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Expanding the Impacts of Social Forestry Programs in Developing Countries

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The Importance of Social Forestry

Most rural people in developing countries rely on trees for fuel, building materials, food, fodder, and medicines for their own use and for sale. Traditional systems to manage forest resources can be effective.

sources of forest products. Social forestry¹ (see box) programs significantly contribute to helping rural people meet these needs.

Some programs have been particularly effective. They have helped people improve the availability, quality, and use of resources. Unfortunately, these successful efforts normally reach only a small portion of those in need.

In this policy brief, we examine the issues and look at policies affecting the expansion of social forestry program impacts. We also discuss how to assess expansion strategies.²

conditions. Their flexibility and adaptability promote innovation and creative problem solving. And their organizational autonomy and relative independence lets them be more accountable to the community.

Social forestry can improve the use of existing resources.



Social forestry means that rural people and community groups control local tree and forest resources. People use tree- or forest-related activities to provide products for their own use or to generate income.

However, increasing populations, growing external demand for wood, and changing land tenure systems can severely inhibit these traditional management systems. As a result, many millions of people face a declining forest resource base, a critical scarcity of forest products, and intensified rural poverty.

Limited Program Impacts

Because social forestry involves decentralized activity at the community and farm level, small local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) often carry out these programs most effectively. They usually have extensive long-term experience in the community, using local personnel.

To reverse these trends, rural dwellers need better ways to manage existing tree resources and to create new

Community organizations have credibility in the area and in-depth knowledge and understanding of neighborhood

While local organizations can successfully implement community programs, these activities seldom contribute significantly to regional or national development needs.

Reasons for lack of large-scale success are their:

- dispersed and isolated nature,
- limited resources and organizational capacity,
- restricted scale of operations because of geography and programs, and
- lack of comprehensive programs.

Even the combined impacts of many independent small-scale programs usually do not have large-scale impacts.

Social forestry programs need the positive attributes of large and small organizations.

Enlarging the size or operational scale of local organizations is one option to expand program impacts.

Large organizations have several advantages over small organizations. They include a wider resource base, greater organizational capacity and depth, and an ability to operate large-scale projects. In addition, they can capture significant economies of scale.

Yet, large centralized organizations often have complex hierarchies that prevent efficient flow of information and resources. They often adopt top-down decision-making strategies that directly conflict with local authorities and power structures. They usually do not incorporate the advantages of small-scale organizations.

In many cases, large centralized organizations design standard programs that discourage local participation and are insensitive to local needs and conditions. Thus, programs often do not fit a community's unique context. Not surprisingly, large-scale, centrally-run and dominated social forestry programs often do poorly at the local level. Both small- and large-scale programs have weaknesses and strengths.

Thus, to achieve large-scale impacts while being responsive and effective at the local level, social forestry programs need to combine the positive attributes of both large and small organizations.

The Challenge of Expanding Program Impacts

The challenge is "...to multiply what are in many cases relatively small-scale initiatives...into larger-scale rural forestry programs that will penetrate throughout the rural areas as quickly as possible."⁴

Given the effectiveness of small programs, we need to ask, "How large can small become?"⁵ That is, at what size or operational scale do small organizations lose their advantages of smallness? How do we apply lessons

learned from both small- and large-scale successes to large-scale programs?

Linking Macro and Micro Approaches to Expand Impacts

To expand program impacts, we must deal effectively with the dilemma of organizational size and scale to meet local needs. "Even the largest development program must be broken down to the size of the farm, the city block, or the school, and be seen in terms of the ultimate beneficiary. Macro and micro approaches are complementary."⁶

Organizational size and scale must meet local needs.

Successful large-scale social forestry programs in Haiti, Bangladesh, and Korea operated on a local level but within a national structural and policy framework. These programs showed that the combined impacts of small-scale local successes resulted in large-scale impacts⁷ (see box 1).

Box 1. Village Forestry Development in the Republic of Korea

The Republic of Korea's social forestry program, implemented in the 1960s and 1970s, partly owes its success to strong linkages between community NGOs and Korea's national legal, policy, and management framework. Korea built this cooperative interorganizational arrangement on the long tradition of village cooperation and organization. They blended top-down and bottom-up planning and capitalized on the advantages of both small-scale NGOs and regional and national government agencies. They planted and managed hundreds of millions of trees, resulting in positive large-scale ecological, economic, and social impacts.³

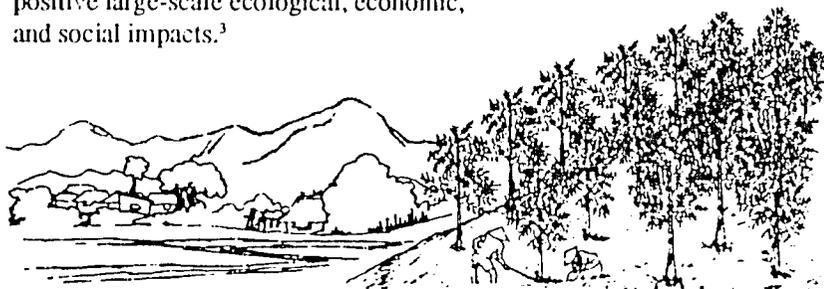
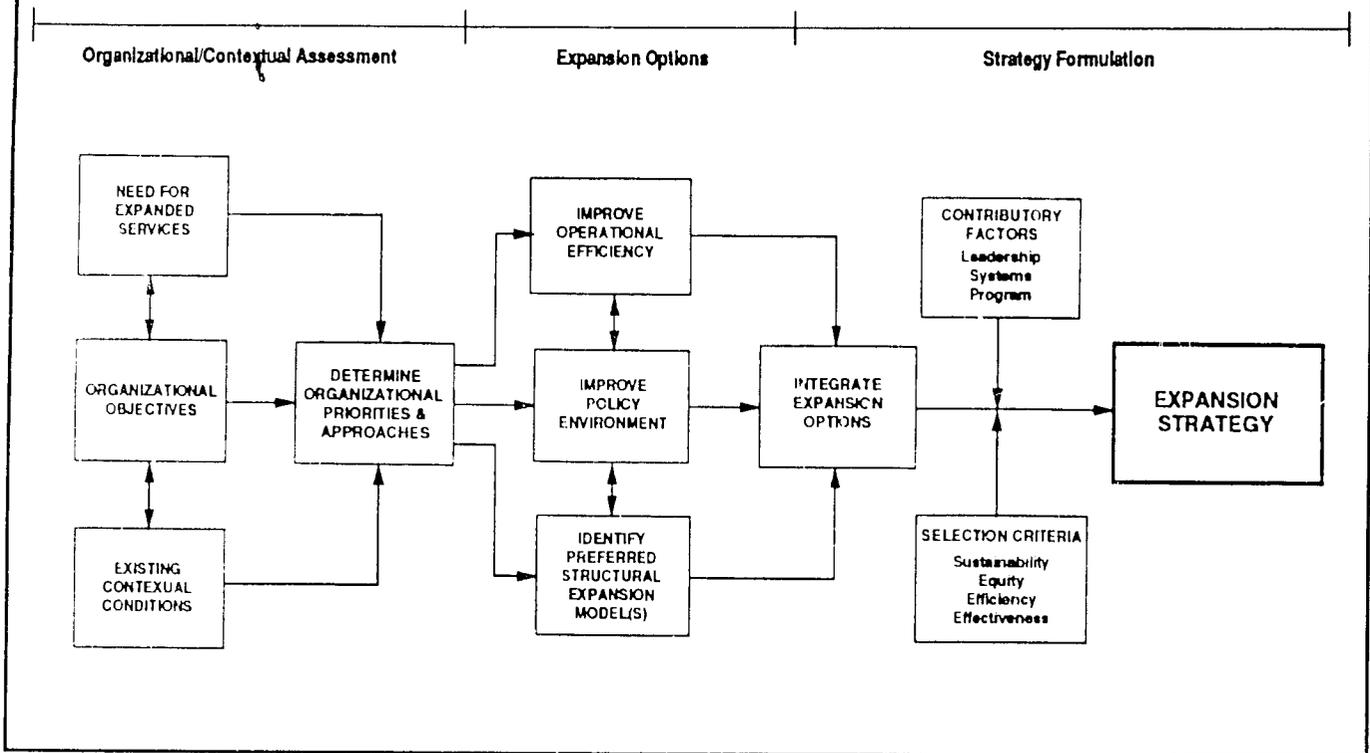


Figure 1. Expanding Social Forestry Program Impacts: A Strategy Development Model



Program designs need to capitalize on the organizational advantages of both large and small organizations, stressing the advantages of organizational size and scale and minimizing the disadvantages.

Effective linkages can ease and stimulate program impacts.

Development efforts must have effective linkages between the macro and the micro, between major donor agencies, and between organizations implementing local programs.⁸

Effective linkages and a positive institutional environment can ease and stimulate expanded impacts of social forestry programs.

Guiding the Expansion Process

Figure 1 provides an overview of a process for assessing the elements to consider in impact expansion. The framework considers:

- the organization's objectives,
- relevant policies and contextual factors affecting expansion,
- options for expansion, and
- other important factors that help develop expansion strategies.

What are the organization's objectives? As a first step, we need to carefully assess the organization's objectives. Do its mission and mandates limit or encourage expansion? Does the organization really want to expand its program impacts?⁹

What conditions are affecting the current situation? We need to understand the extent of unmet needs and opportunities for social forestry. We

need to determine how local contextual conditions favor or constrain particular expansion approaches.

For instance, many capable rural NGOs may exist. As part of a large-scale multiorganizational arrangement (an umbrella NGO approach), we can ask these groups to carry out new programs in their communities. Or there may be few NGOs, requiring other approaches.

Rural NGOs could implement new programs in their communities.

We can determine priorities and general expansion approaches by analyzing the organization's objectives, the need for additional services, and the operational context.

How can program impacts expand?

See box 2 for specific ways to expand impacts. One option is to improve the efficiency of existing program services. We also could encourage a positive policy environment that removes expansion obstacles.

Or, we can choose a structural approach (box 2, numbers 3 to 7) that fits existing contextual conditions. This approach should emphasize the comparative advantages of both small and large organizations and avoid the disadvantages of each. Based on the organization's priorities and the operational context, it can use a combination of these approaches.

Leadership and organization affect success.

How do other factors affect an expansion strategy? Factors such as leadership, internal organizational systems, and program may affect the relevance and effectiveness of an approach.

For instance, competent leaders may be scarce, limiting immediate expansion possibilities. Organizational capacities may be inadequate to handle increased administrative and managerial workloads. Or we may need to modify the program itself to operate on a larger scale.

Local activities must complement development programs.

We also need to carefully review issues related to the sustainability, equity, and efficiency of the strategy. Consider all

Box 2. Ways to Expand Program Impacts

There are at least eight ways to expand the impacts of social forestry programs to provide services over broader geographic areas to greater numbers of people.

1. Increase the efficiency and/or relevance of current programs to improve program effectiveness and diffusion.
2. Pressure for local, regional, or national policy reform to strengthen policies that encourage expansion of impacts on existing programs.
3. "Scale up" or internally "grow" an existing organization by adding staff, resources, and infrastructure.
4. Link organizations using multi- or inter-organizational arrangements (networks, umbrella structures, franchise approaches).
5. Replicate the program through other existing organizations or individuals. A central group can plan or direct the replication or it can spontaneously diffuse from one existing organization to another without central control or direction.
6. Multiply the project's design or interventions in new areas by newly-formed organizations. A central group that facilitates the development of new community organizations usually controls and directs multiplication. These new organizations then implement the social forestry program in their own communities.
7. Decentralize authority and functions to local autonomous or semi-autonomous organizational units. This will enable local decisionmakers to make more appropriate, equitable, and effective decisions and program designs.
8. Centralize authority and planning through vertical integration and consolidation to implement programs on a large scale.

these factors before designing an overall expansion approach.

Policy Needs

To expand impacts successfully, policy and financial environments must encourage local activities to complement and add to official development programs.¹⁰

Expansion strategies should use the best features of small-scale, community-

based organizations and larger more-centralized organizations.

For a strategy to meet both local and national needs, public policy should help:

- support and strengthen local organizations,
- create linkages, and
- identify and implement new institutional arrangements.

Developing and Strengthening Local Organizations

Policies need to ensure access to necessary infrastructure and resources, including training, research, and credit. These resources enhance institutional capacity and help leverage national, multinational, and private-sector support.

Policies must support research, training, and credit.

It is important to identify critical bottlenecks that inhibit impact expansion and to design policies to remove them. An appropriate policy environment also will allow local organizations to innovate and serve as "social laboratories" to test, refine, and ultimately transfer positive ideas.¹¹

Creating Linkages

To expand program impacts, experience shows that it is vital to create and maintain strong horizontal linkages among local community groups. Vertical linkages within regional or national organizations, networks, or government, are also essential.

Policies can help link organizations and enhance the diffusion of ideas and innovations.

Such linkages help integrate bottom-up and top-down planning, policy setting, decision-making, and management (see box 1 on page 2). They can improve operational efficiency and program effectiveness.¹²

Linkages also help coordinate local activities so they directly complement and support national development programs.¹³

Policies that help link local organizations can enhance cooperation, communication, and the sharing and diffusion of ideas and innovations. They promote large-scale replication of key features of successful programs.

Identifying and Implementing New Institutional Arrangements

With strengthened local organizational capacity and more effective linkages, it may become possible and appropriate to transfer some governmental field functions, authority, and resources to local groups.



This can occur through informal channels or regulatory mechanisms that formally transfer responsibilities. However, governments should not give up responsibilities that are best retained by the state. Nor should they use NGOs mainly as instruments of the state.

Policies also should encourage new institutional arrangements that capitalize on advantages of both small and large organizations. Such arrangements (umbrella structures, NGO-government linkages, networks, coalitions) link large and small organizations and enable them to implement programs jointly on a large scale.

Finally, policies need to ensure that local decisionmaking is compatible within the existing national policy

framework. This will assure that all are working together toward common goals.

Local policies must work with national policies.

Notes

1. Gregersen, Hans M., S. Draper, and D. Elz. 1989. *People and Trees: The Role of Social Forestry in Sustainable Development*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
2. EPAT/MUCIA currently is conducting research that will identify and synthesize contextual factors that facilitate or inhibit the expansion of social forestry program impacts. The research will also show how these factors affect the selection and performance of organizational strategies. It will provide conceptual and planning tools to evaluate the organizational environment and to design expansion strategies for particular contextual conditions.
3. See Gregersen, Hans M. 1982. *Village Forestry Development in the Republic of Korea: A Case Study*. Forestry for Local Community Development Programme GCP/INT/347/SWE. Rome, Italy: Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).
4. Spears, J. 1984. *Review of World Bank Financed Forestry Activity, FY 1984*. Washington DC: The World Bank.
5. Annis, S. 1988. "Can Small-scale Development be Large-scale Policy?" In S. Annis and P. Hakim, eds., *Direct to the Poor: Grassroots Development in Latin America*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publications.

POLICY BRIEF

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6. Masoni, V. 1985. "Nongovernmental Organizations and Development." *Finance and Development* 22:38-41.

7. Examples of successfully expanded large-scale social forestry or rural development programs are described in:

Lovell, C. H. 1992. *Breaking the Cycle of Poverty: The BRAC Strategy*. West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press.

Josiah, S. J. (in press) "Implementing Large-scale Agroforestry Projects through Umbrella NGOs: A Case Analysis from Haiti." In *Proceedings of the Third North American Agroforestry Conference*, August 15-18, 1993. Ames, Iowa.

Gregersen, Hans M. 1982. In the work cited.

8. Annis, S. 1987. "The Next World Bank?: Financing Development from the Bottom Up." *Grassroots Development* 11(1):24-29.

9. It is important to recognize that the expansion of program impacts may or may not include expansion or growth of the organization itself.

10. Masoni, V. 1985. "Nongovernmental Organizations and Development." *Finance and Development* 22:38-41.

11. Reilly, C. A. 1993. "The Road from Rio: NGO Policymakers and the Social Ecology of Development." *Grassroots Development* 17(1):25-35.

12. Annis, S. 1987. In the work cited.

13. Masoni, V. 1985. In the work cited.

Message from USAID

This *Policy Brief* is a product of the Environmental and Natural Resources Policy and Training (EPAT) Project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It is part of USAID's effort to provide environmental policy information to decisionmakers and practitioners in developing countries. The objective is to encourage the adoption of economic policies to promote sustainable use of natural resources and to enhance environmental quality.

EPAT *Policy Briefs* are written for development professionals and policymakers in developing countries who are responsible for establishing and implementing policies on the sustainable use of natural resources and for civil servants, project officers, and researchers who are directly involved in the implementation of development activities. This *Policy Brief* reviews issues related to increasing the effectiveness of social forestry programs in developing countries. Since growing rural populations in those areas rely heavily on forest products for their livelihood, development professionals working with social forestry programs need more information on improving program effectiveness.

Several organizations have supported this work. The contribution of USAID toward writing, printing, and distributing this document is estimated to be \$11,000. The document is being distributed to more than 2,000 policymakers and professionals in developing countries. We will assess its effectiveness by soliciting the views of recipients and enclose an evaluation sheet with each mailing of EPAT publications for that purpose.

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