

Forests and Poverty Conservation

The international community is committed to eliminating poverty. International development targets to that end include a reduction by half in the number of people who are food insecure and a similar reduction in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by the year 2015. The Forestry Department of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with the support of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), held an interagency Forum on the Role of Forests in Poverty Alleviation in September 2001. Sixty analysts from developing countries, representatives of multi and bilateral agencies, international research organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including WWF and IUCN, came together to share their experiences.

The objectives of the Forum were to focus on the issues that need to be addressed if forestry is to make a more effective contribution to the alleviation of poverty and to strengthen agency and institutional capacity to identify opportunities and constraints at the levels of both policy and implementation.

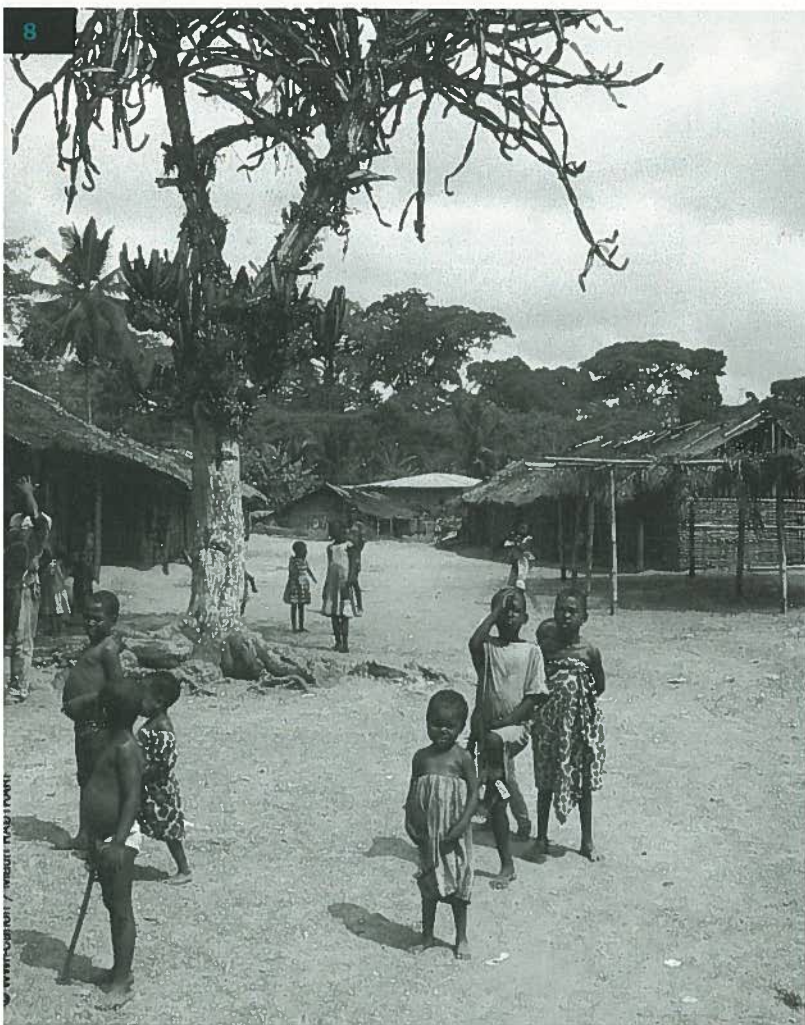
At a national level, there is a need to understand:

- Which national policies (both in and outside the forestry sector) have the strongest negative impact on the poor, or even increase poverty?
- What does it take to achieve more pro-poor forest policies?
- How can the share of forest benefits the poor have be increased, and how can their access rights be strengthened?
- What institutions and what fora can take these issues forward?

In applying policies, laws and regulations on the ground, there is a need to know:

- What local factors currently affect the implementation of pro-poor forest policies (this might include lack of capacity, lack of political will, power disparities amongst and within forest stakeholder groups)?
- What partnerships involving local actors (private sector, government, community groups) are likely to prove successful in reducing poverty through sustainable forest/tree management?
- What other means and approaches could be used to sustain and spread promising outcomes for the poor?

Forests and trees play a more substantial role for those with little or no land – who draw more of their livelihood from forests – than for those who obtain most of what they need from their own resources. Yet in the past, their political powerlessness often made it hard for them to influence policy-processes. Now, the International Development Targets for 2015 have refocused attention on all aspects of the livelihoods of the poor, including the contribution that forests can make to them.



Top: Besingi village in the buffer zone of Korup National Park, Cameroon

Right: A Seri woman from the Gulf of California, Mexico

Far right: Evenke people, Sakha Republic, Russian Federation



perspectives

Edmund Barrow from IUCN-EARO and Paul Toyne from WWF-UK, report on the FAO's Forum on the Role of Forestry In Poverty Alleviation.

The Forum offered participants interactive ways of working on these problems and their possible outcomes. IUCN and WWF were the only conservation groups represented. Our shared objectives were to ensure that the participants understood the balance and relationships between poverty, contributions of forestry, and the sustainable use and management of forest resources, particularly those coming from natural forests and woodlands, and to stress the importance of long-term, truly sustainable solutions rather than quick fix policy options that do little to secure livelihoods for future generations.

The Forum used country profiles developed for Bolivia, Honduras, Mali, Tanzania, Nepal and Vietnam as the basis for discussion and for identifying major issues and themes concerning forestry and poverty alleviation. The major product from the meeting was a 26 page policy brief '*How forests can reduce poverty*' which sets out an agenda for action. The key components are laid out below.

Agenda for Action – How forests can reduce poverty

1. Strengthening rights, capabilities and governance

- Support the poor's own decision-making power
- Strengthen forest rights of the poor and the means to claim them
- Recognise links between forestry and local governance

2. Reducing vulnerability

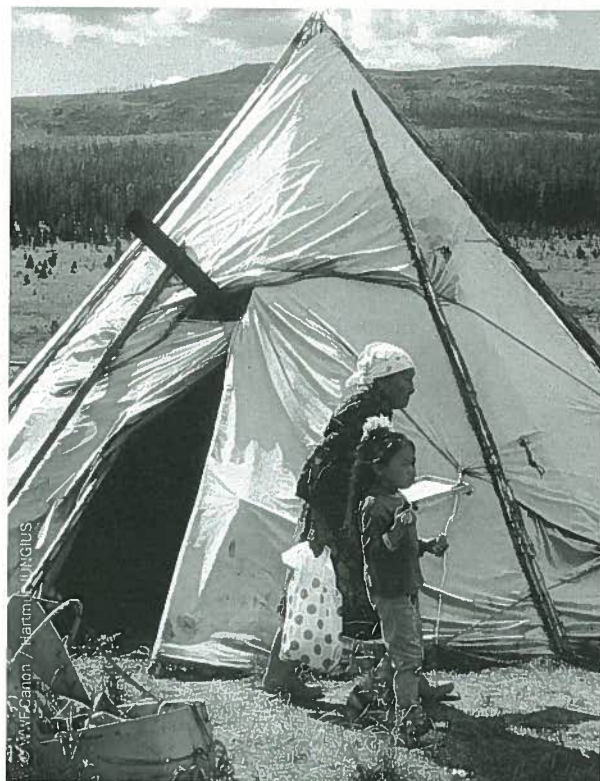
- Make safety nets not poverty traps
- Support tree planting outside forests
- Cut the regulatory burden on the poor and make regulation affordable
- Reduce unfair obligations in forest management

3. Capturing emerging opportunities

- Remove the barriers to market entry
- Base land use decisions on true value of forests
- Ensure that markets for environmental services benefit the poor
- Support associations and financing for local forest businesses

4. Working in partnership

- Simplify policies and support participatory processes
- Promote multi-sectoral learning and action
- Enhance interagency collaboration
- Make NGOs and the private sector partners in poverty reduction



Action is needed now to take advantage of the ways that forestry can help reduce poverty. Without action – without investment in people-centred forestry – other measures to tackle poverty and improve poor people's livelihoods will be undermined. Forests and trees can help. Forest resources contribute to food security. They can provide commercial opportunities and employment for the poor. They can be used as test cases for the development of good local governance.

A people-centred approach can further increase the impact of forests and trees in reducing poverty. What is needed is the removal of barriers that prevent forests and trees from contributing to the livelihoods of the poor as well as support for emerging opportunities.

Forests and trees have an important role to play in the struggle to reduce poverty. Initiatives based on sustainable local forest management, as part of rural development and sustainable livelihood strategies, can support good governance and increase benefits to the poor. The challenge now is to turn this potential into a reality.

Contact: Forum on the Role of Forestry in Poverty Alleviation,
Email: fonp-documents@fao.org, fax: +39-6-5705-5514

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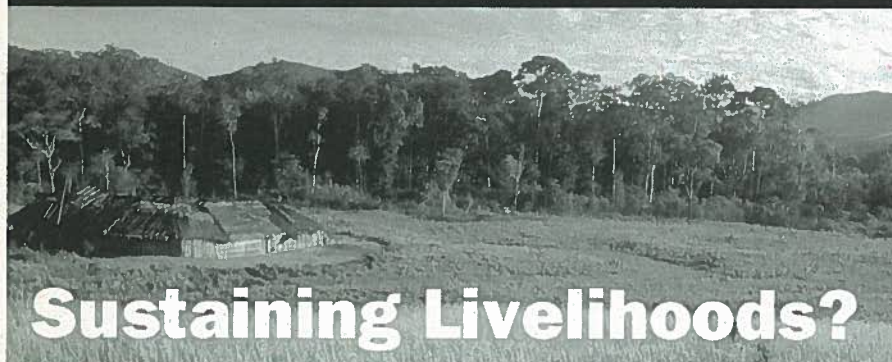
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Sustaining Livelihoods?

There has been increasing discussion in recent years about the link between conservation and human livelihoods, gathering momentum since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Despite the long period of dialogue and the perceived high level of dependence of many people on forests, the linkages between forest conservation and livelihoods remain controversial. Some conservationists have concluded that when one attempts to integrate conservation and development, biodiversity tends to lose out. Equally, some development thinkers see such integration as an unnecessary distraction from the real challenge at hand – to lift poor people out of poverty – and argue that the best conservationists have to offer is the option of sustainable poverty.

Both of these viewpoints find support in Sven Wunder's¹ conclusion that there exists limited scope for synergies between conservation and development and that each lobby should not diverge from its core business. Proponents of integrating conservation and development have not helped themselves by making exaggerated claims as to the extent of the win-win prize that is purportedly there for the taking. Wish lists have been drawn up, disappointment has ensued.

A degree of honesty and conceptual clarity is now required. To start with, those who want to see a workable marriage between development and conservation must better articulate what a livelihood emphasis means within a conservation programme. They need to develop a convincing case which distinguishes between those livelihood elements where synergies with conservation exist, e.g. environmental and food security, rural risk management strategies, and those elements where synergies are more limited or very site specific, e.g. additional income generation.

Such a framework would then provide a more reliable basis on which to work with intended beneficiaries in the design of integrated conservation-development interventions. It would also allow us to be more rigorous in testing the underlying assumptions of the intervention: are we using conservation as a means to improve livelihoods, or improving livelihoods as a way to achieve conservation aims? Once that is understood, we can be clearer and more realistic about what can be achieved, and better placed to be thorough in our monitoring and lesson-learning.

Undoubtedly part of the emerging scepticism comes from the failure of those projects that promised to maximize both conservation and development outcomes. Proponents of integration need to shift their attention away from the myth of win-win and concentrate on understanding how land-use trade-offs can be equitably balanced. Equally opponents of integration should seriously consider whether their preferred option of splitting into separate development and conservation camps is really that feasible given the complexities of land use and property and access rights.

Bob Fisher and Stewart Maginnis

¹See Wunder, S. 2001. *Poverty alleviation and tropical forests – what scope for synergies?* World Development 29.

The next issue of *arborvitæ* will be produced in June 2002 (copy deadline May 2002). If you have any material to send or comments please contact: Nigel Dudley and Sue Stolton, 23 Bath Buildings, Bristol BS6 5PT, UK. Telephone and fax: +44-117-942-8674 E-mail: equilibrium@compuserve.com

Back issues of *arborvitæ* can be found on the WWF/IUCN Forest Innovations website, at: <http://www.iucn.org/themes/forests>

This newsletter has been edited by Nigel Dudley and Sue Stolton of Equilibrium Consultants. Managing editors Mark Aldrich of WWF International and Simon Rietbergen of IUCN, the World Conservation Union. Design by Helen Miller, HMD UK. Printed on paper manufactured from 100% post consumer waste.

Thanks to the following for contributing information, text and advice: Mark Aldrich (Switzerland); Ed Barrow (Kenya); Nick Brown (USA); Zhu Chunquan (China); Steve Gretzinger (Costa Rica); Marc Hockings (Australia); Rolf Hogan (Switzerland); Jack Hurd (Switzerland); Mark Hurlley (USA); Andrew Ingles (Thailand); Stephen Kelleher (USA); Stewart Maginnis (Switzerland); Catherine Mgendi (Kenya); Peter Moore (Indonesia); Carole Saint-Laurent (Canada); Alberto Salas (Costa Rica); David Sheppard (Switzerland); Agus Setayarso (Indonesia); Victor Teplyakov (Russia); Dagmar Timmer (Switzerland); Paul Toyne (UK); Regina Vasquez (Brazil); Dale Withington (Cambodia)

The editors and authors are responsible for their own articles. Their opinions do not necessarily represent the views of IUCN and WWF.

