFs that are well stocked with timber. In such cases timber in excess of local requirements could be sold to generate income for the CFMG.

Because of concerns expressed about the reliability of current approaches used to carry out forest resource assessments needed for CF management planning, a study was carried out to compare two different methods (Anon 2007). The two methods were: guidelines for forest resource assessment outside FMUs, and CF resource assessment guidelines as contained in the CF Planning Manual, Part III). The key parameters assessed were: number of trees per ha, basal area per ha and volume per ha. The study was carried out in two CFs, one in Trashigang Dzongkhag (chir pine) and one in Paro Dzongkhag (mixed conifer-predominately blue opine). It was concluded that the results from the two methods differed substantially, and there was a *"...large gap between the results of these two resource assessment systems conducted in the same area in the same forest"*. The authors of the study were not able to comment on which system produced more realistic results. They also noted that they found it very difficult to understand how the assessment figures were used to calculate AHL. It is worth noting that resource assessments in conifer forests are generally considered to produce more reliable results than in mixed broadleaf forests, particularly for volume calculations. This makes the results of this study even more worrying.

Several examples cited by participants at the national Community Forestry workshop raised concerns that the AHL greatly overestimated the sustainable off-take. There was a strong consensus that the methodology for determining AHL is probably flawed, particularly for sub tropical broadleaf forests, and it should be critically reviewed. In the interim, it is probably wise to suggest that CFMGs adopt a cautious approach in scheduling harvesting, particularly for external sale. The problem of arriving at meaningful AHL figures is a universal one (see Box 2), particularly in mixed species tropical and sub tropical forests, and there are many examples where such forests have been grossly over harvested. In some cases large scale industries have been forced to close down when calculations of sustainable harvesting limits have proven to be grossly over optimistic.



## Box 2. Problems associated with determining AHL figures

Classical approaches to silviculture and forest inventory tend to work less well in forest types that are characterised more by their heterogeneity than their uniformity (such as mixed species sub tropical broadleaf forests). Situations where tree stocking rates vary across the landscape pose considerable sampling problems with collecting reliable inventory information. The question of representativeness of sampling plots and the determination of the effective area<sup>2</sup> of the productive forest are aspects of particular concern. Simply establishing inventory plots, measuring the trees in the plots and extrapolating the resulting figures across the landscape is unlikely to produce reliable data that can be used with sufficient accuracy to determine standing volumes or to schedule yields. The application of data determined in this fashion can lead to spurious and misleading results. There is a real danger of falling into the trap of “confusing numbers with facts”. The use of numbers confers a degree of respectability and legitimacy to the exercise, even if the numbers have little meaning.

Two examples from Australia illustrate the problems.

### 1. North Queensland rainforests, Australia

Over the space of less than two decades, the estimated annual sustainable harvest (based on the application of inventory data from permanent yield plots) was progressively reduced from 200,000 to 60,000 cu.m.

### 2. Mixed species dry sclerophyll eucalypt forest, Victoria

Since 1990, the sustainable yield of the 50,000 ha forest (determined from the application of inventory data) was progressively reduced 70,000 to 8,660 cu.m. per year.

Lesson learned: Even though seemingly good quality inventory data was available for a single forest value, timber, from many years of measurement of permanent yield plots, the application of that data failed to adequately reflect the real life situation of the forest in terms of determining the sustainable timber supply.

Gilmour, pers. com.

Participants (both government and community) at the National Community Forestry workshop in April 2009 reflected on their implementation experience and identified the key bottlenecks that limit the efficient and effective implementation of Community Forestry. A full list of these issues is given in Annex 3, and a summarised version of the actions needed to address the highest priority issues is shown in Table 4.

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2 The area available for harvesting. Some parts of the forest may be too steep, degraded/regenerating or close to water courses and not available for harvesting.

**Table 4. High priority actions needed to address the key bottlenecks that inhibit the efficient and effective implementation of Community Forestry (numbers reflect the relative priorities assigned by workshop participants)**

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Institutional</b>	<b>Technical</b>
Lift area limitations and make them more flexible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use natural boundaries</li> <li>• Respect traditional practices</li> <li>• Situation-based</li> <li>• Management capacity</li> <li>• Area should be large enough to generate income</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>20</b></p>	CF application process is too long. Propose: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint inspection of CF site by DzFO and DFO/ Park</li> <li>• CFMP approval authority could be devolved to field level</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>13</b></p>	Build capacity at all levels <p style="text-align: right;"><b>13</b></p>
Reduce minimum number of HH for a CFMG from 10 to 3 <p style="text-align: right;"><b>8</b></p>	Provide more equipment at Dz and geog levels (computers, etc.) <p style="text-align: right;"><b>9</b></p>	Simplify the CFMP process and develop a simple template <p style="text-align: right;"><b>8</b></p>
Enable CFMGs to manage all forest resources (including sand, boulders and water) <p style="text-align: right;"><b>8</b></p>	Strengthen coordination between Dz Forestry, Park management and Divisional forestry <p style="text-align: right;"><b>3</b></p>	Resource assessment is too complex and not correct. AAC/AHL should be revised. <p style="text-align: right;"><b>5</b></p>
CFs should be encouraged in protected areas <p style="text-align: right;"><b>8</b></p>	Strengthen geog centres (staff, training, equipment) <p style="text-align: right;"><b>3</b></p>	Simplify the CF manuals <p style="text-align: right;"><b>4</b></p>
Apply good science to support all aspects of CF planning and implementation <p style="text-align: right;"><b>4</b></p>		
Include plantations created by Dept in CFs <p style="text-align: right;"><b>4</b></p>		

Many of the issues identified by the workshop participants as needing attention relate to freeing up the procedural systems and making them more simple, flexible and adaptable. This is a common situation encountered in many countries. Initiation of Community Forestry is often accompanied by an understandable caution and uncertainty among foresters about whether Community Forestry really can work when the forests are transferred to the hands of people untrained in technical forestry. As Tshering (2009) noted: *“While cautioning on the progress of Community Forestry*

*Development is healthy, being over cautious simply is hindering the progress...(some) have been putting forward serious questions like the following:*

- *Will the CFMGs be able to manage forests after we hand over?*
- *Will the CFMGs not overexploit?*
- *Will CFs handover not affect the 60 % policy?*
- *Should we not study the impact of CF first before we proceed further?*

*Well, to directly answer these questions, the critics are proved wrong. A lot of researched and published documents prove that the CFMG are capable of managing the CFs... the CFMGs take strong ownership of the CFs after hand over...(and) There are enough evidences of positive impacts of Community Forests...CFMGs are also not over harvesting. Case studies conducted in Masangdaza and Yakpugang observed that the harvesting is much below AAC." (p. 10)*

This cautious approach generally results in prescribing rigid procedural systems to guard against overharvesting, i.e. the regulatory framework is more enforcing than enabling. Experience suggests that making the procedural systems more enabling and freeing up the restrictions results in a greater sense of commitment and ownership by community groups. In essence they are more effectively empowered to manage their natural resources. This is not to say that the management of Community Forests should not be based on good science, but rather that good science should be applied to develop simple and easily applied procedures. This is a real challenge to forest scientists, but one that can be met. There are many examples of the use of simple "rules of thumb" for harvesting forest products, based on the application of sound ecological and silvicultural principles.

In most situations (exceptions might be the full-scale commercial production systems in Mexico - see, for example, Antinori and Bray 2005) detailed growth and yield estimation is not required to assure sustainable off-take of most forest products (even assuming that reliable information could be collected). In fact, by emphasising appropriate silviculture rather than detailed inventory, communities will be able to utilise forest goods and services without jeopardising the long term ability of forests to satisfy future needs.

Most conventional forestry tends to view sustainable yield in terms of maximising the production of timber on a long term sustainable basis. It is more useful to think of managing community forests in terms of optimising the whole process, so that the yield of products and the social arrangements needed to manage the forest can both be sustained. Ultimately, what is important is that:

- The productivity of the forest is maintained or improved; and
- Goods and services of a type, quality and quantity to satisfy the requirements of forest users are regularly available.

Hence, the interaction of social and biological factors needs to be taken together

when determining suitable silvicultural regimes. There is no point in insisting on the application of sophisticated silvicultural systems and complicated inventory techniques on the basis that this is needed to maximise timber yield, if the system is too complicated to be applied by communities. It would be much better if a sub-optimal approach is taken leading to less than maximum yields, but the use of a system that can be understood and applied by community groups.

Communities can apply their extensive local and site-specific knowledge to the process of identifying and monitoring silvicultural activities. Experience has shown that silviculture in community managed forests can be sophisticated in a way that differs from the sophistication resulting from application of traditional forestry science. However, government forest departments do have an important role to play. They need to act as technical advisers and facilitators of participatory silvicultural processes so that the best of forest science and local knowledge can be integrated. Long-term data collection and analysis of permanent sample plots in community forests can assist forest departments to be in a better position to suggest management options for communities, particularly for commercial timber utilisation. This could allow for a better combination of subsistence and commercial objectives in Community Forestry in the longer term.

The previous discussion highlights the need for much more and better quality information to guide many aspects of Community Forestry in the future, covering planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. An indicative list, drawn from discussions at the national Community Forestry workshop, of some of the topics for which improved information is needed, is given in Table 5. This could be the basis of a research agenda to support Community Forestry to be taken up by the RNR Research Centres and relevant projects such as FORED. While much information already exists on the basic ecological dynamics and silvicultural requirements of some of the major forest types in Bhutan, it could be packaged more effectively for application by extension agents and communities.

**Table 5. Indicative list of topics for which improved information is needed to improve CF planning, implementation and monitoring**

Phase of CF	Research topics
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calculation of AHL for major forest types and various forest conditions (including degraded forest) (applying good science to develop rules of thumb for community application).</li> <li>• Calculation of sustainable off-take for major NWFPs (applying good science to develop rules of thumb for community application).</li> </ul>
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determination of appropriate silvicultural systems for major forest types (and forest conditions) suitable for application by CFMGs (applying good science to develop rules of thumb for community application).</li> <li>• Determination of appropriate management systems for major NWFPs (applying good science to develop rules of thumb for community application).</li> <li>• Methodologies for improving income generation from CFs.</li> <li>• Approaches for managing CFs to reduce poverty.</li> <li>• Approaches to improve governance of CFs (covering transparency, accountability, participation, predictability, empowerment, inclusiveness, equity and benefit sharing).</li> </ul>
Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criteria and indicators for community level monitoring of progress towards achieving CF objectives.</li> <li>• Approaches for determining impacts of CF on biophysical indicators of forest condition and area (national program level).</li> <li>• Approaches for determining impacts of CF on socio-economic indicators, particularly those associated with income generation and poverty reduction (national program level).</li> <li>• Development and application of approaches for good governance in CFs (embracing transparency, accountability, participation, predictability, empowerment, inclusiveness, equity and benefit sharing).</li> </ul>

Community Forestry is largely about the application of social processes to achieve biophysical and socio-economic outcomes. Central to the application of these social processes is an understanding of the nature of communities. A detailed discussion of communities in sociological terms is given in Box 3.

### **Box 3. What is a community?**

The notion of “community” is a basic concept used in discussing the involvement of people in forest-related activities, but it is often used very loosely. The primary connotation is a vague notion that Community Forestry means something like “people’s forestry”. This acknowledges that activities are aimed at providing direct benefits to rural people and that “the people” should have a substantial role in decision making. At this level, that is, as a statement about the philosophy behind Community Forestry, there is nothing wrong with the term. However, “community” is often used as if it was a sociological term which adequately defines the recipients.

“Community” has a number of connotations; it suggests a group of people who share a set of common interests (residence, kinship, religious affiliation, etc.). It is implied that members of a community may act jointly in respect of these common interests. Individuals may be in a number of communities, depending on which set of interests are relevant in a given situation. Thus, a community of residence does not, necessarily, share common interests in terms of forest use-rights. Further, a community of residence is unlikely to be homogeneous in terms of wealth, land ownership, occupation and religion. The interests of poor and wealthy people are likely to be divergent. Men and women form different interest groups; there are also different interest groups among women in a community of residence. Often ethnic group membership is a further differentiating factor. In other words, the word “community” can obscure a variety of group affiliations.

Beyond the rather vague use of the word as a loose synonym for a group of people, the word “community” is of little use in implementing forest activities which have a community orientation. It does not help us to think of the heterogeneous nature of the social groupings we are dealing with. There is a need for a concept that clearly acknowledges the heterogeneous nature of many rural societies and which can deal with this heterogeneity. The notion of an “interest group” is far more helpful. The concept refers to a group of people who have similar sets of interests in respect of a particular situation. For example, people who own large numbers of livestock that are grazed on a patch of common land have different interests from people who have only a few stall-fed animals. A proposal to establish a plantation on common grazing land will affect each group differently.

Identification of various interest groups is fundamental to any project activity. The number of separate interest groups will differ according to different situations. A minimum list of interest would include women, the poor, separate ethnic groups (where applicable) and any groups of people specialising in distinct economic activities. Examples of the latter category would include; livestock owners dependent on common grazing land; blacksmiths dependent on forests for production of charcoal; shop owners with heavy demands for fuel wood. This is no more than an indicative list. Other interest groups will be relevant in particularly

situations. It is also crucial to remember that broad categories such as “women” and “the poor” are not always (in fact, not often) groups with homogeneous interests. There are rich and poor women and there are different types of poor people. The interests of totally landless poor, and poor people with at least some land may be different.

The concept of interest groups is a tool that assists in the identification of relevant social groups within a heterogeneous society. It can also act as the basis of a checklist that ensures that all interest groups are involved in negotiations.

Adapted from Gilmour and Fisher (1991)



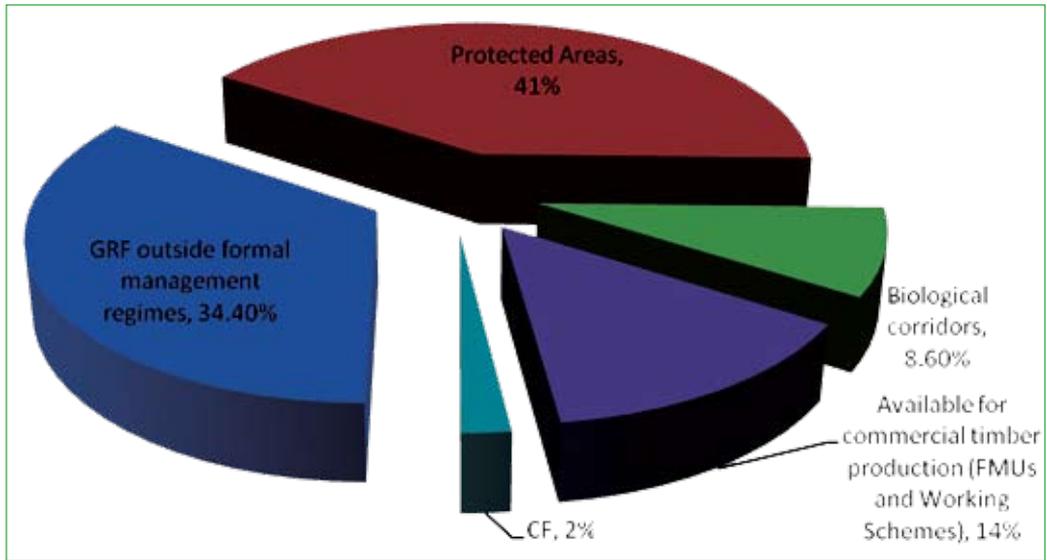
## 6. Positioning Community Forestry in the wider forest management landscape

Bhutan is well endowed with forests and past policies and practices have aimed at ensuring that the forest heritage is preserved and managed for the future. About 72.7 percent of the country is classified as forest land. However, forest with a canopy density of more than 10 percent occupies about 64 percent of the forest land and almost 9 percent is occupied by scrub forest. Broadleaf forest is the principle forest type followed by mixed conifer, while blue pine and chir pine occupy 3.1 and 2.6 percent respectively (RGoB 2009 a). Virtually all forests are natural, and plantations account for only 0.2 percent of the country's area. A brief overview of the forest cover by different use categories is given in the following box.

### Box 4. Overview of forest cover and use categories

The total area of forest in the country as shown in the 2005 Forest Resource Assessment (FRA) (FAO 2005) was 26,826 sq. km. and this, combined with scrub forest, constituted 72.7 percent of the land area. The FRA indicated that Bhutan's forest area showed a slight increase during the period 2000–2005. Approximately 14 percent of the forest area is economically accessible and available for commercial timber production, with about 5.8 percent currently under management (FMUs and working schemes) and 8.2 percent not yet under plans. Almost 41 percent of the area of forest land is contained within the Protected Areas system with an additional 8.6 percent designated as biological corridors. The remaining area (about 35.5 percent of the total area of forest land) is not suitable for harvesting using current technology and under the prevailing economic circumstances. Most of this area is used on an *ad hoc* basis for rural timber supplies. This category also includes the area above 4,000 metres asl (7.5 percent). It is estimated that about 4 percent of the forest land will be designated as Community Forests by the end of 2013.

Figure 2 shows the area of forest land under the various forest management regimes. While Community Forestry is the smallest component at two percent, it has the theoretical potential to cover between 8 and 10 percent of the total forest area and reach 70 percent of the total population of Bhutan and if all rural households become active members of CFMGs (Temphel and Beukeboom 2006).



**Figure 2. Percent of forest land covered by different management regimes**



## 7. Governance for Community Forestry

Community Forestry is a form of forestry that operates as a completely different paradigm from conventional forestry. The fundamental basis of the difference is a significant shift in the locus of power for major decision making from government to local communities. In effect, it is a change in the social dynamics surrounding forest management. Such a major social change cannot come about by direction alone, but must be accompanied by associated changes in overall governance so that it is supportive of Community Forestry. Governance refers to the total set of formal and informal (including cultural) arrangements that govern the way in which society functions to address a particular issue, in this case forestry (see Box 5).

### Box 5. Changing notions of “Governance”

*“...the term ‘governance’ was originally understood as synonymous with government (or the way that the government was ruling). A core issue in the new interpretation of ‘governance’ is the altered role of the state, in view of the new roles of the private sector and civil society organisations. Governance is about the changing vision of the roles and responsibilities of the government from the ‘old’ style of governance – with the government steering – to a new situation with more actors co-steering. Important aspects of this new situation are its multi-actor, multi-level (national, international and local) and multi-meaning nature: different stakeholders may embrace different values, interests and world views.*

*At the conceptual level, it is noticeable that governance aims at steering – at improving societal situations. It therefore needs to deal with complexity and is based on soft systems thinking that implies multi-stakeholder processes and social learning aimed at making improvements at the level of all the orders of governance, including discussions about effectiveness, norms and values.”*

van Bodegom *et al.* (2008): page 13.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) defines governance as: *“the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic, environmental and social resources for development”* (USAID 2000).

The concept of ‘good governance’ came to be prominent in development fields in the late 1980s when a World Bank sponsored comprehensive study identified that poor performance of development aid in Sub-Saharan Africa was due to the weak governance of those states. Since then, the issue of good governance has been considered as a necessary condition for overall economic advancement. Building upon the approaches of the World Bank, USAID and ADB have identified four principles of good governance: transparency, accountability, participation, and predictability (Sharma and Acharya 2004). To these could be added empowerment, inclusiveness, transparency, equity and benefit sharing. Good governance relates to the quality of

the process whereby all of these principles are addressed explicitly.

As indicated in the above definition, governance by its very nature involves the use of power to make and enforce decisions. When decisions concerning access to and use of resources are being made, they invariably affect a large number of stakeholders who have different and often conflicting interests. This section considers the nature of these arrangements and how they need to operate if Community Forestry is to become a mainstream form of forestry that can deliver improved economic, social and environmental benefits to rural communities and the nation as a whole.

The adoption of Community Forestry as a major program has altered the traditional roles of foresters in managing those parts of Government Reserved Forest that have been allocated as Community Forests. They are required to take on new and different roles as community advisors and extensionists associated with the devolution of authority and responsibility to manage Community Forests by Community Forest Management Groups (CFMGs). These formal roles are mandated through the Forest and Nature Conservation Act 1995 and the Forest and Nature Conservation Rules 2006, and a broad overview is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6. Role of local, Dzongkhag and national levels in Community Forestry (based on accepted practice)**

Level	Role
<b>Local</b> (CFMG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement forest management in accordance with approved management plan;</li> <li>• Use benefits coming from CF management for forest management and community development;</li> <li>• Report progress of CFMP implementation to Geog Forestry Extension Officer.</li> </ul>
<b>Dzongkhag</b> (Dzongkhag/Geog government officials)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide technical and other support to CFMGs;</li> <li>• Report progress and problems to national level;</li> <li>• Maintain Dzongkhag database;</li> <li>• Monitor all CF activities, such as CFMP development and implementation (in collaboration with territorial division and park management);</li> <li>• Carry out capacity building;</li> <li>• Evaluate impacts of the CFMP implementation.</li> </ul>
<b>National</b> (DFPS/SFD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain overview of CF policy and implementation procedures to ensure that they are enabling of CF and conform to the wider national policy agenda;</li> <li>• Maintain national CF database;</li> <li>• Arrange capacity building for key actors.</li> </ul>

Table 7 outlines more specific details of the authority and responsibility of key individuals and organisations.

**Table 7. Authority and responsibility of key actors in Community Forestry planning and implementation (based on accepted practice)**

Organisation / person	Authority	Responsibility
CFMG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribute to the preparation of CF management plan.</li> <li>• Implement CF management plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that all potential villagers are members of CFMGs and that no one is excluded.</li> <li>• Ensure that CF management is in accordance with the CF management plan.</li> <li>• Ensure that benefit sharing is equitable.</li> <li>• Maintain records.</li> <li>• Prepare an annual report within one month of the end of the financial year and submit to Geog Forestry Extension Officer.</li> </ul>
DzFO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommend CF applications to DFO for approval.</li> <li>• Prepare CF management plans in collaboration with CFMGs.</li> <li>• Recommend approval of CF management plans to Dzongkhag Administration and DFO.</li> <li>• Carry out monitoring of the implementation of CFMPs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support local communities in identifying potential CF areas and forming CFMGs.</li> <li>• Participate (with DFO) in selection of GRF for handing over as CF.</li> <li>• Forward copy of CF application to DFO.</li> <li>• Ensure that CF activities are implemented in accordance with the CFMP.</li> </ul>

Dzongkhag Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Endorse CF management plans.</li> <li>• Suspend CFMGs (in conjunction with DFO/PM).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that CFMPs fit into the Dz plans.</li> </ul>
DFO/PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Endorse CF management plans.</li> <li>• Carry out tree marking of trees to be harvested in CFs<sup>3</sup>.</li> <li>• Carry out monitoring of the implementation of CFMPs.</li> <li>• Suspend CFMGs (in conjunction with Dzongkhag Administration).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate (with DzFO) in selection of GRF for handing over as CF.</li> <li>• Ensure that tree marking is carried out in accordance with the silvicultural prescriptions in the CFMPs.</li> <li>• Ensure that CF activities are implemented in accordance with the CFMP.</li> </ul>
SFD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommend approval of CF management plans to the Director.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review regulatory framework for CF to ensure its effectiveness.</li> <li>• Maintain national CF database.</li> </ul>
Director of DFPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approve CF management plans.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that CFMPs are in accordance with national regulatory framework and development plans.</li> </ul>

The formal roles outlined above, along with the authority and responsibility associated with them, are directly related to the hierarchical nature of government and the resultant organisational structures. This is the visible aspect of governance and the most easily conceptualised and analysed. A less visible but equally important aspect relates to institutional arrangements associated with decision making, and incentives for adopting certain courses of action. Institutional analysis and institutional change is never simple or easy. The paradigm change that is behind Community Forestry requires a change in **relationships** at all levels, including between:

- CFMGs and individual members.
- CFMGs and the Dzongkhag administration.
- Particular users and others (through users associations).

3 While this authority is stated in the 2006 Rules, in many cases tree marking is carried out by CFMGs themselves using marking hammers registered with the DFO/PM.

- CFMGs and wider political structures.
- Dzongkhag administration and the Department of Forests and Park Services.
- Frontline staff and higher level management in the Department of Forests and Park Services.
- The Department of Forests and Park Services and wider political and bureaucratic structures.

There are many complicating factors associated with addressing these relationships and related issues (Thomson and Schoonmaker Freudenberger (1997)) and these include:

- Incompatible interests within and between local communities;
- Dominance by a few powerful individuals or interest groups;
- Exclusion of women or minority interests;
- Competing factions based on economic or other interests.

The practical aspects of Community Forestry are played out in the field with the major players being community groups, government territorial foresters and Dzongkhag Forestry Extension staff. Consequently, most efforts aimed at improving the capacity of the key actors have focused on these groups. Many people have attended training and capacity building courses designed to learn about the tools and techniques needed to facilitate implementation of Community Forestry. While this is a necessary step, it is by no means sufficient to ensure that change takes place and is sustained. Many of these courses frequently overlook the importance of going beyond tools and techniques to relationships and to changing behaviour patterns. It is necessary to identify the key actors at various levels and address relationships (and the associated cultural norms) within and between them. Approaches such as Public Hearings and Public Auditing have proved useful in sensitising community groups to these issues and improving many of the accountability and transparency aspects of governance (Anon. 2005).

Community Forestry is a practical example of democratisation in action, and it has the potential to have a much wider impact than just among the key actors of community and Department of Forests and Park Services staff. By providing an example of good governance and encouraging the establishment of these principles into Dzongkhag and Geog development planning, CF has the potential to be a positive influence on the evolution of participatory democracy, decentralisation and devolution.

Partnership and confidence building for effective compliance and enforcement of a regulatory framework for Community Forestry takes time and requires the support of national and local governance institutions and processes. Among the many challenges that need to be addressed are issues such as balancing the cultural dimensions of customary practices with contemporary values of equity, democracy and sustainable forest management. Together with technical aspects, institutional issues are central to the success of Community Forestry.

## 8. Benefit flows, equity and poverty reduction in Community Forestry<sup>4</sup>

Community Forestry is a relatively recent policy instrument in Bhutan and the impacts of its application, both biophysical and socio-economic, are yet to be fully appraised. However, analyses from other countries in the region give a useful strategic perspective. In many countries tangible benefits from Community Forestry have barely started to flow because of the considerable lag time between the establishment of effective Community Forestry regimes (often on degraded lands that require considerable rehabilitation before they can become productive) and the commencement of benefit flows.

One of the underlying articles of faith of Community Forestry is that human well-being will be enhanced, and in the Bhutanese context this will contribute to Gross National Happiness. However, this is not well documented. It is only in recent years that significant benefits have commenced to flow from community managed forests in those countries where Community Forestry is well accepted and widely established. This has provided impetus to addressing distributional issues – especially as they impact on equity and poverty – particularly since poverty reduction has become a major policy objective of rural development programs in most countries.

Community Forestry can also act as a platform for discussion on a range of issues and, in socially divided communities, can (with empathetic facilitation) result in the bringing together of individuals and groups around a shared interest in the future well-being of their forests (Box 6). This social benefit is a very important, but unexpected, benefit arising from a visionary local initiative.

### **Box 6. Community Forestry as a platform for developing social cohesion**

The Chairman of Bumpaling CF in Sarpang Dzongkhag, Mr Sonam Zamgpo, explained how, when he was resettled to the area from Zhemgang in 1992, the village was populated by people from many different parts of the country. They had different ethnic backgrounds, languages, customs and beliefs. There was a great deal of mutual suspicion and mistrust, and people went their own way and did not work together for anything. In 2002 he initiated discussions on protecting the nearby forest. Over a period of time this brought people together to talk about issues of common interest and about doing something that would benefit their children and grandchildren. People in the village now join in each other's festivals and enjoy the benefits of a cohesive society. The Bumpaling Community Forest was officially handed over to the CFMG in December 2008.

4 The content of this section draws heavily on Gilmour *et al.* (2004)

The success of Community Forestry in increasing the area and quality of forests, especially in countries such as Nepal, is now reasonably well documented. During the past few years, reports of the financial and other benefits that are being generated from Community Forests in Bhutan are also coming to light. For example, Temphe and Beukeboom (2007) report that *"in the past few years a total of US\$12,150 have been accumulated in the savings groups of 24 CFMGs... This might seem only a small amount but is significant in the context that in some communities the cash economy was only introduced recently. Most of the funds are collected through savings, NWFP sale, and fines"* (p.5). Peldon (2009) gives numerous examples of significant income being generated from the harvesting and sale of NWFPs, and she suggests that there is a large untapped potential for substantial increase in the marketing of NWFPs. She also notes that 13 Community Forests, involving 1,342 households, have been established specifically for the sustainable utilisation and management of NWFPs.

It can be argued that many, if not most, members of CFMGs in Bhutan are beneath the poverty line. Consequently, many of the benefits generated from Community Forests contribute directly to poverty reduction. However, analyses in other countries suggest that there are many distributional issues, with many of the benefits flowing to local elites, and in some cases very poor people are made relatively, if not absolutely, worse off. Furthermore, the human well-being benefits of Community Forestry have frequently been considered in terms of rural livelihoods in general rather than poverty reduction in particular. Though Community Forestry was always linked to poor people, there have been, until recently, few specific strategies that link operational methodologies with poor people's needs. This is now changing, but empirical examples are few. This is partly because they are so rarely documented and partly because even where evidence exists there are good reasons for thinking that many of the claims about benefits are inconclusive, as they ignore equity aspects and transaction costs (see Boxes 7 and 8) of poor people engaging in Community Forestry programs (Fisher 2000).



### Box 7. Equity in Community Forestry

Equity is often taken to mean that all participants receive an equal share of the benefits (which is generally taken to equate to equality). A better way to think of equity is in terms of fairness—what is fair under the prevailing circumstances? There are different aspects to equity that are important to consider when developing regulatory frameworks for or implementing Community Forestry. The first of these is **equity in benefit sharing** which should ensure that the poor are not made absolutely or relatively worse off. The second is **procedural equity** which should ensure that all sections of society have an effective voice in decision making.

Another important consideration is the notion of equity being embedded in social and cultural norms. For example, in societies such as India and Nepal, the caste system embeds inequity into all social relationships (in spite of legal settings that prohibit discrimination based on caste). In Timor-Leste, some individuals and families of inferior status in the customary hierarchy may never claim inheritable rights of “ownership” of land and forest resources, and may also have to pay rates and taxes for their non inheritable rights of use (D’Andrea 2003).

It is very difficult for an intervention strategy such as Community Forestry to address equity independent from fundamental social reforms. However, it is important (in all countries) that Community Forestry does not further entrench fundamental inequities, but attempts to acknowledge and address them.



### **Box 8. Transaction costs**

Transaction costs refer to the costs (financial and other) involved in transacting the business associated with Community Forestry. This includes things such as the time spent at meetings and in negotiations, as well as direct costs such as contributing labour to tree planting and other forest activities. There are economic consequences associated with transaction costs that are often quite severe, particularly for poor people who might have to forego livelihood or income generating activities in order to participate in Community Forestry affairs. For these reasons some analysts argue that, unless implementation agents are very careful, poor people can be made both absolutely and relatively worse off by participating fully in Community Forestry activities.

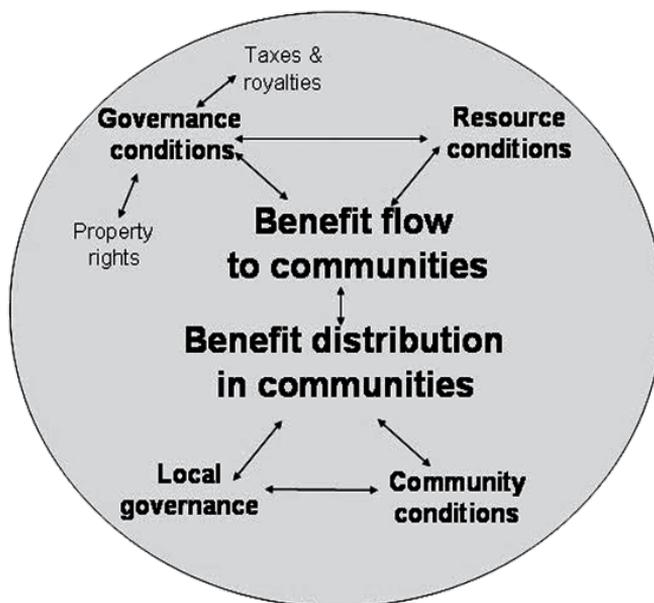
In some cases governments include in the regulatory instruments the need for communities to commit to a high level of bureaucratic record keeping and reporting, and this inevitably increases transaction costs. A careful look at these suggests that much of this reporting is to satisfy the governments' own needs rather than those of the community. Yet, the community is required to pay for the transaction costs. However, minimising reporting and record keeping has to be balanced with the need for openness and accountability of the institutions involved (government as well as community). There are obvious equity considerations associated with transaction costs.

Buffum *et al.* (in press) carried out a study of three CFMGs in 2005 to assess nine indicators of equity. They found that economic equity (distribution of benefits) and political equity (participation in decision making) were much higher than reports from neighbouring countries. They attributed these findings to four factors: ethnic homogeneity, active participation of women, supportive government policy and strong extension support.

However, a second case study of the gender and equity aspects in three Community Forests was carried out by Namgay and Sonam (2006) that paints a different picture. They concluded that inequity in sharing benefits from Community Forests is an emerging issue that needs to be taken into account in future strategies. In order to address poverty effectively and to develop and apply an explicit pro-poor strategy, it is necessary to understand the multiple dimensions of poverty. Poverty is not just about a lack of money, although that is one of the important asset classes. Others asset classes that need to be considered include: social; human; physical; financial; natural and political (Hobley 2007).

These case studies provide a useful beginning in addressing the aspects of equity and overall governance in a more targeted manner, and suggest that much more work needs to be done on this topic before generalised conclusions can be reached.

Figure 3 gives a framework that is of value in conceptualising and analysing some of the elements that impinge on benefit flow and distribution between governments and communities and within communities.



**Figure 3. Framework for conceptualising benefit sharing (from Mahanty et al. 2007)**

Even in countries such as Nepal, where Community Forestry has been demonstrably successful by many criteria, the need for an explicit pro-poor approach to Community Forestry has only recently been identified. A recent study in Nepal found that pro-poor NGOs (such as Action Aid Nepal, Care Nepal, Lutheran World Federation Nepal and Oxfam/Great Britain) have in fact had most success in incorporating poverty reduction approaches into Community Forestry implementation modalities (NORMS 2003).

The challenge for the future in all countries including Bhutan, therefore, is to see how the significant benefits accruing from the management of forests by communities can be used explicitly to alleviate rural poverty. Much remains to be learnt, though there are encouraging empirical examples demonstrating that much can be achieved with further testing and consequent scaling-up of successful approaches. A number of countries in the region have poverty alleviation as a key component on their development agenda, and have embedded the agenda in policy (for example, in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers-MOF 2004). However, translating these strategies into practical outcomes for Community Forestry on a large scale remains a considerable

challenge. Mahanty *et al.* (2006) propose that this challenge can be met by applying approaches that include:

- *Gaining a better understanding of who is marginalised, the causes of poverty in specific localities, and the role of forest resources in this context;*
- *Improving opportunities for the poor to maximise their income from forest resources;*
- *Addressing governance to strengthen the resource rights and access of the poor, as well as benefit sharing from the use and marketing of resources; and*
- *Seeing (Community Forestry) in context, so that forest-based livelihoods are not treated in isolation from other asset and livelihood activities. (p. 87)*

They go on to emphasise that it is important to recognise that Community Forestry can ultimately only make a partial contribution to poverty reduction, but that this contribution may be significant, particularly for communities with few alternative pathways out of poverty.



## **9. Strategic approaches for the future**

### **9.1 Principles to guide formulation of Community Forestry strategies**

A strategy is a plan designed to achieve a particular goal and is concerned with how different activities are linked together in order to achieve the goal. This strategy should be thought of as charting the way ahead for the medium to long term (5-10 years), with immediate action needed to commence the process.

An analysis of the regulatory framework for Community Forestry, the evolution of policy and practice and the place of Community Forestry in the national planning agenda during the past decade leads to the identification of several key principles that can guide the formulation of strategies for the future focus and development of Community Forestry.

At the strategic level, Community Forestry should:

- Balance conservation with sustainable utilisation;
- Support decentralisation and devolution through empowerment of local communities to manage their local forests;
- Improve governance of Community Forests leading to improved forest conditions and the equitable distribution of benefits;
- Generate income for local communities through commercial harvesting of timber and NWFPs;
- Contribute to poverty reduction;
- Provide, as far as possible, timber for rural construction and maintenance.

In addition, some of the principles that were adopted while framing the draft National Forest Policy (2009) are also relevant for developing Community Forestry strategies. These are:

- Underpin all aspects of forest planning and management with the application of good science, i.e. by applying the best available scientific knowledge to all aspects of Community Forestry (planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) but in a way that is readily understood and applied by extension staff and communities;
- Make explicit attempts to bridge the research-management divide.

During the formulation of the strategies, consideration was also given to mechanisms by which other sector policies, such as watershed management, can be taken into consideration in conjunction with Community Forestry. It was concluded that the vehicle for this integration should be Dzongkhag and Geog level development plans.

## **9.2 Vision for Community Forestry**

Building on the principles outlined above, the long term vision for Community Forestry is for a future that is sustainable, affordable, makes a significant contribution to rural livelihoods, poverty reduction and improved forest condition and is resilient to climate change. Specifically, the vision is for:

- Community Forests available to all rural communities that are able and willing to manage them;
- Community Forests managed sustainably to produce a wide range of forest goods and services;
- Community Forests managed to provide:
  - the majority of forest products needed to sustain basic rural livelihoods;
  - income from commercial harvesting and marketing of timber, NWFPs and environmental services;
  - a contribution to poverty reduction;
- Government forest officers trained as community advisors and extensionists to support management of Community Forests by CFMGs;
- The management of Community Forests based on good science.
- Management carried out in an adaptive, flexible, action learning manner to respond positively to uncertain social outcomes and unintended consequences as well as future shocks from climate change or other events.

## **9.3 Community Forestry development goal**

One of the six objectives identified in the draft National Forest Policy (2009) relates to Community Forestry and it is stated as:

Rural communities able to meet the majority of their timber demands from their own community forests, and derive economic benefits from the sustainable management of their forests through sale of forest products and services.

This objective would logically become the development goal for Community Forestry to which subsequent strategies will contribute (Peljor 2009). However, during the consultation process for this strategy it was suggested that additional issues need to be incorporated into the goal to reflect better the contemporary RGoB policy and national planning imperatives. These include: poverty reduction and empowering communities to manage their forests to meet their requirements for timber and other goods and services. Thus, it is suggested that the development goal for Community Forestry could be reformulated as:

**Rural communities empowered to manage their own community forests sustainably to meet the majority of their timber demands and other forest goods and services, derive economic benefits from the sale of forest products and services, and contribute to a reduction in rural poverty.**

This goal for the management of Community Forests will also contribute to the Constitutional requirement of a minimum of 60 percent forest cover for all time. The relevance of this statement as a development goal was endorsed by a national Community Forestry workshop held in Thimphu in April 2009. The workshop participants identified critical policy, institutional and technical issues that currently inhibit the implementation and expansion of Community Forestry (see Annex 3 for details). They went on to agree to a series of strategies that would collectively contribute to the attainment of the goal. These strategies, along with challenges to be faced and approaches for their implementation, are outlined below.

#### **9.4 Strategies, challenges and approaches**

##### **Strategy 1. Enhance the regulatory framework for Community Forestry to ensure that it is enabling rather than enforcing**

###### **Observations and challenges**

While the overall regulatory framework is largely enabling, with supportive legislation, policies, rules and procedural systems, experience during the past decade suggests that changes could be made to make the framework more enabling and to simplify and streamline service delivery. This would have the effect of leading to greater empowerment of CFMGs to become more effective forest managers.

Some aspects of the implementation manual are complex and difficult for extension agents to understand. In addition it is designed as a “one size fits all” set of procedures even though biophysical and social conditions vary greatly throughout the country. To some extent the guidelines have mixed the Government’s compliance needs with the communities’ needs to manage their forests. When revision of the manual takes place caution should be exercised to ensure that it is not made more complex in an endeavour to make it more relevant to the variety of social and biophysical conditions.

The present area limit of 2.5 ha per household is an artificial one that gives little recognition to the traditional and natural boundaries used and respected by communities, even though the 2006 Rules specify that traditional areas should be respected where possible. This creates an imposed artificiality in the way that communities are required to perceive their environment and manage their community resources.

The initial focus of Community Forestry was primarily on management for subsistence purposes. The Government’s strategic objectives have now widened to include income generation, poverty reduction and sourcing timber for rural construction and maintenance from Community Forests, and additional issues, such as the Payment for Environmental Services, are also under serious discussion.

## **Suggested approaches**

Transfer the primary authority and responsibility for forest management (development, protection and utilisation) of forest resources near villages and settlements to Community Forestry Management Groups to the extent that they are able and willing to accept the mandate.

When developing rules and implementation guidelines, distinguish between the Government's compliance requirements for Community Forestry and the communities' needs to manage their forests. Review the existing implementation manuals and develop a rationalised and simplified approach consistent with the Government's broader agenda of stimulating decentralisation and devolution. In particular, simplify the:

- Application process for applying for CFs;
- Procedures and requirements for developing CF management plans and,
- CF implementation manuals.

Remove the area limit of 2.5 ha per household that presently applies to the establishment of Community Forests, and use traditional and natural boundaries where ever possible to define the limits. While no upper limit is proposed on the area of CF for one CFMG, determination of the area should be guided by:

- Customary rights and practices;
- Availability of forest land;
- Willingness and ability of the CFMG to manage the forest;
- Potential productivity of the forest;
- Proximity of adjacent villagers;
- Level of dependence on the forest.

Remove the minimum household number required to constitute a CFMG (presently 10) so that dispersed small settlements, which constitute a natural community of residence (see Box 3), can benefit from Community Forestry policies. However, caution should be exercised to ensure that this does not lead to *de facto* privatisation by a single household.

Devolve more rights and responsibilities to CFMGs (to address limited staff numbers and increasing work loads of Dzongkhag and geog forestry staff), and consider involving the private sector (including consulting firms and NGOs) in some tasks.

## **Strategy 2. *Manage Community Forests by applying principles of Sustainable Forest Management to achieve both conservation and development outcomes***

### **Observations and challenges**

It is important for the achievement of the CF development goal that all forests are managed sustainably. Among other things this means that harvesting of renewable natural resources should be based on principles of long term sustainability. However, this can take many forms. At the present time AHL for timber harvesting is determined in a very formulaic manner and considerable uncertainties exist about the validity of the calculations, particularly in the sub tropical broad leaf forests. Sustainable off-take does not necessarily require the application of detailed inventory, particularly when such inventory is poorly applied and results in incorrect or misleading numbers. What is needed is the application of good scientific knowledge about the ecology and silviculture of the major forest types in the country. This knowledge can, even without inventory, be translated into simply understood silvicultural prescriptions for harvesting and managing regeneration. These prescriptions (rules of thumb) need to make sense to CFMGs and Dzongkhag and Geog extension staff so that they can be applied in an adaptive manner to suit the particular circumstances of the CF.

Similar sustainability considerations apply to harvesting NWFPs as mentioned in RGoB (2008 c). To date, guidelines for resource assessment and management of six NWFPs have been prepared and are used as the basis for harvesting. An interim framework for the collection and management of NWFPs was approved in April 2009 (RGoB 2009 b), and this will contribute significantly to the sustainable harvesting of NWFPs.

The 2006 Rules allow for the establishment of CFs in protected areas and FMUs, but there is some resistance from Park Managers and DFOs for this to occur. At present there are very few CFs in protected areas or FMUs. There is a sense from some DFOs that, because the forests in FMUs are already under management, there is no need to transfer them to communities to manage. While this approach meets the government's policy objective for SFM, it does not contribute to the policy objective of income generation or poverty reduction. There could be a case for reassessing the policy priorities at national level to ensure that there is an appropriate balance in forest management approaches to contribute to the Government's overarching development goal for the forest sector. This could lead to the establishment of CFs in production areas of FMUs where such areas are in immediate proximity to villages. Some FMUs do not have current management plans, and resource inventories need to be carried out before new FMU management plans can be finalised. In these cases there is an opportunity to include relevant areas from such FMUs into CFs.

Communities live in parks and have traditionally used forest resources since before the parks were established. However, there is lack of clarity between local communities and park management over the harvesting of forest products within the parks. ICDP approaches are currently the major focus of park management in their interventions to curtail local harvesting of forest resources (including wildlife). CFs established within

park boundaries could provide a more effective institutional platform (which has a firm legal basis) for reaching agreement with local communities that would recognise their traditional rights while at the same time negotiating trade-offs to help achieve protected area objectives. Similarly, people have traditionally used forest resources in areas that are now included in FMUs. There is room to have CFs in the non production zones of FMUs (primarily the social zones) that could contribute to both community and FMU management objectives.

Many CFs contain degraded areas and most CFMGs want to improve the productivity of their forests by establishing plantations in these degraded sites. They have limited capacity to produce seedlings although they can plant and tend them. The major costs associated with plantation establishment are in planting and future maintenance, and these are all borne by the CFMGs. It would be a worthwhile low cost investment for the Government to provide seedlings to CFMGs.

Heavy grazing in many forest types across the country inhibits the development of advanced regeneration, particularly in broad leaf forests, and this poses a threat to future sustainability. In some forests in the south the numbers of grazing animals kept per household has decreased from about 30-40 open range grazed animals a decade or so ago to about 6-12 stall fed animals today (discussions with CFMGs in Sarpang Dzongkhag). This has resulted in an almost complete reduction in forest grazing, and a consequent improvement in the ability of regenerated seedlings to reach an advanced stage. The national cattle population for the period 1999 to 2005 also showed a decline of 29,000 head (from 345,000 to 316,000—8.4 percent) (RGoB 2008 b) suggesting that, at least in some areas, grazing pressures on forests are reducing. However, grazing pressures remain high in much of the country and this continues to pose a challenge to securing forest regeneration.

The FNC Act includes sand and boulders as forest products. However, the 2006 Rules specify that surface collection of these products by CFMGs is not allowed. This constrains the ability of the CFMGs to manage their forests in totality, and effectively disempowers them from being effective managers.

### **Suggested approaches**

Carry out harvesting of timber and NWFPs based on sustainable off-take, and in support of this:

- Critically review the methods used to calculate AHL for timber harvesting in all major forest types;
- Develop rules of thumb, based on the application of good science, to guide timber harvesting and silvicultural treatment to ensure that Community Forests are managed sustainably in the long term.
- Continue to develop guidelines for resource assessment and management of important NWFPs to ensure that their harvesting is carried out on a sustainable basis.

Promote the establishment of CFs in protected areas and biological corridors using the following criteria:

- CFs allowed in demarcated multiple use zones of protected areas, but
- No CFs allowed in demarcated core zones.

When management plans are developed for FMUs, provision should be made for inclusion of CFs in the FMUs, in consultation with adjacent communities.

Coordinate with Dzongkhag and Geog level development planners as well as with the CFMGs and herders to discuss the problems associated with grazing in CFs and the consequent impact on regeneration. These are social problem requiring social solutions.

Encourage joint inspections by DzFOs and DFOs/PMs to shorten the process and resolve any coordination difficulties.

Encourage CFMGs to establish plantations in degraded parts of CFs by providing assistance to establish nurseries or by the provision of free seedlings.

Allow existing plantations to be included in CFs where the plantations are within the traditional boundaries of village forests.

Include all forest resources including sand and boulders within the purvue of CFMGs and allow the surface collection of sand and boulders by CFMGs, as long as their collection does not have any deleterious environmental effects. However, the primary objective of CF management should remain on sustainable forest management.

Allow HHs to be members of different CFMGs, particularly for NWFP management and utilisation.

### ***Strategy 3. Manage Community Forests to generate income as well as a wide range of other goods and services***

#### **Observations and challenges**

Many Community Forests are degraded forests that require substantial investment of time and resources to return them to a productive condition. There has been a reluctance to allocate productive forest land to communities for forest management. It is not feasible to expect Community Forests to contribute to income generation, provision of rural timber supplies and poverty reduction in the short to medium term unless substantial areas of productive forest are included. The removal of sand and boulders from recognised “forest products” also limits the ability of CFMGs to exercise effective control over the natural resources in their forests, and also removes their ability to generate income from their sale.

The limit of 2.5 ha per household inhibits the ability of Community Forests to contribute

significantly to income generation and particularly poverty reduction.

There may be benefits for some CFMGs registering as cooperatives or farmer groups in order to strengthen their marketing position. To form a cooperative under The Cooperative Act, a minimum number of 15 persons (with a maximum of three persons per household) are required. Farmers groups need at least three persons for registration (although there is no specification of the minimum number of households). This also has relevance in considering the minimum number of HH that can constitute a CFMG.

### **Suggested approaches**

Support product development of forest products that have the potential for generating income. Explore value chains for marketing a wide range of forest goods and services, including timber, NWFPs (including sand and boulders) and ecosystem services. Assist CFMGs to:

- Develop the skills needed to carry out sustainable harvesting of NWFPs and other forest products by combining local and external technical knowledge.
- Support the development of appropriate forest-based enterprises and income generating schemes and provide with marketing assistance, with particular attention given to developing mechanisms to address poverty reduction.
- Support the formation of associations/cooperatives to enhance economies of scale, particularly for marketing forest products.
- Link CFMGs with private sector entrepreneurs to facilitate processing and marketing of forest products.
- Explore the benefits of registering as cooperatives/farmer groups to strengthen their marketing possibilities for forest products.

Consideration should also be given to innovative approaches of forest-based enterprises such as ecotourism and the payment for environmental services, where potential exists.

### **Strategy 4. *Manage Community Forests to contribute to a reduction in rural poverty***

#### **Observations and challenges**

All societies contain a mix of relatively well off and relatively impoverished individuals and households, even those societies where the majority of people are below the poverty line. Interventions inevitably disrupt social norms and provide opportunities for capture of benefits by local elite. Developing a Community Forestry management regime that generates income does not necessarily lead to poverty reduction—in many cases this leads to greater relative poverty.

Particular skills are needed to:

- Be aware of the social impact of interventions
- Identify the poorest members within a community

- Address distributional aspects of benefits and costs associated with the management of Community Forests
- Distinguish poverty reduction from community wide livelihood improvement
- Take account of the inequitable burden of high transaction costs that frequently fall on the poorest members of communities
- Be creative about ideas for encouraging marginalised individuals and groups to contribute to and benefit from involvement in CFMGs
- Address the special needs of marginalised individuals and groups through CFMG by-laws.

### **Suggested approaches**

Clarify what poverty means in rural Bhutan, particularly the causes, and develop an explicit pro-poor approach to Community Forestry. Key elements of such an approach would include:

- Profile the rural poor;
- Target benefits to improve the lot of the poorest members of the community;
- Develop targeted activities to ensure equitable distribution of benefits and costs;
- Minimise transaction costs (such as attendance at meetings) for rural poor so that they can become active and effective participants in Community Forestry programs.

This will require collaboration with individuals and organisations, both inside and outside Bhutan, where these skills are available.

### **Strategy 5. Meet rural timber requirements from Community Forests to the greatest extent possible**

#### **Observations and challenges**

The subsidised price for rural timber distorts the market and acts as a disincentive for rural people to manage community and private forests for timber production. Some rural timber finds its way onto the commercial market. It is likely to be politically difficult to remove the price subsidies in the short term.

The present cap of 2.5 ha per household as the criterion to determine the area of Community Forests limits the ability to produce sufficient timber above subsistence requirements to satisfy the demand for rural timber. Removing the cap and using traditional and natural boundaries to define CFs will generally lead to an increase in the area of CFs and the timber available for rural construction and maintenance.

The ability of rural communities to source timber for their construction and maintenance needs from GRFs may limit their interest in using CFs for this purpose.

## **Suggested approaches**

Raise awareness among rural communities of the Government's intentions in having them source their timber for construction and maintenance from CFs in the medium term and of their responsibility to manage their CFs for this purpose (among others).

Phase out rural timber subsidies over the short term to provide incentives for investment in community and private forestry.

Remove the cap on the area of Community Forests per household to encourage CFMGs to manage their Community Forests for economic as well as subsistence goods (so that there is no need to source products from GRFs), and use traditional boundaries to define the forest limits as much as possible.

**Strategy 6. Base the management of Community Forests on principles of good governance (embracing transparency, accountability, participation, predictability, empowerment, inclusiveness, equity and benefit sharing) and in line with decentralisation and devolution policies**

## **Observations and challenges**

Organisational and institutional arrangements for government supported systems such as Community Forestry tend to reinforce existing hierarchies and inequities in society, unless this issue is explicitly acknowledged and addressed.

Organisational and institutional arrangements need to change over time as Community Forest management moves from a focus on protection and rehabilitation to a focus on commercial utilisation and marketing of forest goods and services. Flexible and adaptive approaches to management are needed.

Good governance of CFs by CFMGs should contribute to a greater sense of ownership of the forests and responsibility for their sustainable management. Benefits coming from the management of Community Forests include non cash benefits such as empowerment, so equity in decision making is as important as equity in benefit sharing.

Community Forestry is a practical example of democratisation in action, and it has the potential to have a much wider impact than just among the key actors of community and Department of Forests and Park Services staff. By providing an example of good governance and encouraging the establishment of these principles into Dzongkhag and Geog development planning, CF has the potential to be a positive influence on the evolution of participatory democracy, decentralisation and devolution.

Limited coordination between Dzongkhag forestry, park management and divisional forestry staff results in overlaps in authority and responsibility leading to uncertainties and delays in processing CF applications and preparation of CF management plans. Further, "resistance" is often encountered in agreeing on area and boundaries of CFs and this causes frustration in community groups and with CF extension agents.

### **Suggested approaches**

Strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of CFMGs to empower them to manage their Community Forests sustainably and share benefits from these forests equitably among all users, but with particular attention given to developing mechanisms to reduce poverty.

Support the development of CFMG by-laws that encourage inclusiveness and are flexible enough to ensure that households that arrive after initial CF establishment, or leave for some reason, and marginalised groups are not excluded from full participation in CF management.

Both parties in CF agreements, Government and community, have responsibilities as well as authorities. In the interests of enhancing transparency and accountability, procedures should be established to enable CFMG members to hold Forest Officers accountable for their actions.

Carry out an institutional analysis of roles and responsibilities of DFOs, Park Managers and DzFOs in relation to Community Forestry. Make recommendations to improve institutional arrangements leading to improved overall efficiency and effectiveness.

Explore and strengthen the institutional linkages between the CF planning process and Geog development planning so that other sector priorities, such as watershed management are given consideration and integrated, along with CF proposals, into Geog development plans.

Interact with Dzongkhag and Geog level development planning to facilitate the incorporation of participatory and good governance principles into planning approaches, using CF experiences as examples.

Political will and clear directions from high levels in the MoAF are needed to clarify the importance of Community Forestry in the overall policy of the Government.

### **Strategy 7. *Improve awareness of the general public and Government staff about all aspects of Community Forestry***

#### **Observations and challenges**

Experience has suggested that the general public and government staff in some Dzongkhags have limited understanding of Community Forestry and how it can contribute to improving rural livelihoods and poverty reduction, as well as improving the condition of local forests. Many communities are also unaware of their rights in regard to CF. Based on previous experiences with nationalisation of forests some communities have expressed reservations about whether they will have long term security regarding access and use rights of CFs under current policies. This lack of trust in Government policies and lack of awareness limits the interest of communities in coming forward to take advantage of Community Forestry. Similarly, some Government staff are not aware of their responsibilities in explaining the details of

Government CF policy and encouraging communities to become actively involved.

The case study series of publications has gone some way to raising awareness about key CF issues among interested professionals, both inside and outside Bhutan, and has given useful experience to many staff in critical analysis and writing.

### **Suggested approaches**

Build awareness raising into regular extension activities to the greatest extent possible (particularly at Dzongkhag and Geog levels), covering Government policy for CF (linked to the wider decentralisation and devolution agenda). Emphasis could be given to the practical aspects of CF in empowering communities to managing their own forests for their own benefit.

Continue the practice of inviting the media to key CF events and giving regular interviews to keep CF in the public eye.

Prepare a variety of material, in different languages, for distribution to assist raising general awareness of CF. This could include brochures, posters, etc.

Produce a newsletter on a regular basis updating CF status, presenting innovative ideas from CFs (e.g. income generation), discussion of topical subjects (e.g. governance) and other CF related events inside and outside the country. The target audiences for such a newsletter could be: donors, DFPS staff, Dzongkhags, research institutions, CNR, Territorial Divisions, Park Managers, the media and institutions outside Bhutan, such as RECOFTC.

Continue support for the case study series as a vehicle for exploring topical issues, for building the capacity of young professionals in critical analysis and writing and to provide a vehicle for feedback from the field into policy discussions.

Encourage publication of articles about CF in scientific journals and presentation of papers at workshops and conferences to expose CF in Bhutan to a wider audience as well as to build capacity and confidence of Bhutanese professionals.

Consider the production of a documentary on CF that can have wide circulation, and that could subsequently be used in DVD form for training.

### **Strategy 8. Build capacity to plan for and manage Community Forests**

#### **Observations and challenges**

CFMGs have limited (but rapidly growing) capacity to accept fully a decentralised and devolved mandate to manage Community Forests.

In spite of substantial and well directed efforts to build capacity among government staff, there is still limited capacity of Dzongkhag level staff to support fully CFMGs in all aspects of planning and management, particularly as Community Forestry becomes

more complex.

Intervening in social systems inevitably produces unintended consequences which, by definition, cannot be planned for. It is important that government staff are able to look for unintended consequences and address any problems as they arise.

The College of Natural Resources (CNR) at Lobesa has the mandate for training extension officers for their work with supporting CFMGs, and is currently expanding its mandate to deliver Bachelor degree courses from mid 2009. The curriculum was recently reviewed (following a training needs analysis with a wide range of stakeholders) and now contains a full module on Community Forestry. Once the degree program is in place one of the major strands will be Community Forestry and related topics. The College plans to establish a Centre for Rural Development which could further enhance the potential for training and research in topics related to Community Forestry. The SFD works closely with the College to conduct capacity building exercises in the field.

The Rural Development Training Centre (RDTC) has provided CFMG members with useful training in record keeping, managerial skills and local leadership, and this should be continued.

As well as the continued use of formal training institutes and group training, there are possibilities of developing personalised approaches to capacity building that have proven highly effective in similar situations in other countries. This involves using structured on-the-job mentoring programs tailored to the specific needs of individual trainees.

Not all skills needed to implement a CF program can be met from within the Department of Forests and Park Services, particularly in the socio-economic domain. It will be necessary to connect with other service providers, both inside and outside Bhutan to provide these skills, particularly in the short term.

### **Suggested approaches**

Continue to build capacity for Community Forestry management at all levels.

Carry out an appraisal of the training needs of communities and government staff to manage Community Forests effectively. Continue to interact with the College of NR to influence the content of the curriculum and *ad hoc* training courses to ensure that they reflect the needs of staff to work in a participatory manner with CFMGs, and in particular to enhance the facilitation skills of people who will become GFEOs and DzFOs. Training on good governance of Community Forests and the inclusion of gender issues in CFMPs is also important.

Training in income generation (including product development and marketing) is an important new direction, and will need specific attention.

Continue the focus on short term in-country training on an *ad hoc* basis to meet the on-going and emerging needs of community groups and government staff. In particular, give increased attention to building capacity to address social aspects of Community Forestry, especially governance, to ensure that outcomes meet important social goals of equity and poverty reduction.

Conduct carefully selected study tours, particularly for CFMGs, to give them exposure to different settings and to learn from interacting with other CFMGs. This could also stimulate the formation of more formal networks between CFMGs that could, in time, lead to the development of some type of civil society federation that could take on advocacy and other roles.

Continue to support the production of case studies on topical issues in CF as a mechanism to build capacity to analyse and document field situations, as well as to provide feedback into policy thinking.

Continue to provide encouragement and opportunities for graduate and post graduate study by government officers to build their technical and analytical capacity so that they can take on leadership roles in the future. Such study should be directed towards those issues that are constraining the development of Community Forestry in Bhutan.

Critically analyse the tasks that can be devolved to CFMGs to reduce the work load of Dzongkhag and Geog level forestry staff. This will also increase the empowerment of CFMGs and help to strengthen their sense of ownership and control over their forests.

Make connections with service providers, both inside and outside Bhutan, to supply skills in areas which are not available from within the Department of Forests and Park Services, particularly in the socio-economic domain.

Respond positively to uncertain social outcomes and unintended consequences as well as future shocks from climate change and other events by adopting adaptive management and an action research approach to implementation, whereby the cycle of: *planning, action, reflection and plan revision*, becomes a normal *modus operandi*.

### **Strategy 9. Base technical and socio-economic approaches to Community Forestry on good science**

#### **Observations and challenges**

The inclusion of lengthy and complex technical requirements in CF application procedures and management plans frequently has perverse effects. They can lead to an inability of local communities to follow the prescriptions, and their ultimate disempowerment, with a consequent inability to manage the forests sustainably. The original intention of including detail and complexity is generally done to ensure that

forests are managed sustainably. However, their inclusion often leads to the opposite outcome from the stated intention of policy. Good science is needed to translate technical knowledge of silvicultural practices to simple “rules of thumb” for application by CFMGs with little or no input from technically trained foresters in the long term.

The RNR research centres and the newly created Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environment at Bumthang have limited experience in addressing technical Community Forestry issues, and virtually none in addressing the important socio-economic issues. These latter issues include those associated with governance and the related aspects of equity and poverty reduction.

The research agenda of the RNR Research Centres has become more client-oriented in recent years, and institutional mechanisms are in place to bring specific research needs from the field to the notice of researchers via annual research coordination workshops.

The application of participatory technical trials involving researchers and community groups would be a useful innovation. Such participatory approaches are useful vehicles to apply good science to relevant topics as well as to transfer knowledge and skills to the client groups. Topics such as testing management regimes in different forest types for harvesting timber and NWFPs would be suitable for inclusion.

The question of providing sound analysis of and research into socio-economic aspects of Community Forestry remains unresolved, but one that should be addressed in the short term.

The SFD has collaborated effectively with the PFMP, CBNRM program and RECOFTC in the production of useful case studies that have involved many people in taking a structured approach to reviewing and analysing key aspects of Community Forestry policy and practice. These have provided useful feedback to policy makers and practitioners and have helped case study participants to gain experience and confidence in critical enquiry.

### **Suggested approaches**

Regularly assess and prioritise the key impediments to achieving the strategic biophysical and socio-economic outcomes for Community Forestry.

Develop a research agenda of priority biophysical and socio-economic issues that require urgent attention and bring these to the attention of the research coordination workshop.

Actively develop and apply approaches to provide input into the important socio-economic issues that need to be addressed, particularly in the areas of CF governance.

Build strategic partnerships with research institutions inside and outside Bhutan to address key Community Forestry issues that are impeding the achievement of strategic objectives.

Adapt operational procedures (including manuals for planning and implementation of CF) so that they are based on good science, but are simple enough to be understood and implemented by CFMGs with limited outside support.

### **Strategy 10. Monitor and evaluate the biophysical and socio-economic outcomes of Community Forestry**

#### **Observations and challenges**

On-going monitoring and evaluation are important aspects of management by both community groups and government mediating agencies, and can assist in bringing to attention emerging problems before they become too damaging. The Community Forestry program explicitly targets socio-economic outcomes as well as biophysical ones. However, most forestry officials generally have little understanding of social systems, although they are required to intervene in both social and biophysical systems.

In order to determine whether Community Forestry is achieving its strategic objectives, there is a need to monitor the processes, activities and outcomes, and to evaluate the impact on the key biophysical and socio-economic components of the Community Forestry goal.

Much can be learnt from an analysis of stories of limited or no success, as well as from analysing success stories.

#### **Suggested approaches**

Develop systems to monitor and report on biophysical and socio-economic outcomes, particularly:

- Base line data on condition (area and quality) of forests being handed over as CFs.
- Changes in forest area and condition over time.
- Generation and distribution of benefits derived from management of Community Forests (with particular emphasis on equity).
- Extent of income generation from management of Community Forests.
- Extent to which poverty is reduced.



## 10. Conclusions

Communities need to be encouraged to invest time and energy to become involved in government supported Community Forestry initiatives. The basis of such an approach is to: (i) build a relationship between government officials and the community based on mutual trust and respect (rather than the more traditional regulatory relationship); (ii) minimize transaction costs for the community and government partners; (iii) maximize authority for communities to manage forests and distribute benefits; and (iv) ensure that benefits flow as early and as equitably as possible. Some of these aspects can be built into regulatory frameworks while others need to be addressed through associated capacity building and reorientation activities and improvements to overall governance.

Several key points can be made in conclusion:

- Good progress has been made in implementing Community Forestry since 2001 and the program is heading in a sound direction—moving from piloting to institutionalisation of a national program which has the potential to significantly contribute to the country's national development goals.
- The regulatory framework for Community Forestry is generally enabling, but many aspects could be improved to simplify the procedural systems and lead to greater empowerment of CFMGs to manage their forests to produce a wide range of forest goods and services, to generate income and to reduce poverty.
- The potential exists for Community Forests to contribute to income generation and poverty reduction but activities need to be more clearly targeted on achieving the outcomes.
- More attention is needed to address governance issues (including empowerment, inclusiveness, accountability, participation, predictability, transparency, equity and benefit sharing).
- On-going capacity building is needed to support implementation and address increasingly complex issues such as income generation, poverty reduction and payment for environmental services
- Solid research support is needed to backstop the Community Forestry program so that biophysical and socio-economic aspects needed for planning, implementation monitoring and evaluation are based on good science.

Community Forestry is a practical example of democratisation in action, and it has the potential to have a much wider impact than just among the key actors of community and Department of Forests and Park Services staff. By providing an example of good governance and encouraging the establishment of these principles into Dzongkhag and Geog development planning, CF has the potential to be a positive influence on the evolution of participatory democracy, decentralisation and devolution.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1. Year by year details of establishment of Community Forests (as at December 2009)

Year	No of CFs handed over	Area of CFs handed over (ha)	No of HHs involved in CFMGs
Until 2001	3	1,546	530
2002	5	228	116
2003	7	1,052	413
2004	9	1,020	475
2005	7	1,411	709
2006	7	509	277
2007	19	2,089	845
2008	61	8,334	2,965
2009	82	8,808	3,433
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>24,997</b>	<b>9,763</b>

### Annex 2. Geographic spread of Community Forests by Dzongkhag (as at December 2009)

Dzongkhag		Total no of CFs	No of Households	Area (ha)		
				Timber	NWFP	Total
		#	#	ha	ha	ha
1	<i>Bumthang</i>	6	169	408	0	408
2	<i>Chhukha</i>	9	347	741	0	741
3	<i>Dagana</i>	2	84	222	0	222
4	<i>Haa</i>	7	217	559	0	559
5	<i>Gasa</i>	3	86	229	0	229
6	<i>Lhuentse</i>	13	359	654	18	672
7	<i>Mongar</i>	8	659	582	1,909	2,491

8	<i>Paro</i>	8	448	1,304	0	1,304
9	<i>Pema Gatshel</i>	8	508	396	299	695
10	<i>Punakha</i>	18	572	1,032	0	1,032
11	<i>Samdrupjonkhar</i>	6	674	447	1,455	1,902
12	<i>Samtse</i>	13	471	834	0	834
13	<i>Sarpang</i>	16	628	1,484	30	1,514
14	<i>Thimphu</i>	8	292	520	858	1,377
15	<i>Trashigang</i>	28	1,654	4,760	317	5,077
16	<i>Trashiyangtse</i>	11	477	486	541	1,027
17	<i>Trongsa</i>	6	390	1,110	599	1,709
18	<i>Tsirang</i>	13	1,010	1,516	0	1,516
19	<i>Wangduephodrang</i>	8	259	577	0	577
20	<i>Zhemgang</i>	9	459	436	674	1,111
	<b>Total Bhutan</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>9,763</b>	<b>18,297</b>	<b>6,700</b>	<b>24,997</b>

### Annex 3. Prioritised issues for inclusion in Community Forestry strategy

(Numbers indicate votes from workshop participants denoting relative importance)

Policy	Institutional	Technical
Lift area limitations and make them more flexible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use natural boundaries</li> <li>• Respect traditional practices</li> <li>• Situation-based</li> <li>• Management capacity</li> <li>• Area should be large enough to generate income</li> </ul>	CF application process is too long. Propose: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint inspection of CF site by DzFO and DFO/Park</li> <li>• CFMP approval authority could be devolved to field level</li> </ul>	Build capacity at all levels
<b>20</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>

Reduce minimum number of HH for a CFMG from 10 to 3 <b>8</b>	Provide more equipment at Dz and geog levels (computers, etc.) <b>9</b>	Simplify the CFMP process and develop a simple template <b>8</b>
Enable CFMGs to manage all forest resources (including sand, boulders and water) <b>8</b>	Strengthen coordination between Dz Forestry Park management and Divisional forestry <b>3</b>	Resource assessment is too complex and not correct. AAC/AHL should be revised <b>5</b>
CFs should be encouraged in protected areas <b>8</b>	Strengthen geog centres (staff, training, equipment) <b>3</b>	Simplify the CF manuals <b>4</b>
Apply good science to support all aspects of CF planning and implementation <b>4</b>	Responsibility for tree marking should rest with GFEO, registered by DFO/PM <b>2</b>	Support the use of GIS mapping (establish a GIS unit in SFD) <b>1</b>
Include plantations created by Dept in CF <b>4</b>	Support fire fighting protection activities <b>2</b>	Revise old MPs to bring them into line with contemporary policy settings <b>1</b>
Develop marketing strategies for forest products from CFs <b>2</b>		
Pursue opportunities for carbon trading and ecotourism <b>1</b>		
Allow multiple CFs per community		

**Participants of the first National Community Forestry Workshop held on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2009 in Thimphu.**



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## **National Strategy for Community Forestry**

Today, Community Forestry is a key component of Bhutan's forest policy. It has become an institutionalised part of the system for the sustainable management of Bhutan's rich and diverse forest resources. This strategy charts the way ahead to ensure that Community Forestry contributes to Bhutan's overall social and environmental development goals and to local democratisation, and thus guides the future implementation of the Community Forestry programme.

The strategy comprises ten strategies that collectively contribute to achieving the Community Forestry development goal. The strategy was developed based on a thorough analysis of the experience gained with Community Forestry so far and on the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan's overarching goal of poverty reduction. A key step in the formulation process was the National Community Forestry Workshop held in Thimphu in April 2009 during which the participants identified critical policy, institutional and technical issues that currently inhibit the implementation and expansion of Community Forestry and subsequently considered a series of strategies to address these issues.

Community Forestry is a practical example of democratisation in action, and it has the potential to have a much wider impact beyond the forestry sector. By providing an example of good governance, it can positively influence the evolution of participatory democracy, decentralisation and devolution.



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