

POINT FOR ACTION

1

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



Strengthening
rights,
capabilities
and governance



STRENGTHENING RIGHTS, CAPABILITIES AND GOVERNANCE

Support the poor's own decision-making power

As with other resources, forests and trees contribute to reducing poverty when local people are able to make their own decisions concerning forest management. The best participatory forest initiatives provide for capacity-building, and for strengthening group organizations and local institutions. Strengthened communities can take action to improve local livelihoods by improving access to infrastructure, education and health services, as illustrated by community forestry initiatives in Nepal.

Strengthen forest rights of the poor and the means to claim them

Many people stay poor because they have insufficient rights to manage their resources, including forests. Evidence increasingly shows that transferring or returning ownership of forest assets to the poor, or securing long-term access and control rights, are

politically feasible and cost-effective strategies for poverty reduction.

Clear tenure rights allow local people to protect forests from outside encroachment, to increase their local food and forest security, and to enter into business contracts. Proven new mechanisms for devolving forest rights to poor communities include: joint forest management agreements (India, the United Republic of Tanzania), ownership or control of village forest reserves by indigenous and rural communities (Ghana, Nicaragua, Tanzania), long-term concessions (Bolivia, Indonesia), household forest allocations (China, Viet Nam), conditional handover of forest resources consonant with government policy (Nepal, Philippines), and complete transfer of forest resources (Mexico, the Gambia). These vary in the security they offer the poor, but all are valid under different circumstances and all are stepping-stones to poverty reduction.

Rights on their own are not enough: they must be supported by the capability to claim and defend them against more powerful actors; they must have clear constitutional guarantees, as well as specific supportive legislation and regulations. The poor need to be aware of their rights and know how to access effective routes to recourse. Management of budgets, costs and benefits should be devolved along with responsibilities. Local institutions need sufficient autonomy to act, modify, and enforce local rules. In addition, national laws should define rules by which communities interact with outsiders, provide basic protection for individuals against the abuse of local power, and set guidelines for the protection of wider societal interests.

Recognize links between forestry and local governance

Initiatives aimed at improving poor people's use and control of forest resources provide entry points to elements of good governance such as representation, transparency, accountability, equitable taxation and increased civil society roles. The forestry sector has a good record in public sector reform, capacity-

building, improvement of rights to natural resources, and elimination of corruption and illegal trade. The forestry sector is becoming increasingly effective in generating lessons for other sectors, learning from other sectors, and providing a springboard to broader action on governance.

Improved access to, and transparency of, information on forest resources is central to people-centred development and requires appropriate information technologies and communication channels to assist local decision-making. The inclusion of this information in local planning improves freedom of choice for the poor.

ADVANTAGES TO GOVERNMENTS OF PEOPLE-CENTRED FORESTRY

- Reduced central government costs
- More effective control over forest resources
- Environmental benefits
- Local conflict resolution
- Natural resources for local development
- Effective management through partnership

CARBON MANAGEMENT, FORESTS AND POVERTY REDUCTION

The possibility of managing forests for their carbon storage values represents a major opportunity for some poor people. In Costa Rica, groups of smallholders already receive payments from certified carbon offsets. **Local land rights and equitable distribution of benefits** must be secured in these schemes.

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