

Workshop on decentralisation

(Yogyakarta, September 2006-09)



The workshop organised under the umbrella of the Asia Forest Partnership, together with the Indonesian and Philippines governments, CIFOR, RECOFTC, FAO, Intercooperation and various donors (Bafu CH, SDC, GTZ, ITTO) took place in the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta from 4 to 6 September 2006.

People from several countries of Asia and the Pacific and international experts discussed during 4 days the progresses made on forest governance and decentralisation since Davao (1998) and Interlaken (2004) workshops on decentralisation.

The discussions were organised around three main topics, i.e.:

- Role, rights and responsibilities. Analyse of the major problems related to roles and responsibilities of involved actors, the mechanisms adopted to clarify respective roles of actors and ways that might work to overcome the problems related to roles, responsibilities and rights in the decentralisation process. A special attention was given to women and disadvantaged people, and the constraints to women's involvement in the decentralisation process.
- Institutions, organisations, capacity building, infrastructures and legal aspects. Institutional and legal clarity about land tenure, land rehabilitation. Aspects of corruption, illegality and law enforcement. Interface between corruption and illegal logging, land tenure and rehabilitation.
- Financial incentives and investment in forestry decentralization. To what extent is finance considered a key issue in decentralised forest management? Incentives and investment patterns operating in countries in reference to decentralisation in forestry.

A one-day field trip was organised during day 2 of the workshop. The organisers selected three sites addressing the following themes:

- Social forestry activities in forestland rehabilitation sites (HKm scheme)
- National movement on land rehabilitation (Gerhan): plantation programme involving community of people. This scheme has its legal basis with the National Policy Guidelines for Gerhan-2003 and it is funded by the central government in order to assist provincial governments.
- Private forest activities (plantation).
- Community based forest management for enterprises (Perum Perhutani), PHBM. Collaborative effort between the state and local communities for forest resources management based on benefit sharing schemes, collaboration, prosperity and transparency.



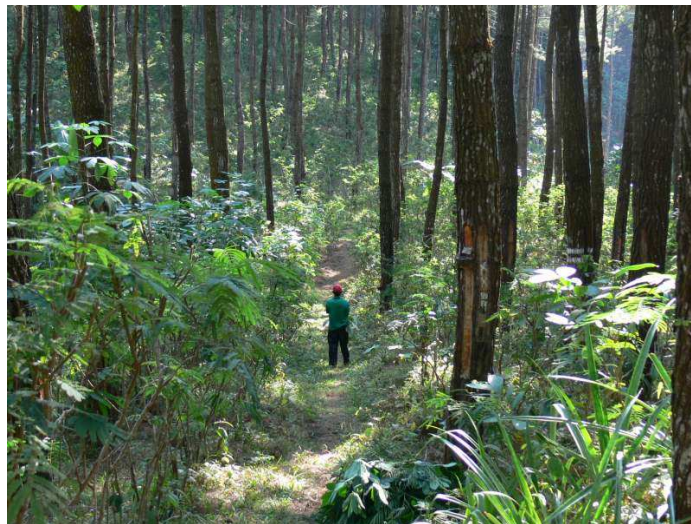
NTFP's exhibited by the community in Donorejo village

In parallel to the normal sessions of the workshop, a poster presentation, film show and book launching were organised for the participants.

The organisation and logistic of the workshop were really impressive, and the Indonesian government put a lot of efforts to show its commitment and its interest in this event. The mobilisation of the officials and the committees for the field visit was something I will not easy forget.

Thanks to a good selection of participants from Asia and Pacific countries, the level of discussion was also high. The restitutions made by the different working groups came with interesting and constructive proposals.

What was probably less evident for many of the participants is the link between what was shown during the field visit trips and real decentralisation/devolution efforts or results, which only confirms what we present in our general impressions (see below) that true decentralisation in forestry has still a long way to go before becoming a reality.



Agroforestry system in a State Owned Forest with Pines. Resin extraction, Calliandra for fodder, medicinal plants, manioc are the different products obtained by the people.

General impressions

Decentralisation in the forest sector has to be considered in the broader frame of forest governance, which can be defined as *“the set of rules and institutions that control and determine what happens to a nation’s forests and who gains and who gets hurt as a consequence”*.

In most of the countries, the quality of decentralized governance in the forest sector appears to be strongly associated with, and dependent on the quality of governance of the whole government apparatus. In countries where the state is weak in general where there is a breakdown of societal governance, public officials are not accountable to citizens, where a certain degree of political stability is absent, where institutions and legal frameworks are dysfunctional, and where corrupt abuse of public office is common, it is highly improbable that a satisfactory level of governance in the forest sector could be achieved.

Decentralisation is a gradual process. Coming from a point where only one actor was deciding everything and controlling the management of the resource to achieve a new situation where several actors at different levels (national, provincial, district and local) will find their place and will know what is their roles and responsibilities, implies a complex process of change (institutional, organisational and individual) for which many people are not really prepared.

Three **key broad factors internal** to the sector appear to set the conditions for *good decentralized* forest governance, as earlier defined. These are as follows:

- Effective and balanced **distribution of responsibilities** and **authority** among levels of government, respecting the **subsidiarity** principle, which means appropriate responsibilities and power for each level of government
- Adequate **resources** and institutional **effectiveness** at each level of government
- Sufficient **participation** of civil society and the private sector at all levels of forest governance.

Today, despite all the efforts made and the energy spent by different countries, the outcome is still quite limited. True decentralisation in forestry remains the exception. In most of the cases the forest are state owned and the Forest Departments continue to manage them in a very centralised ways. Some efforts of “deconcentration”¹ have been undertaken, but decentralisation in the form of “devolution of power”² is still the exception.

The cases presented in the field visits during the workshop, which are probably not representative enough of what is happening at the country level, show an approach which is still very much top down. It gives also the impression that the basic principles of participation, transparency, equity, power sharing in decision-making processes remain a kind of obligation for the Forest Department.

But at least a dialogue has been established between the different actors, mainly between the State Forest Service and the communities.

The role of the local governments is still unclear and they probably remain today the weak element in the decentralisation process.

Some of the key elements presented during the restitution session by the working groups

Roles, rights and responsibilities

Major problems: capacity, trust, commitment, clarity, consistency, communication and sustain benefits.

Mechanisms: participatory approach, legal framework, training and capacity building

The way forward: gradual process, roles and responsibilities appropriately devolved at the different levels (subsidiarity), open consultation process, and clear legal framework.

About equity it appears that women are generally underrepresented and that the % of prop-poor approaches is quite low. Women need to be integrated in existing structures, within smaller groups where they can feel more comfortable and their work should be organised to fit in their household obligations.

Institutions, organisations, capacity building, infrastructure and legal aspects

Different situations of land tenure exist within the countries. China has for example only 40% of state forests and in PNG 95% of the forestland is under customary tenure. On the other hand, in India, Thailand, Pakistan and Laos, most of the forests are state owned.

Institutional changes within government agencies are needed in parallel with the decentralisation process. But attitudinal and behavioural changes are also needed at the individual level. Decentralisation processes of “social change” are slow.

Education and training is priority.

In terms of illegality, corruption and law enforcement, decentralization present threats (decentralization of corruption) as well as opportunities (local community control and empowerment). What seems to work to overcome corruption in decentralized forest management is increased transparency through new laws, increased media scrutiny, strengthening clean local government institutions and empowering local communities to have a stake in defining their local direct actions and to defend their tenure rights.

Central government agencies must remain strong, because they still have an important role to play. Again we don’t need inevitably “less state”, but we need a “better” and “another” state. Or in other words, restructuring

¹ Redistribution of decision-making authority and financial and management responsibility among levels of the central government

² Transfer of specific decision-making powers from one level of government to another, or transfer of decision-making powers by the government to entities of the civil society.

government-civil society relations does not necessarily mean minimalist government. But it does require government that is accountable to local interests and that balance these interests justly when making decisions about public goods.

Financial incentives and investment in forestry decentralization

Decentralisation was meant to cut down the costs of central governments, but a fair and balanced redistribution of revenues at the lower levels is still something, which needs to be improved.

The question of payment for environmental services was also raised.

Conclusions

Decentralisation will not solve all the problems related to the forest sector and approaches need to be adapted to regional and local contexts. There are different ways of doing things.

To bring changes one should not wait for a clean and effective legal system to be in place; forest will have disappeared long before.

The tenure issue (including aspects of clarity and stability) is probably one of the most crucial and it will require special attention

Second by importance is “capacity building”, which needs to take place at all levels, but with a special focus on weak sections. It should bring progressive changes in attitude and behaviour of people as well as in institutional norms.

A broad range of innovations already exists on the ground and could serve as models for further progress.

