

Community forestry establishment in the central dry zone of Myanmar

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Abstract: After 10 years of development and implementation of Community Forestry Instructions (CFI) in Myanmar, the time has come to analyze and evaluate the opportunities and challenges of existing community forests with specific regard to making different modifications and amendments, adjusted to the different agro-ecological regions of Myanmar. This would help to enlist enthusiastic participation by local people and to achieve better and sustainable outcomes from future community forests. This paper is focused only on evaluation and assessment of existing dry zone community forests. A field survey (Questionnaire survey and interview) was carried out in three different community forests of Chaung U, Kyaukpadaung and Magwe townships in 2005 where the earliest community forests of the dry zone have been established under the UNDP financed multi-sectoral projects during the period 1994 – 2001. The current situation of Community Forest (CF) development in the dry zone and its future trend have been discussed. Finally, necessary modifications and amendments in Community Forest Instructions (CFI) for specific agro-ecological regions of the central dry zone of Myanmar are proposed.

Keywords: Community forestry establishment, Myanmar

Introduction

The project focused on evaluation and assessments of existing dry zone community forests with particular regard for opportunities and challenges for initial establishment, follow-up of community forest management plans in the long-term, and sustainable utilization and benefit sharing among user group members. The main purpose of the project was achieving rural social economic developments in the dry zone of Myanmar through community led, low-input and sustainable community forests. Specific objectives are as follows:

- Assessing the process of CF establishment in three representative townships of the dry zone
- Examining the formulation process of CF management plans and its implementation in the long-term
- Evaluating the actual benefits received by user group members from these CFs and their effectiveness for each member household
- Contributing proposals for modifications and amendments for successful and sustainable CF establishment in the central dry zone of Myanmar

Main Findings of the Study and Policy Implications

According to the field survey responses, all these CFs were established with the full support of the Forest Department and UNDP. They received training, seedlings, rice and wages for CF operations. Twenty out of thirty respondents said that establishing a CF in their village was impossible without getting other external supports (except for seedlings and techniques/training). In order to achieve a successful CF in the dry zone villages, the major requirements were wages for digging and refilling as the soil is very hard and sunny in that area, suitable and workable land, tree planting techniques, and watering during the drought period.

In all three selected CFs, formulation of the CF management plan was largely dominated by outsiders, i.e. FD and UNDP staff. Most user group members do not know exactly who in the village has been keeping the management plan recently. It is also clear that follow-up and practice of the management plan after the project period are very inadequate. In reality existing village councils are those who take

care of the CFs in all three villages rather than the CF management committee. Major barriers to follow up the management plan are lack of understanding and lack of interest as it is unusual work for villagers. "In organizing the village CF management committee and in formulating the CF management plan, the role of extension staff (local forest ranger or deputy ranger) is very important".

Existence of Community Forestry Instructions (CFI) is far better however than 'no CFI' at all. But modifications and amendments of existing CFIs are urgently required. In addition specific regulations and detailed instructions for implementation of CFI are also necessary for specific regions. Through these modifications, amendments and regulations, local communities may have opportunities to implement CFI more flexibly to adjust them to their local conditions. This would lead to a breakthrough from existing Step 1 to the more advanced Steps 2 and 3 of CF establishment in the shortest possible time (see Figure below).

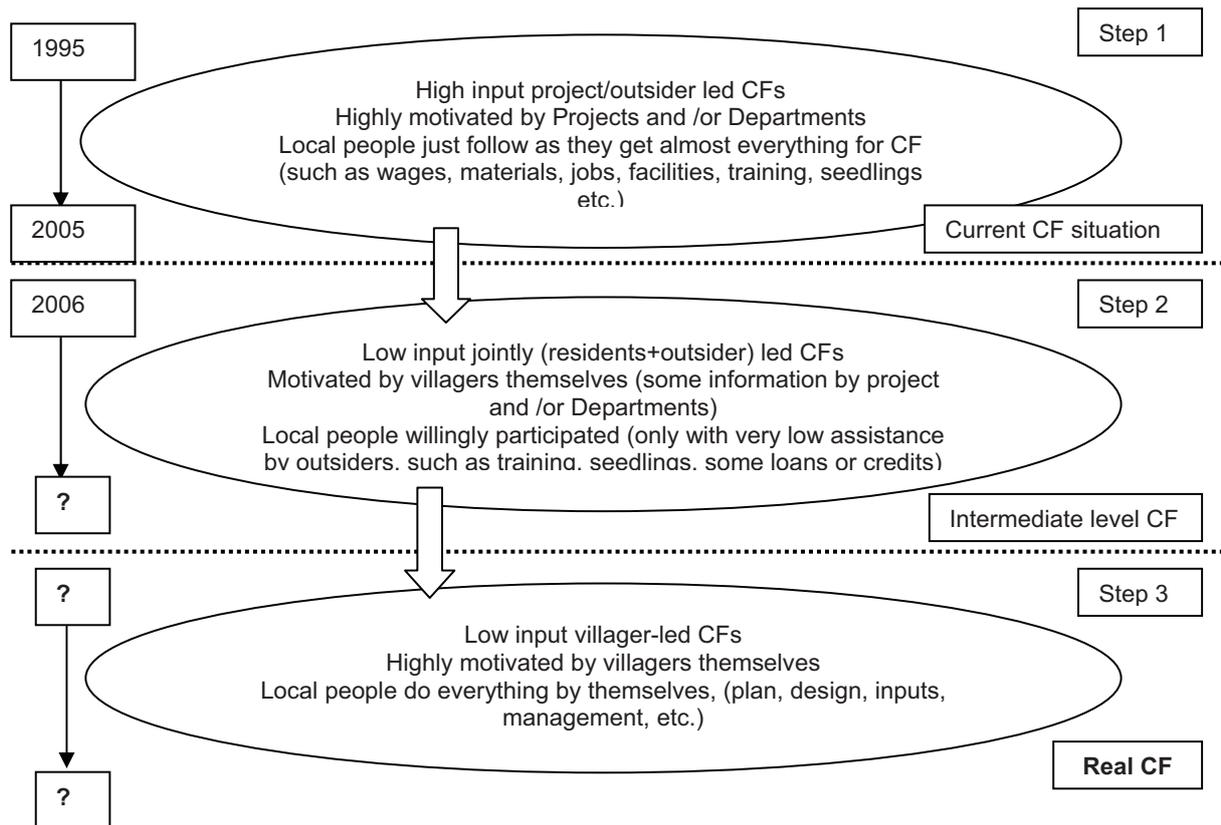


Figure. Steps to be changed in Community Forestry Development in Myanmar

Community Forestry Instructions should be upgraded as Community Forestry Rules (CFR) under Forest Law or as a separate Community Forestry Law (CFL). This is the only way to guarantee the permanency and security of community rights over CF areas. As a consequence one could expect greater interest and trust from local communities for CF activities. The CF management plan should reflect the real capacity, management skills and indigenous techniques of the community. It should not be ready-made or imposed by outsiders. Outsiders should just help the community to work out their own practical and efficient management system, rather than teaching or imposing on them very formal and theoretical forest management techniques.

More research is still needed to obtain a comprehensive and detailed regulation or guidebook for dry zone CFs. Further research should aim at including more districts and townships of the dry zone, each of which has its unique environmental, social and economic situations. In addition, further studies should try to cover technical, educational and other aspects that can influence CF development in the dry zone of Myanmar.