

PN-ACA-793

**What Makes for Success?:
NGO Community Forestry Workshop Report**

World Resources Institute, Local Development
Institute, and Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United Nations

Center for International Development and Environment
World Resources Institute
1709 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20006

1991

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This discussion paper is prepared by Center staff and collaborators. WRI takes responsibility for choosing the topic and guaranteeing authors and researchers freedom of inquiry. Unless otherwise stated, all the interpretations and findings are those of the authors.

**"Community Forestry, NGOs, and Policy: What Makes for Success?"
Bangkok, Thailand
June 1991**

I. OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

The workshop was convened by the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok (RAPA), the Local Development Institute, FAO's Forestry Planning and Institutions Service and the World Resources Institute at FAO/RAPA headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand. The goal of the workshop was to generate greater understanding about current experiences, constraints, and opportunities in community-based forest management initiatives and the ways in which these are integrated into government policies. The workshop also provided an opportunity for participants to voice their strongly-held opinions and perceptions of forestry and development issues, particularly development assistance.

Specifically, the workshop sought to obtain a better understanding of how community forestry works at the local level: the obstacles encountered, the solutions proposed, and the implications for policy. The solutions were examined at each level of impact -- from the community-level through various levels of government. The workshop also explored how participating nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in different countries can learn from one another by comparing and contrasting their respective approaches to community forestry.

II. WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Participants included 20 national representatives from China, Fiji, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand, representing a cross-section of NGOs engaged in field-based community forestry initiatives as well as policy advocacy. All of these participants were senior staff of their respective NGOs, and represented an impressive "who's who" list of community forestry leaders among popular movements in various Asian countries.

In addition, another 20 participants attended as "observers" from Thai government agencies, FAO/RAPA field staff, private foundations and the international development assistance community. However, as the workshop evolved, all became active participants. (See participants list, Appendix 1.)

III. WORKSHOP FORMAT

The workshop was held over a four-day period, with a fifth day as an optional field trip to visit Thai forestry projects (see Appendix 2 for full agenda).

Given the wealth of experience and expertise of participants, the workshop focussed on group discussions rather than the presentation of formal papers. The dynamics of the workshop centered around working group meetings, interactive discussion, and plenary sessions. Three working groups, each comprised of participants and observers, discussed specific topics, and later reported back to the plenary sessions where summaries were made. Each working group appointed a chair and a rapporteur, with staff from the organizers acting as facilitators. Dr. Sanheh Chamarik (LDI) chaired the plenary discussions, which were facilitated Dr. Y.S. Rao (FAO/RAPA) and Bruce Cabarle (WRI).

The workshop consisted of four sessions, which addressed the following major topics:

- (1) Defining community forestry and the key issues surrounding its practice;
- (2) NGOs' strengths and weaknesses, particularly as they relate to the major problems associated with community forestry projects;
- (3) The role of government agencies, policies and practice in supporting/hindering community forestry projects; and,
- (4) The role of international organizations (both transnational NGOs and development assistance agencies).

IV. SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

1. Defining Community Forestry

Community forestry is a centuries-old concept. It has been practiced for millennia and predates the emergence of agricultural society. Swidden agriculture -- the practice of clearing small patches within forests for agriculture -- is perhaps the oldest form of community forestry in practice today. Community forestry now encompasses a wide range of activities, including using trees to improve agricultural productivity outside of the forest zone and conserving intact forest reserves by officially recognizing the customary laws, beliefs and lifestyles of forest-dependent peoples.

Community forestry is an integral part of the way in which many rural people meet their subsistence needs and improve their overall quality of life. While needs and aspirations often center around economic concerns, oftentimes they are also rooted in cultural, spiritual, moral and ethical concerns. Beyond providing for tangible and non-tangible needs, successful

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community forestry can also serve as a political tool to help secure access to, and control over, natural resources critical to local livelihoods. Community forestry can be considered most successful when individuals gain, especially the poorest among the poor (such as women and other powerless groups within rural communities).

Community forestry is primarily concerned with the human and socio-cultural aspects of "self-help" or "self-reliance" in development. Such initiatives demonstrate the capacity of local user groups to identify problems, propose solutions and participate on their own terms in collaboration with outside interests in the management of forest resources. Secured access to natural resources (soil and water, as well as trees) vital to local livelihoods, equity, and the achievement of social justice are also goals of community forestry.

In summary, with community forestry, the focus is on the process of involving user groups in forestry activities.

2. Key Issues

Four aspects of community forestry emerged from the workshop as being paramount, each being interdependent but having a specific agenda that must be taken into account in designing successful projects. These are:

- * Economic - Achieving self-sufficiency through utilization of forest products and generating additional income for local communities;
- * Environmental - Protecting, maintaining and conserving the ecological balance of local forest resources at all levels, from primary forests to degraded lands;
- * Socio-cultural - Respecting the cultural heritage of local peoples, especially indigeneous forest inhabitants;
- * Political - Providing means for local peoples to struggle against exploitation of local resources by "outsiders" and external domination.

Participants stressed that certain issues merit special attention when addressing these four aspects of community forestry, including:

- * The cultural heritage and traditional practices of local resource users, especially regarding how these translate into customary laws and regulations governing the use of local resources, are fundamental considerations to be integrated into community forestry planning.
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- * Gender issues, particularly the role of women and children, must be considered in planning and implementing community forestry activities. This is especially important in areas where men migrate seasonally in search of wage labor and the brunt of local labor is borne by women and children.
- * Policies securing local tenure and access rights are fundamental to the success of community forestry yet most legislation expropriates resources from local communities, vesting exclusive rights to centralized governments, and is counterproductive to the goals and objectives of sustainable resource management.

3. The Role of NGOs: Strengths and Weaknesses

Nongovernmental organizations are tremendously diverse; the composition, approach and philosophy of local-level groups conducting field work are quite different from those of urban-based advocacy groups.

The workshop participants noted that grassroots NGOs can be effective proponents for community forestry and sustainable development at local levels. To further these goals, they must attempt to understand the cultural values of communities where programs are being implemented, by working with and for those communities. Accordingly, the participants asserted that the value of NGO actions, especially at the grassroots level, should ultimately be determined by the community itself, not by any outside evaluator. NGOs which have demonstrated success in promoting community goals provide the most promising venue for governments and donors to work with local communities and to support community forestry projects.

NGOs bring special qualities to community forestry efforts. They also have inherent advantages over governments and development assistance agencies. Among the special qualities defined by the workshop participants are:

- * NGOs have fewer bureaucratic encumbrances, a more flexible, bottom-up approach to problem solving and are better at facilitating a "two-way" exchange of information. As a result, NGOs are often more "accountable" to local communities and thereby respond more readily to local needs.
- * NGOs tend to be more open and reflective. They are usually staffed by motivated individuals who have genuine commitment, many of whom have chosen to work in this field for reasons other than economic gain.
- * Field-based NGOs are better able to offer alternative solutions to local problems and to demonstrate their application on the ground.

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- * NGOs often can serve as negotiators between local communities and outside interests. In this capacity, they are well positioned to adapt and interpret information from outside interests and sources, and build the appropriate linkages between communities, governments, research centers and donor agencies to better meet local needs.
- * Collective NGO action has the potential to garner political clout and spearhead social movements which are essential to forging a shared consciousness for local communities and legitimizing their organizations as political actors.
- * NGOs play a critical role in mobilizing human resources and advocacy campaigns, and as "development watchdogs" and legal aid groups for local communities.

Workshop participants also noted that NGOs are faced with a variety of problems which inhibit them from realizing their potentials, including:

- * Lack of assured, long-term funding, material and human resources; uncertainty in any of these areas can seriously affect the effectiveness of NGO actions, especially when NGOs lack the technical expertise and skilled staff to oversee projects;
- * Uncoordinated, duplicated efforts among some NGOs;
- * Overstated achievements and a tendency among some NGOs to follow "bandwagon issues" and raise false expectations, which can lead to disillusionment by community-level groups which believe that local needs are not being addressed;
- * Resistance from powerful, vested interested groups, both inside and outside of local communities, that benefit from maintenance of the status quo;
- * Mutual mistrust between government agencies and NGOs, especially the fear of some government officials that NGOs are attempting to preempt government roles and, in some cases, foment revolution;
- * Cooption by dominant funding sources and restrictive governments.

Participants agreed that development assistance agencies can play an important role in overcoming these obstacles by providing funding to strengthen NGO institutional capacities (such as professional development), as well as programs which provide incentives to government agencies to work with NGOs and local communities as equal partners. Such arrangements can best be achieved through a process of direct negotiations between these

groups which respects the principles and needs of NGOs and local communities.

4. The Role of International Organizations

Several NGO participants were leery of international organizations such as the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and even WRI, because they believe these groups are biased in favor of governments. Past NGO experiences have often shown that international organizations do not always have rural communities' best interests in mind. In order for international organizations to improve their present relationships with NGOs, as well as build stronger collaborative working relationships with them, it is necessary to improve communication between these two groups. Numerous problems inherent in the development assistance paradigm were identified by the participants, including concerns that:

- * Developing world institutions have often been created and are propped up as "tools of the West" in order to exploit resources in a way which helps maintain comfortable, western lifestyles;
- * The international assistance arena is largely a profit-making venture, as the majority of funds allocated return to the country of origin through lucrative contracts to development agencies and consultants;
- * NGOs, if included in development projects, are often treated largely as potential contractors (replacing government agencies or international consultants);
- * Money and donors dominate the process rather than follow it, and are unable to readily adapt to changing needs at the local level;
- * The development process is project-driven, and rewards the creation of "white elephants," with constant personnel changes and lack of local accountability often contributing to irreversible development project failures; and
- * Those who provide the money are not necessarily accountable to the intended beneficiaries.

The NGO participants also expressed their concern that, because donor agencies provide funds and drive development assistance, these agencies often feel they can dictate how NGOs should address specific problems or carry out tasks. To be most effective, NGOs require freedom to determine their own priorities based on local needs, and to decide how to best achieve their goals. Workshop participants stressed that conditionality should not accompany financial support. Several NGOs called for "voice

and vote" representation within international agencies to assist with establishing guidelines for funding sources (what is and is not morally acceptance money), legislation, agenda setting and establishing funding priorities. Participants put forth the following recommendations to reform the development assistance process:

- * NGOs should be included in all phases of a project cycle, as well as in official policy dialogues.
- * Development assistance agencies should tap local resources and knowledge, often available through NGOs, and reduce their dependency on outside international aid experts.
- * Development assistance agencies should make provisions to communicate in local languages, ensuring that all pertinent information is made readily available to concerned NGOs and affected local communities, and that local concerns are considered before any project designs are finalized.

Workshop participants concluded that international NGOs, and bilateral and multilateral development assistance agencies should recognize national and local NGOs as equal partners in the development process. This requires changes within donor agencies' staffing, priorities, project cycles and procedures before the development process can be reformed overseas.

V. CONCLUSIONS: WHAT MAKES FOR SUCCESS

An important issue discussed throughout the workshop was how to ensure the success of community forestry programs, taking into account the limits of different groups of people, whether they are "insiders" (i.e., local communities, forest dwellers, etc.) or "outsiders" (NGOs, international organizations, donors, governments, etc.) involved in forestry programs.

Local peoples and their tenurial rights provoked significant debate and were of special concern. The general consensus was that local peoples must have a say in all phases of community forestry programs; leadership and initiative must emerge from within, and are the best guarantees for success; and, outsiders should be catalysts, supporters, and motivators, and should not drive or dominate forestry development processes in inhabited areas.

Several participants emphasized that national development policies that place too heavy an emphasis on economic growth and rampant consumerism do not bode well for successful community forestry programs. They questioned community forestry's value as a development model in a "throwaway" society. It was concluded that it will be impossible to achieve local sustainability if the global community continues to consume forest resources at an

unsustainable rate.

The essential elements for cultivating and sustaining successful community forestry initiatives that were brought forth at the workshop can be summarized as follows:

- * Government agencies and NGOs must act in cooperation to support local development processes. Antagonisms between governments and NGOs must be eliminated.
- * NGO responsiveness to local needs and priorities is a function of community participation. Outsiders should act as catalysts, and their support should serve to strengthen local institutions and to forge linkages with outside stakeholders.
- * The use of outside expertise and technology may be valid, however, it should be provided in an appropriate manner, building upon local knowledge to produce a workable "hybrid" solution.
- * Community forestry programs will be most successful if they meet peoples' needs based on locally-established priorities. It may be better to help communities secure basic health, transportation and education services before promoting community forestry programs. A general needs assessment should be conducted to determine these needs and priorities in advance of launching local initiatives by outside interests.
- * Understanding and awareness of the community's cultural, moral, ethical and spiritual values are essential to determining needs and priorities, and to gaining the local confidence and trust that is essential to mobilizing people to address these needs and priorities.
- * Community forestry programs will only be successful if they work toward the control and management of resources by and for the benefit of local peoples.
- * Community forestry programs should serve to legitimize and strengthen local institutions and NGOs, as well as promote self-reliance.
- * Community forestry should be approached as one element of an integrated development model for rural communities that can contribute to meeting subsistence needs, employment and income generation. Community forestry alone cannot provide for all of the development needs of a community.
- * A system of local control, with the appropriate social checks and balances to ensure accountability and adherence

to local customs, laws and norms is required. The equitable sharing of project benefits is also crucial to this process (and to project sustainability).

- * Proper incentives need to be implemented, especially those which provide protection against disaster; promote concern for future generations; guarantee tenurial rights in the short- and the long-term; and, provide access to necessary resources and inputs (material as well as technical assistance). These incentives would include, for example, crop insurance for small farmers using indigenous technologies (such insurance is usually reserved for larger farmers using green technology) and credit assistance.

Ultimately, the success of community forestry programs should be determined by community-initiated assessments and not by outside evaluations (by either governments, donors or NGOs).

VI. FINAL REFLECTIONS

The participants provided positive feedback on the opportunity to exchange information and learn about the experiences of NGOs in different countries to various problems, such as the temperate highland experience of the Nepalese, the degraded land social forestry programs of the Indians, and the forest dweller experiences of the Filipinos and Fijians. The working group format proved to be the most useful vehicle for such exchanges, and was, in fact, the aspect of the workshop rated highest by the participants.

Several NGO participants appreciated the combination of advocacy and field-based organizations that the workshop brought together. Advocacy NGOs benefited from learning more about the "field lessons" of community forestry, including their implications for advocacy strategies designed to influence government agencies and policies. Both field-based NGOs and advocacy groups agreed that insight was also gained into how they can collaborate more effectively and influence government actions to support successful community initiatives.

The participants declined to produce a common NGO policy statement which summarized any collective point of view. The various reasons for this included: (1) the wide diversity of countries and political and cultural realities represented among the participants; (2) the difficulty in reaching a consensus on the definition of community forestry, given each country's contrasting environmental and political conditions; and, (3) the workshop would have required a different structure, allowing for drafting committees to hammer out collective statements in advance of the meeting's conclusion. To have done so, however, would have detracted from the fruitful exchanges cultivated in the working group sections.

From WRI's perspective, we believe that this workshop served an important purpose in providing a venue in which these diverse NGOs could share their experiences and express their opinions. Hearing directly the strongly-held, and often vehement, feelings of these NGOs serves to strengthen our commitment to addressing these issues, and will prompt us to be more sensitive in our own work with nongovernmental and grassroots organizations, as well as to raise these issues with governments. The workshop also introduced WRI to additional NGOs; with which we plan to collaborate when undertaking future activities in their countries.

In addition, we will help publish and distribute the workshop proceedings to NGOs and government officials working on community-based management and forest resource issues.

Finally, we feel it is important for the development assistance community to understand the strength of the viewpoints of nongovernmental organizations and other groups representing local communities. This understanding of the needs and concerns of NGOs can help agencies more effectively administer development assistance and accomplish their overall objectives.

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FINANCIAL REPORT TO
USDA FOREST SERVICE

COMMUNITY FORESTRY IN ASIA WORKSHOP

October 1, 1990 through September 31, 1991

1.	Staff Salaries	\$ 2,734
2.	Benefits (27% of salaries)	738
3.	Research Agreements	2,468
4.	Staff Travel	5,583
5.	Subgrants (Local Development Institute, Thailand)	30,000
6.	Other Project Costs ¹ (22% of 1-4)	2,535
7.	General and Administrative Costs ² (18% of 1-6)	7,930
	Total	<u>\$ 51,988</u>

¹Includes rent, reproduction, supplies, telephone, postage, equipment, etc.

²Includes business management and accounting, excluding fund raising costs.

APPENDIX 1

Workshop Participants List

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Key Note Speaker

Mr. A.Z.M. Obaidullah Khan
Assistant Director General &
Regional Representative for Asia
and the Pacific
FAO Regional Office for Asia and the
Pacific (RAPA)
Phra Atit Road
Bangkok 10200
Thailand
Tel: 281-7844
Fax: 662-2800445
Tlx: 82815 FOODAG TH

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Dr. Reungchai Pousujja
The Tree Farmers Association of Thailand
46/9 Sukumvit Road
Tumbol Samat Ampure Muang Junvat
Sulburee
Thailand
Tel: 552-5121
Fax: 552-5121

Mr. Sanan Pengmuan
Coordinator
Roi-Et Community Forestry Project
136 Moo 7 Thumbol Kasetwisai
Kasetwisai District
Roi-Et Province
Thailand
Tel: 043-511500 Ext 127

Miss Jintana Amornsanguansin
Professional Forest Official
Royal Forest Department (RFD)
Paholyothin Road
Bangkhen
Bangkok 10900
Thailand
Tel: 579-5416
Fax: 579-5416

Mr. Vitoon Viriyasakultorn
Researcher
Social Research Institute (CUSRI)
Chulalongkorn University
1 Phayathai Road
Bangkok 10500
Thailand
Tel: 214-5315

Mr. Decha Tangseefa
Local Development Institute
c/o Temporary Office:
Department of Medical Science
2nd Building
693 Bumrungmuang Road
Pomprab District
Bangkok 10100
Thailand
Tel: (02)223-6713, 225-7293
Fax: 226-4718

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Observers

Mr. William Helin
Food Aid and Voluntary Assistance
Coordinator
USDA Forest Service (IF)
Forestry Support Program
Auditor's Building, 1SE Wing
P.O. Box 96090
Washington, DC 20090-6090
USA
Tel: (202)453-9589
Fax: (202)447-3610, 453-3603
Tlx: 7401043 FSPW

Mr. Mark Poffenberger
Research Fellow
Department of Forestry
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94709
USA
Tel: 415-524-3084

Ms. Laurie Fretz
Environmental Consultant
389 Church St. 1105A
Toronto, Ontario
Canada H5B 2E5
Tel: (416)969-9637
Fax: 960-8053

Ms. Natasha Feder
Researcher
Ontario Environment Strategy Project
Conservation Council of Ontario
489 College St, Suite 506
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M6G 1A5
Tel: (416)969-9637
Fax: (416)960-8053

Mr. David Thomas
Assistant Representative
FORD Foundation
Central Chidlom Tower, 16/F
Ploenchit Road
Bangkok 10330
Thailand
Tel: 254-7172
Fax: 254-7174

Ms. Kusum Saigado
Coordinator, Sarvodaya Agriculture,
Forestry & Environment Program
Sarvodaya Women's Movement
32 Rawatawatte Road
Moratuwa
Tel: 01-507843
Fax: 94-1-507084
Tlx: 22837 SARVA CE

Thailand

Dr. Mongkol Dandhanin
Project Leader, Community Forestry
in the NE
Research and Development Institute
Khon Kaen University
Khon Kaen 40002
Tel: (043)238383

Mr. Srisuwan Kuankachorn
Coordinator
Project for Ecological Recovery
77/3 Soi Nomchit
Nares Road, Bangrak
Bangkok 10500
Tel: 236-1462, 234-5363
Fax: 236-1462

Prof. Shalardchai Ramitanondh
Department of Sociology & Anthropology
Faculty of Social Sciences
Chiangmai University
Chiangmai 50002
Tel: (053)221699 Ext 3572

Dr. Yos Santasombat
Associate Professor
Faculty of Sociology
Thammasat University
Tha Phrachan
Bangkok

Dr. (Ms.) Malee Suwana-adth
Secretary-General
SVITA Foundation
22/11 Kaset Tower
Soi Thanpuying Pahon
Ngamvongvan Road
Bangkhen
Bangkok 10900
Tel: 579-2481, 579-7603
Fax: 579-8944

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India

Mr. Arvind Khare
Executive Director
Society for Promotion of Wastelands
Development
Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra
1 Copernicus Marg
New Delhi 110 001
Tel: 384521, 383713, 386210
Tlx: 3153275 SPWD IN
Cab: LANDEVSOC

Ms. Madhu Sarin
Development Planner
48, Sector 4
Chandigarh 160001
Tel: (0172)540339

Indonesia

No participant

Malaysia

Ms. Aster Soong
Sahabat Alam Malaysia
43 Salween Road
10050 Penang
Tel: 604-088-224637, 376930
Fax: 604-375705

Nepal

Dr. Hemanta Raj Mishra
Member & Secretary
King Mahendra Trust for Nature
Conservation
P.O. Box 3712
Bahar Mahal
Kathmandu
Tel: (9771)526558
Fax: (9771)526570
Tlx: 2567 KMTNC NP

Pakistan

Mr. Ali Gohar
Regional Programme Forester
Aga Khan Rural Support Programme
P.O. Box 506
Babar Road, Gilgit
Tel: 2480
Tlx: 28018 AKF PK
Fax: 92-572-2779

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Workshop Staff

Mr. Bruce Cabarle
Assoc. Forestry and Land Use Program
World Resources Institute (WRI)
1709 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20006

USA

Tel: 202-638-6300, 202-662-2524

Fax: 202-638-0036

Tlx: 64414 WRIWASH

Mr. Owen Lynch
Assoc. Forestry and Land Use Program
World Resources Institute (WRI)
1709 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20006

USA

Tel: 202-638-6300

Fax: 202-638-0036

Tlx: 64414 WRIWASH

Dr. Saneh Chamarik
President
Local Development Institute
c/o Temporary Office:
Department of Medical Science
2nd Building
693 Bumrungmuang Road
Pomprab District
Bangkok 10100

Thailand

Tel: (02)223-6713, 225-7293

Fax: 226-4718

Mr. Songpol Jetanavanich
Administrative Director
Local Development Institute
c/o Temporary Office:
Department of Medical Science
2nd Building
693 Bumrungmuang Road
Pomprab District
Bangkok 10100

Thailand

Tel: (02)223-6713, 225-7293

Fax: 226-4718

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FAO Project Staff

Mr. T. Marghescu
Forestry Officer, Agroforestry
Specialist
Reforestation of Denuded Forest Lands in
Khao Kho
THA/88/017
c/o FAO Regional Office for Asia and the
Pacific (RAPA)
Phra Atit Road
Bangkok 10200
Thailand
Tel: 281-7844
Fax: 662-2800445
Tlx: 82815 FOODAG TH

Mr. Swat Nicharat
National Chief Technical Adviser
Reforestation of Denuded Forest Lands in
Khao Kho
THA/88/017
c/o FAO Regional Office for Asia and the
Pacific (RAPA)
Phra Atit Road
Bangkok 10200
Thailand
Tel: 281-7844
Fax: 662-2800445
Tlx: 82815 FOODAG TH

Mr. M. Larsson
Associate Professional Officer
Forest Resources Assessment 1990
GCP/INT/501/FIN
FAO Regional Office for Asia and the
Pacific (RAPA)
Phra Atit Road
Bangkok 10200
Thailand
Tel: 281-7844
Fax: 662-2800445
Tlx: 82815 FOODAG TH

BEST AVAILABLE COPY

Ms. R.M. Mahonen
Associate Professional Officer
(Agroforestry)
Regional Wood Energy Development
Programme
GCP/RAS/131/NET
FAO Regional Office for Asia and the
Pacific (RAPA)
Phra Atit Road
Bangkok 10200
Thailand
Tel: 281-7844
Fax: 662-2800445
Tlx: 82815 FOODAG TH

Mr. Daniel I. Jeldres
MSc Land & Water Development
P.O. Box 13, Phu Wiang
Khon Kaen 40150
Thailand
Tel: 043-291226

Ms. Cecile Fassaert
Associate Professional Officer &
Social Economist
P.O. Box 13, Phu Wiang
Khon Kaen 40150
Thailand
Tel: 043-291226

APPENDIX 2
Workshop Agenda

WORKSHOP ON "COMMUNITY FORESTRY,
NGOS AND POLICY:
What Makes for Success"

11-14 June 1991, Bangkok, Thailand

Provisional Agenda and Time-Table

10 June 1991 (Monday)

Arrival of participants

11 June 1991 (Tuesday)

0830-0900 hrs Registration

0900-1000 hrs Opening Ceremony

- Welcome by Dr. Saneh Chamarik, President,
Local Development Institute (LDI)

- Welcome by Mr. Bruce Cabarle, Forestry and
Land Use Program, World Resources Institute
(WRI)

- Welcome & keynote address by Mr. A.E.M.
Obaidullah Khan, Assistant Director General
& Regional Representative for Asia and the
Pacific, FAO Regional Office for Asia and
Pacific (RAPA)

1000-1030 hrs Coffee Break

1030-1200 hrs i) Participant introduction

ii) Logistical arrangements and business
matters (Chamarik & Rao)

iii) Workshop Goals, Objectives and Methodo-
logy (Gow, Chamarik & Cabarle)

1200-1330 hrs Lunch

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11 June 1991 (Tuesday) (Cont'd)

1330-1345 hrs Methodology and Establishment of Working Groups

1345-1600 hrs Working Groups: Session 1

12 June 1991 (Wednesday)

0830-1030 hrs Plenary Presentations and Discussion

1030-1045 hrs Coffee Break

1045-1200 hrs Working Groups: Session II

1200-1330 hrs Lunch

1330-1430 hrs Working Groups: Session II

1430-1445 hrs Coffee Break

1445-1645 hrs Plenary Presentations and Discussion

13 June 1991 (Thursday)

0830-1030 hrs Working Groups: Session III

1030-1045 hrs Coffee Break

1045-1230 hrs Plenary Presentations and Discussion

1230-1400 hrs Lunch

1400-1600 hrs Working Groups: Session IV

1600-1800 hrs Plenary Presentations and Discussion

14 June 1991 (Friday)

0830-1030 hrs Working Groups: Session V

1030-1045 hrs Coffee Break

1045-1230 hrs Plenary Presentations and Discussion

1230-1400 hrs Lunch

1400-1600 hrs Plenary Session

Closing of the Meeting

WORKSHOP ON "COMMUNITY FORESTRY,
NGOS AND POLICY:
What Makes for Success"

11-14 June 1991, Bangkok, Thailand

Field Visit Programme

15 June 1991

0615 hrs. Briefing at the lobby at Viengtai Hotel by
Mr. M. Kashio

0630 hrs. Start from the Hotel

0715 hrs. Royal Forest Department (RFD) to pick up an
officer and a staff of the Tree Farmers
Association of Thailand (TFAT)

0900 hrs. Arrival at a village woodlot, Phanom Sarakam
District, Chachoengsao Province, to observe
the activities

1200-1300 hrs. Lunch

1300 hrs. Visit to the Suan Kitti Plantation Company,
Phanom Sarakam District, to observe the tree
planting activities

1600 hrs. Departure to Bangkok

1900 hrs. Arrival at Viengtai Hotel

Note:

- 1) FAO provides an microbus, lunch and soft drinks.
- 2) RFD and TFAT provide an accompanying officer and a staff.

APPENDIX 3
Supporting Materials

The Nation 10 June

'Industrially-biased' Finnish forestry aid comes under fire

ANN DANAIYA USHER
The Nation

Helsinki

FINNISH forestry aid was criticized for its "industrial bias" by environmentalists from Thailand, the Philippines, Nepal and Finland during a two-day conference in Helsinki last week.

The Asian critics charged that forestry master plans written for several tropical countries by the Finnish consultancy company Jaakko Poyry Ltd with financing from the Finnish International Development Agency (Finnida) have overlooked environmental and social interests.

The Finns, meanwhile, argued that Finnish tax-payers' money has been used to promote trade in the name of development cooperation.

Finnish press, which covered the meeting extensively, pointed to Finnida's refusal to finance the conference, suggesting an unwillingness to listen to critical comments.

Jaakko Poyry is the world's largest forestry consultant company, with 6,000 staff specializing mostly in planning and engineering aspects of logging, pulp, paper and plantation operations.

The company has carried out forestry master plans in Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Philippines, and is in the middle of writing a plan for Thailand's forestry management, set to be finished in 1993.

Thai environmentalists have crit-

icized the "terms of reference", the project description on which the Thai project is based, for its focus on wood industry without attention to land tenure questions.

Prof. Sanheh Chamarik, who along with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has lobbied for fundamental changes in Thailand's 1985 forest policy, worries that the master plan will simply reinforce this policy.

"What guarantees do we have that the same mistakes that were made in the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Nepal will not be repeated in Thailand?" asked Witoon Permongsacharoen, director of the Project for Ecological Recovery, who attended the Helsinki seminar.

Jaakko Poyry Vice President Jouko Virta argued that it is "too soon" to know how the Thai plan will turn out. He noted that master plans are merely tools that offer governments data and recommendations on legislative reform, institution-building and planning.

"We act as advisors with the best professional expertise at our disposal - we don't have any interest in promoting business through the master plans," said company vice-president Jouko Virta.

The conference marked the culmination of several years of debate about Finnida-funded forestry plans, which began in 1986 with heavy criticism of the Sri Lankan plan for its emphasis on logging

and lack of attention to ecological protection.

Part of the reason for the absence of environmental concerns was that the World Bank set the terms, while Finnida played only a secondary role. The plan was eventually scrapped, though Finnida is currently financing a "revision".

Several participants commented that Jaakko Poyry, the hired consultant, should not be held responsible for the direction of plans. Rather they said, Finnida and the tropical country governments have failed to set sufficiently strict conditions.

During meetings last week, Jaakko Poyry President and new part-owner Henrik Ehmrooth agreed that the Sri Lankan plan had not been successful, but insisted that both the Filipino and Nepali plans had made a "positive contribution" to forestry planning.

There were however wide discrepancies about the success of these two plans as well.

Christie Nozella, director of the Philippines Haribon Foundation, said Filipino NGOs have refused to endorse the plan because it is based on the false assumption that poverty is the main cause of forest destruction.

"The planners only paid lip service to the issues of social equity and democratic access to resources - we rejected the bias of the master plan in favour of the wood industry," she said.