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Community Forestry in Taiwan: A solution or another problem?

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From Scientific Forestry to Community Forestry

Since the late-18th century, European countries were developing scientific forestry. The Enlightenment period, with its ideology based on reason, individual will and rationality, influenced the way humans viewed nature and their relationship to natural resources. By applying science to forest management, humans could order and control the forests. This approach to forestry emphasized centralization, nationalism, and utilitarianism.

In the chaotic post-World War II period, many nations began to assert independence and self-government. In this atmosphere, traditional scientific forestry no longer met the needs of increasingly heterogeneous societies. In many decolonized countries, much of the population was forest-dependent communities. They managed forest resources through traditional social norms rather than by national laws. Gradually, communities began to demand more local participation and control, and a return to traditional forest management systems. Now, the new paradigm of forest management emphasizes democratization, decentralization, and localization. Public participation, interest sharing, and risk separation are key characteristics. Scholars have outlined the major differences between the old and the new forest management paradigms (illustrated below). One important result of this paradigm shift is the emergence of "community forestry," in which the emphasis is on local communities – those united by a common interest or by a sense of place – and their rights to manage local resources for a multitude of social, environmental and economic benefits.

Contrasting Natural Resource Paradigms

Dominant Resource Management Paradigm	New Resource Management Paradigm
❖ Amenities coincidental to commodity production	❖ Amenities outputs have primary importance
❖ Nature to produce goods and services (anthropocentric perspective)	❖ Nature for its own sake (biocentric perspective)
❖ Commodity outputs over environmental protection	❖ Environmental protection over commodity outputs
❖ Primary concern for current generation (short-term)	❖ Primary concern for current and future generations (long-term)
❖ Intensive forest management such as clearcutting, herbicides, slash burning	❖ Less intensive forest management such as "new forestry" and selective harvesting
❖ No resource shortages – emphasis on short-term production and consumption	❖ Limits to resource growth, emphasis on conservation for long-term
❖ Decision-making by experts	❖ Consultative/participative decision-making
❖ Centralized/hierarchical decision authority	❖ Decentralized decision authority

Source: Adapted from Brown and Harris (1992) "The U.S. Forest Service: Toward the New Resource Management Paradigm?" *Society and Natural Resources*, Vol. 5, pp. 231-245.

There have been several on-going events that focus on the issues of community forestry and public participation including:

- ❑ Since the late 1970s, FAO and SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) cooperate to develop community forestry.
- ❑ In 1978, World Bank forestry policy papers place greater emphasis on social forestry and people-oriented forestry.
- ❑ In 1992, the Earth Summit Declaration stated "Public access to information, participation in decision-making, and access to justice makes decisions concerning the environment more fair, environmentally sound, and sustainable."

In Taiwan, several important milestones mark the evolution of the local environmental movement: 1) enacting the logging ban on natural forests in 1991; 2) proposing co-management of a national park between the government and aboriginals; 3) addressing the Community Forestry Project by Taiwan Forest Bureau.

Co-management: called joint-, shared resource-, participatory-, or multiparty- management. Refers to a broad spectrum of institutional arrangements. Its essential features are: involvement of two or more parties with interests and values in managing a common area or resource(s); attempts to balance relationships between individual resource users, user groups, and the state; and sharing of management responsibilities and benefits (Sherry and Myers 2002).



Environmental groups demonstrate in response to forest policy in late 2000.

Community Forestry in Taiwan

In 2002, the Taiwan government introduced a new grant program to help stimulate community forestry projects, called the "Community Forestry Project" (CFP). Initiated by the Taiwan Forestry Bureau (TFB), CFP gave rural communities small subsidies of US \$300 per semester. TFB hopes these grants will jump start communities to self-organize for conservation, even after the action plan is completed.

The goals of the project are to:

- ❑ Promote resident participation so as to build consensus on forest management policies.
- ❑ Build partnerships between community organizations and TFB.
- ❑ Facilitate biodiversity conservation, ecotourism and relative forest infrastructures.
- ❑ Improve the community environment and upgrade the quality of life for local people.

By July 2004, 333 communities were involved and 435 cases received TFB project subsidies, including 136 aboriginal communities and 164 cases (about 40% of total projects).

Outstanding Cases in Taiwan

1. Sagan Village in south Taiwan

Sagan is a village of the Paiwan aboriginal tribe in southern Taiwan. In 2003, TFB approved their Community Forestry Project, which proposed to strike a balance between conservation and rural livelihoods. Their project's ecological effort consisted of the residents teaming up to patrol the river system and protect native fish species. In the project's cultural aspect, they re-built traditional stilted houses named "kubau," transformed the granary into a visitor lodge, and encouraged eco-tourism.



Plaza and public forum for community activities at Sagan



Blend of community forestry and ecotourism at Sagan

2. Tao-Mi Eco-village in central Taiwan

Since the devastating 1999 Chi-Chi earthquake, Central Taiwan suffered great damage and hundreds of casualties, especially in Nan-Tou County. After 2000, the residents of one village, Tao-Mi, began the Community Renaissance Action Plan, which emphasized ecological greening and eco-tourism. Today, Tao-Mi attracts thousands of visitors every year, with the community organizing to provide interpretation, dining, housing and other tourist-friendly services. Tao-Mi's success is attributed to self governance, collaboration, and ecological restoration.



Greening by community collective action on Tao-Mi eco-village on central Taiwan



Constructing the wetland by community residents on Tao-Mi eco-village

3. Liukuei County in south Taiwan

There are a variety of ethnic groups in Liukuei in southern Taiwan, including Taiwanese, Hakka, and aboriginals. Most of these communities are agrarian and experience a low standard of living. In Liukuei county, most forestland is owned by government and is managed by bureaucrats. The administrative system and national laws limited the rights of local people to use the forest and natural resources. Recently, the government and local people initiated dialogue through a series of local forums in which each party can discuss issues and attempt to negotiate and reach some agreement for problem solving.



Several local forums on natural resources use and communal development were held between local residents and the governmental at Liukuei

A Critique of Community Forestry

Community forestry development faces many challenges:

1. It is difficult to reach a common consensus that the entire community agrees with.
2. There are often few participants.
3. The powerless are often excluded from discussions that pertain to them. The word "community" itself implies a homogenous social group, geographic domain, or professional organization; yet most communities are heterogeneous. There are usually significant divergences of gender, race, religion, social status, and economic ability within a single "community." One critique of research is that it is composed of various studies pieced together to provide a sketch of the whole community. Researchers often deal with community issues by surveying active groups/organization and collect data from minority leaders. These results tend to ignore the powerless who have never participated. This problem needs to be addressed if community forestry projects are to succeed.

What We Can Do – What Alternative Approaches Can Researchers Use?

A number of methodologies have been developed to address research shortcomings where there is under-participation from local communities. Examples of these methods include rapid rural appraisal (RRA), participatory rural appraisal (PRA), participatory learning and action (PLA), and participatory action research. These methods attempt to empower the powerless to participate – including women, the poor and other marginalized people. It assumes that social justice is indispensable for achieving ecological stability and environmental conservation.

My research at TFRI attempts to design a set of research projects which canvasses the needs, interests, backgrounds, and modes of communication of both the powerless and those with power, and then evaluate the differences between these two groups. Also examined are whether these two groups differ between traditional cultural symbols and modern ecological ideology. The results should provide data on which methods of information sharing and gathering and participation work best to foster community forestry projects.

Personal examples of publications:

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