



Tropentag, October 7-9, 2008, Hohenheim

“Competition for Resources in a Changing World:
New Drive for Rural Development”

Is Community Forestry a Solution or a Problem? Literature Review with Examples of Indonesia, Namibia, Nepal and Thailand

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Abstract

Community forestry (CF) has been recognised as a viable option for effective conservation and management of forests. Scholars in forest resource management often proclaimed that community based forest management (such as community forestry) can be more efficacious than other practices. The approach to community forestry is expected to have positive economic, ecological and socio-political outcomes at various levels. Failure of state-centric approaches, the increasing number of stakeholders and their multiple interests, economic opportunities, national legislation and international obligations, financial crunch for public forest sector investment are the commonly refereed drivers towards the emergence of community forestry in developing world.

While community forestry practices appears to be successful in devolving power from the national to the local level, the empowerment effects on the community level favoured local elites and a “central power-group” tended to (more or less) seize benefits and decision-making capacity. Various case studies indicate that this practice assist to improve the quality of forests to varying degrees. Logically, improvements in forest resource availability should lead to improvements in the flow of those resources to local users and thereby improved livelihoods of those who are dependent on forest resources. However, various studies confirm that improved forest resources may not benefit all members of a user group where the most powerful actors control the use of forests in order to ensure their own interests. The existing empirical studies give the mix signals of community forestry outcomes, there are success as well as failure stories. Based on empirical studies of four countries, we identify contextual conditions that help to explain why full participation of local people alone is not enough to archive a successful community forest management.

Keywords: Community forestry, poverty reduction, stakeholders