

forestry

research findings for development policymakers and practitioners

Joint Forest Management in India fails the poorest people

In 1992, the state government of Andhra Pradesh in India introduced Participatory Forest Management – initially under the Joint Forestry Management scheme, then the Community Forest Management scheme. The aim was to involve local people in the management of forest resources. What impact has it had?

At least 10 million people in Andhra Pradesh (14 percent of the population) depend on forests for agriculture or collecting forest products. A report coordinated by the University of East Anglia, in the UK, assesses the impact of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) on these people.

Almost half of forest dependents are tribal people who have traditionally practiced *podu* for generations, a system of forest agriculture in which farmers move from place to place when soil productivity declines. Despite practicing this for generations, they have not been granted formal land ownership rights. As a result, most have insecure livelihoods and live in marginal forest areas.

The state forest department obtained World Bank funding to promote PFM to

protect degraded forests. Local people were seen as partners in forest protection through the Vana Samarakshyan Samiti (VSS) committee and given rights to collect and use forest products.

However, PFM did not give communities secure land tenure and restricted their access to *podu* land. PFM also lacked a strong legal basis and failed to significantly develop people's livelihoods. A survey of three districts in Andhra Pradesh showed:

- The Forest Department prioritised long-term timber production and planted exotic tree species on *podu* lands without properly consulting local people. However, local people depend on non-timber forest products, which meet everyday needs and provide immediate income.
- The restrictions on *podu* led to an 18

percent decline in income from this source for the poorest people and 20 percent for less poor households. Food security also declined, with tribal groups worst affected.

- Attendance at management committee meetings was low; participants were mostly male and meetings were dominated by powerful local groups.
- The Forest Department decided the key issues and local people participated by doing the activities they were instructed.
- Women were not allowed to express their views or collect bank cheques for VSS payments.

Problems with PFM, as implemented in Andhra Pradesh, are mainly due to persistent power inequalities between local people and the state, and the limited devolution of power. PFM will only succeed if local people can plan long-term forest management while maintaining their immediate income. This requires secure land tenure.

The researchers recommend that policymakers:

- improve tenure security for local communities by implementing the 2006 Forest Rights Act and amending the 1967 Andhra Pradesh Forest Act
- accept the importance of *podu* for food security
- empower local people to manage their own forests with support from the Forest Department
- let local people select appropriate species for planting, such as multi-purpose and horticultural trees, medicinal plants and bamboo, which rapidly provide income
- improve fair access to markets for forest products
- empower women to attend and take part in VSS meetings and collect bank cheques.

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'Participatory Forest Management in Andhra Pradesh: Implementation, Outcomes and Livelihood Impacts', by V. Ratna Reddy *et al*, pages 302-332, in *Forests, People and Power: The Political Ecology of Reform in South Asia*, Earthscan Forestry Library: London, edited by Oliver Springate-Baginski and Piers Blaikie, 2007



Sale Tari tends his acacia trees in Niger using a natural regeneration technique. As well as providing a regenerative supply of firewood, the trees act as windbreaks to prevent wind erosion and stabilise the dry land in the sub-Saharan Sahel region.

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Dry forests help to reduce poverty in South Africa

The benefits of tropical forests for poor people are widely recognised. In particular, they provide opportunities to generate income. However, policymakers and researchers do not give enough attention to the benefits from dry forests and savannas.

Dry forests are characterised by sparse distributions of tree species, such as acacia and other drought-resistant species. Savannas are fire-adapted tree-grass mixtures covering 50 percent of Africa, as well as large areas of Asia and the Americas. Research from Rhodes University, in South Africa, shows some of the benefits of dry forests and savanna.

Dry forests are a source of food, fibre, shelter and medicine for everyday use. They provide resources to meet spiritual and aesthetic needs, and people can earn cash through small-scale trade in forest products.

Forest resources also provide a 'safety net' or a source of income when other sources are limited. The loss of labour for income generation, for example through HIV and

AIDS, has further increased dependency on forest products.

Further benefits include:

- Urban populations use forests for ecotourism and for spiritual and cultural practices.
- Trading in forest products creates opportunities to involve all family members and to work close to home. This also helps maintain traditions and indigenous knowledge.

However, forests are often located in remote areas with little infrastructure or government investment. Communities living near forests are often poor, with high unemployment. The daily use of forest resources prevents poverty getting worse. However, communities are often already marginalised through limited skills, a lack of education and poor infrastructure, which all limit their access to employment.

Some income-generating opportunities cause deforestation and environmental degradation, which threaten the sustainability of forest-dependent livelihoods. Unequal access to forests can also increase inequalities between communities.

Although dry woodland and savanna incomes may be low, they are invaluable to those with few alternatives. The researchers conclude:

- Dry woodlands and savannas can play a key role in supporting HIV and

AIDS-affected households through direct provision of resources for home consumption and trade.

- Forest resources will not alleviate poverty in rural areas but can prevent poverty from intensifying.
- Deforestation and environmental degradation through forest-based livelihoods must be managed so that they do not cause further poverty and livelihood insecurity.
- Whilst forest products and ecotourism have the potential to offer some people a route out of poverty, they cannot provide opportunities for everyone. These inequalities must be regulated to avoid conflicts over resources.
- Forest policies must prioritise poverty alleviation and fair sharing of resources. Policymakers must also balance policies aimed at conservation and forest protection with those aimed at poverty alleviation.

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'The Importance of Dry Woodlands and Forests in Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Alleviation in South Africa', *Forest Policy and Economics* 9, pages 558-577, by Charlie M. Shackleton, Sheona E. Shackleton, Erik Buiten and Neil Bird, 2007

Illegal timber trading in Honduras and Nicaragua

Around 40 percent of people live in or near forests in Honduras and Nicaragua. Poverty is high because investment in facilities is low and services in remote areas are inadequate. Illegal logging causes deforestation, which further reduces options and opportunities for the people who rely on forests.

Research coordinated by the Overseas Development Institute, in the UK, looks at the broad policy, legal and institutional context of illegal logging and how it affects people in the two countries.

Illegal logging includes clandestine production, which avoids the legal system altogether, and fraudulent practices, including the reuse of permits or bribery and threats to falsely legalise timber.

The scale of the illegal trade is estimated to account for between 75 and 85 percent of the hardwood harvested in Honduras. In Nicaragua, it is thought that more than half of all timber is produced under clandestine conditions, while most of the rest involves fraud or corruption at some point in the process.

The timber trade is lucrative, especially when legal costs are ignored. While local people may be employed in harvesting timber and have some limited rights to use forest products, overall they receive little profit from the trade. They find their rights to use forest resources are limited and often controlled by outside interests or powerful

local elites. Limited access to forest resources and harvesting rights leave poor people with few alternatives but to break the law.

Several issues allow illegal logging to continue and adversely affect poor people's lives.

- Legal and institutional barriers make it difficult for local people to follow laws. For example, land tenure is often insecure, with land titles difficult to obtain. This allows powerful elites to push poor people off their land, forcing them into even more remote areas.
- Complex, overlapping laws and regulations mean that responsibility for governance and law enforcement is unclear and prone to corruption. Links between illegal logging and organised crime make this worse.
- This complexity also makes the costs of legally producing timber high, especially compared to cheap, illegal competition.

Threats and corruption from organised criminals and commercial timber companies exacerbate these problems. Measures to improve the situation should:

- strengthen land and resource use rights, alongside measures to prevent illegal timber producers from taking over these rights
- simplify administrative procedures for small-scale farmers, such as the development and approval of

management plans – this would make legal timber production easier

- enforce laws against criminal producers and corrupt officials through improved data collection, monitoring and heavier penalties – this would help to reduce the unfair price advantage of illegal timber
- involve local groups more in decision-making and provide incentives for sustainable forestry, such as certification or payments for environmental services.

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'Rural Livelihoods, Forest Law and the Illegal Timber Trade in Honduras and Nicaragua' by Adrian Wells et al, pages 139-166, in *Illegal Logging: Law Enforcement, Livelihoods and the Timber Trade*, Earthscan: London, edited by Luca Tacconi, 2007

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