

The purpose of these *Key Sheets* is to provide decision-makers with an easy and up-to-date point of reference on issues relating to the provision of support for sustainable livelihoods.

The sheets are designed for those who are managing change and who are concerned to make well-informed implementation decisions. They aim to distil theoretical debate and field experience so that it becomes easily accessible and useful across a range of situations. Their purpose is to assist in the process of decision-making rather than to provide definitive answers.

The sheets address three broad sets of issues:

- Service Delivery
- Resource Management
- Policy Planning and Implementation

A list of contact details for organisations is provided for each sub-series.

## Overview of the debate

Over the past 5 years, the debate about participation in forest management has focused on:

- Identifying the appropriate degree/type of participation in different aspects of forest management.
- How to understand, bring together and reconcile the interests of all the parties with a legitimate interest in forests and their resources.
- How to design and implement the legislative, policy and institutional changes needed to achieve effective and equitable forest management.
- How to facilitate the required staffing, structural, cultural and budgetary changes to make state forestry organisations more participatory.
- The gender and other equity impacts of different forest management options.

## Key issues in decision-making

Experience with various approaches to forest management has underlined **the importance of participation** as a means of improving equity, effectiveness and sustainability. The challenge is now to identify and operationalise the most appropriate form of participation in any given situation. This may range from:

- discrete consultation during the policy formulation and implementation process, through
- ongoing representation in decision-making bodies, to
- co-management of forests at a local level.

Forests often provide **diverse benefits to multiple groups** of users. Rights, resource flows and relationships are all complex, dynamic, often contradictory and frequently lead to conflict between users. A first step in managing these conflicts is to identify the various parties with an interest in forest management and to determine their rights, responsibilities and objectives. Public agency/donor/NGO goals may include one or more of the following:

- the enhancement of rural livelihoods;
- sustainable resource management and/or biodiversity conservation;
- devolution of power to indigenous or other local people and/or improved governance;
- increased national income from forests; and
- a reduction in public sector costs.

Local people may share these goals or have specific income or cultural objectives. They may also view forests as a fall-back resource which helps cushion them against external shocks and trends. Commercial enterprises are likely to be concerned with extracting maximum economic value from the resource while preservationists may wish to preserve it untouched.

- How much common ground exists between the various interested parties?
- Is there any flexibility or willingness to compromise?
- How do different parties perceive each other?
- Do current relations provide the basis for building effective institutions/coalitions for management (including agreement on a way forward)?
- Is there a body (public sector or otherwise) capable of arbitrating between divergent interests?

Where there is a severe **imbalance of power** amongst user groups (e.g. if the logging industry or another group is disproportionately powerful), prior empowerment and capacity building work with weaker groups may be required. If interests are very divergent it may be more productive to form an, initial, limited partnership – which includes weaker groups – with a view to bringing other parties in at a later date. If even this proves too difficult, withdrawal from local level activity may be the best course in the short term.

The transaction costs of the more intensive forms of participatory management can be significant both for user groups (time and effort) and external agencies (time and money). If new initiatives are to be successful and sustainable, **perceived benefits must exceed the costs of management in the long term**. Success also rests on the ease and effectiveness of monitoring and enforcement of management arrangements.

- What proportion of different user groups' income is derived from forest sources?
- What non-income benefits are derived from forest sources and how highly are these valued?
- How is dependence on forest resources changing? (The benefits of effective forest management are likely to fall if forest products are increasingly supplied from on-farm sources.)
- Do those involved have access to knowledge and the necessary technical support to enable them to manage the resource sustainably?

## DFID experience

- Various under Forestry Res. Prog. (contact NR International)
- Research: Community forestry in Nepal (University of Leeds – start 1997)
- Nepal: Community forestry (start 1993)
- Ghana: Forest sector devt. (start 1995)
- India: Western Ghats (start 1989)
- South Africa: Policy support (start 1995)
- Cameroon: Community forestry (start 1995)

## NEDA experience

- Pakistan: Malakand-Dir social forestry (start 1987)
- Nepal: Annapurna forest conservation & devt. (start 1990)
- Senegal: Community forestry (start 1984)
- Bolivia: Sustainable mgmt with indigenous people (start 1992)
- Costa Rica: La Amistad, sustainable devt. & nature conservation (start 1990)
- Guatemala: Forest devt. in the Sierra de Cuchumatanes (start 1993)
- Integrated conservation & devt. prog. (ICDP) – WWF (start 1996)

## Expertise

- FAO
- IAC Wageningen
- IKC Wageningen
- IIED
- IUCN Working Group on Community Involvement in Forest Management
- ODI
- RECOFTC
- WUR

## Participation in Forest Management *continued*

Commitment to participation tends to be greater when programmes include early measures to increase employment or other locally-valued benefits. This can raise costs at the outset, increasing the need for donor or other external support. It is, however, important that programmes are designed with a view to longer-term financial and managerial sustainability.

In general, costs tend to be lower where strong and capable local institutions already exist – especially if these have a history of collaborative management – and user groups are homogenous. However, the existence and relative ease of working with strong groups must not disguise the need for an extended **analysis of local social dynamics**:

- How can socially marginal groups (e.g. hunter-gatherers) be supported to participate fully in the new management arrangements?
- Do the new management arrangements create new elites? If so, what safeguards are in place to ensure that these elites do not abuse their power?

Checks on the abuse of power are one important component of **systems of accountability**. These should run both upwards and downwards. In order to operationalise them it is necessary to be clear about the roles and relationships of the various parties involved.

- User groups participate in forest management systems both directly and indirectly (e.g. by voting and through exercising choice in markets for services).
- Private sector organisations (including NGOs) can be important providers of services to forest users. They should operate within standards enforced by public agencies and devised in conjunction with users.
- Public agencies (forest departments) retain an important role as overall stewards of forest resources. They may require considerable support if they are to evolve from authoritarian, policing bodies into supportive, facilitating organisations.
- Elected bodies (at various levels) are part of the overall governance system for forest resources. They establish policies, pass legislation and can transmit the views of users to forest departments.

Providing support to processes of policy, institutional and legislative reform that promote participation in forest management is an increasingly important area for donors. The range of issues to be considered extends well beyond the sector itself. Key questions are:

- Is there pressure for reform from below?
- Are decentralisation and changes in governance explicit national objectives?
- Are participatory processes underway in other sectors?
- Are politicians and senior officials sufficiently convinced of the benefits of new approaches that they are willing to act as champions and provide the means to achieve reforms?

Pilot efforts can help by providing concrete examples of the benefits and limitations of participation, though scaling these up to national level remains a problem. The major lesson of recent experience with participation in forest management is that **approaches should be differentiated and situation-specific**. Since interests vary over time, it is also important that the institutions promoted are flexible and amenable to change.

## Key literature

- Arnold, J.E.M. (1998) 'Managing Forests as Common Property'. *Forestry Paper 136*. Rome: FAO.
- Borrini-Feyerabend, G. (1996) *Collaborative Management of Protected Areas: Tailoring the Approach to the Context*. Gland: IUCN.
- DFID (1996/8) *Sharing Forest Management: Key Factors, Best Practice, Ways Forward*. London: DFID.
- DFID (1999) *Shaping Forest Management: How Coalitions Manage Forests*. London: DFID.
- Hobley, M. (1996) 'Participatory Forestry: The Process of Change in India and Nepal'. *Rural Development Forestry Study Guide 3*. London: ODI.
- NEDA (1998) *Forests and Forestry: Sector and Theme Policy Document*. The Hague: NEDA.
- UNASYLVA (1998) *Accommodating Multiple Interests in Forestry*. Vol. 49, No. 194. Rome: FAO.
- Wiersum, K.F. (1998) *Co-management of Forest Resources*. Wageningen: IAC.

Key Sheets are available on the Internet at: [www.odi.org.uk/keysheets/](http://www.odi.org.uk/keysheets/)  
or through the websites of DFID and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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