

A key strategy for sustainable forest management

Forests in the Caribbean are integral to the economic and social development of nation states. Many rural communities, especially the poor, depend on forest goods and services to support their livelihoods. Community forestry is a key strategy to providing for sustainable livelihoods and economic development as well as enhancing efforts to conserve forest ecosystems.

1. Introduction and context

Community forestry describes the participation of local communities¹ in decisions about how forests are managed and used. This has also been described as participatory forest management, community-based forest management, community-based forestry, and collaborative management (or co-management) of forests.

The degree of participation of local people in forest management varies widely in the Caribbean. Most prevalent is the traditional Colonial model of largely top-down decision making where local people are informed of some decisions made by the government agency managing the forests. However, increasingly there are examples of initiatives where government agencies in the Caribbean are giving local people a greater say in how forests are managed and used, and greater rights to access resources. Some examples of the range of arrangements are highlighted below.

- Many government agencies are more and more working directly with community groups (in some cases whose formation they have catalysed). These initiatives vary in the extent to which the government agency plays a directing versus a facilitating and supporting role. At one end of the spectrum the government directs how communities will assist it with management activities. At the other, the government agency focuses on building the

¹ 'Community' is defined here as the group of people living near to and using forests.



The Clozier Youth Farmers in Grenada have a greenhouse where they grow anthuriums for the hotel industry. (Source CANARI)

capacity of local communities to develop their own strategies for sustainable forest-based livelihoods. Examples of initiatives where the government is more playing a directing role are the National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme in Trinidad and Tobago and the Water Catchment Groups in Saint Lucia. Examples where the government is playing a more facilitating and supporting role are include the Local Forest Management Committees in Jamaica, the Integrated Forest Management and Development Programme in St. Vincent,.

- Government agencies are working directly with forest users to promote sustainable use of the forest resources (for example many community eco-tourism initiatives across the islands and the latanye broom producers in Saint Lucia).



Members of the Dolphin Head Local Forest Management Committee in Jamaica explain features of the nature trail in the Dolphin Head Forest Reserve where they conduct tours. Source CANARI



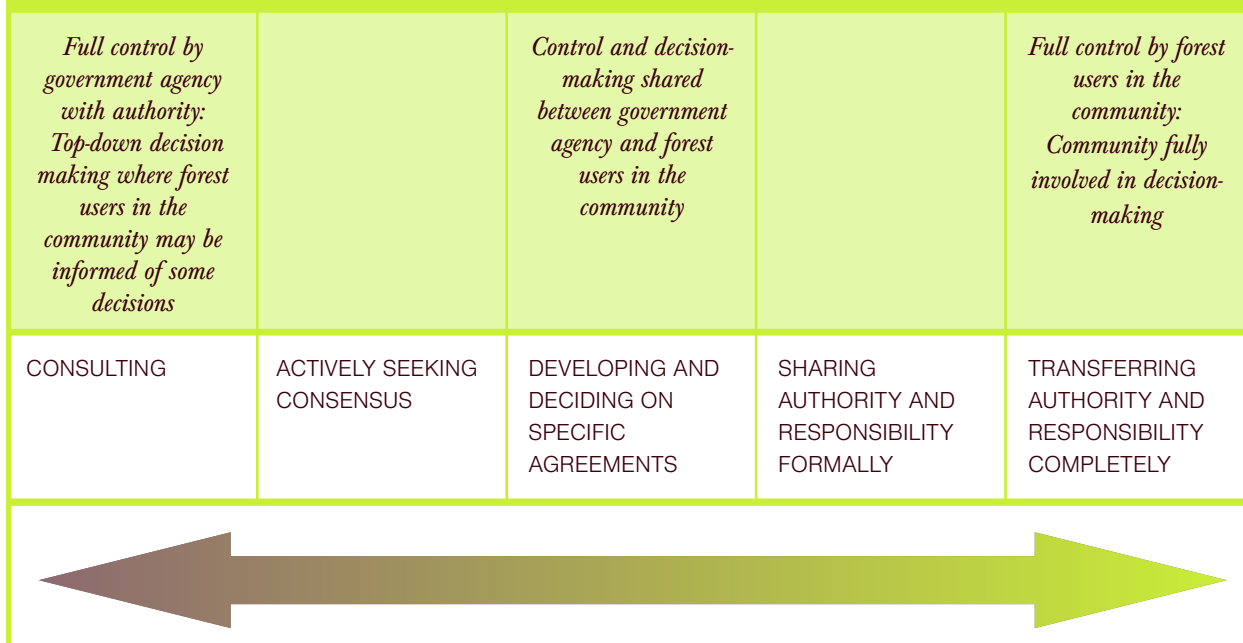
Superior Broom Producers in Saint Lucia make brooms using the latanye palm. Source CANARI

- In some cases government agencies have allocated specific management responsibilities to community groups, either formally (for example the management of the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park by the Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust) or informally (for example the maintenance and development of trails at the Aripo Savannas Environmentally Sensitive Area in Trinidad by Sundew Tourguiding Services).
- There are other examples of community-driven initiatives where people in local communities are seeking to protect and sustainably use the forest resources that are important for them (for example the Fondes Amandes Reforestation Project in

Trinidad, La Fondation Macaya pour le Développement local and Fondation Seguin in Haiti, and the Maroon Community in Nevis).

Community forestry initiatives generally seek to promote the related objectives of forest conservation, sustainable use of forest resources, development of alternative uses (to existing illegal and unsustainable uses), and poverty reduction. However, the emphasis on each of these objectives differs and the trade-offs are not always explicitly negotiated. In many government-driven initiatives livelihood objectives often suffer as more priority is given to forest conservation. In contrast, community-driven initiatives often have a greater emphasis on livelihood benefits.

Figure 1: A continuum of community participation in forest management.²



² Adapted from Borrini-Feyerabend, G. 1996. Collaborative management of protected areas: tailoring the approaches to the context, Issues in Social Policy. IUCN. Gland, Switzerland.

2. Key messages

a. Community forestry is contributing to improved forest management and conservation and is also providing benefits to community livelihoods³.

Reforestation, monitoring, trail maintenance, and fire prevention efforts by communities are contributing to forest conservation, with benefits including increased biodiversity, reduced soil erosion, and improved water quality downstream. Specific livelihood benefits include: increased income from direct employment as well as indirectly through the development of associated small businesses in the community; increased skills and knowledge of people in communities (for example increased literacy, leadership skills, technical knowledge and skills in forest management); improved roads and buildings that the community can use; enhanced community cohesion and pride; new and stronger relationships with other communities; increased confidence to lobby government on community development issues; and better relationships with and access to support from external partners (government agencies, private sector, donor agencies, technical assistance agencies, and research institutions).

b. Enabling policies, laws, structures, and processes are needed to promote and support community forestry. There is need for an improved policy environment and framework to support community forestry in the Caribbean. This would be characterised by: an explicit statement of forest policy (vision, objectives, programmes and actions); strong and functional linkages between forest policy and the other components of the national development policy framework, especially in relation to social development, poverty reduction, water management, rural development, and tourism; the translation of forest policy statements into effective and efficient policy instruments (laws, regulations, guidelines, codes of conduct, standards, etc.); and an explicit inclusion of the principles, goals and tools of participation and devolution within policy statements and instruments. Explicit policy support for community forestry exists for example in the forest policies of Jamaica, Grenada, the Dominica (in draft) and Trinidad and Tobago (in draft). With the notable exception of Jamaica, in most of the Caribbean forestry legislation is outdated and does not explicitly promote or enable community forestry. However, in some countries other legislation provides support for participatory approaches that can be applied to forest management (e.g. the Environmental Management Act of Trinidad and Tobago). Many countries have

³ 'Livelihoods' is defined using the framework developed by the Department for International Development, which is based on the idea that human well-being is determined by the extent to which individuals and households have access to a range of types of "assets", which are usually defined as: *human assets* (e.g. education, skills, talents, health); *financial assets* (e.g. income, savings and access to credit); *social assets* (e.g. family, community and wider social networks); *physical assets* (e.g. standard of housing, access to transportation, etc.); *political assets* (e.g. access to and influence over decision-making processes); and *natural assets* (e.g. ownership or access to natural resources, including land, and ecosystem services). Stakeholders in the Caribbean have identified *political assets* and *cultural assets* as distinct from social capital, as these were felt to be of paramount importance in Caribbean islands.

structures that facilitate participatory approaches in forest management (for example the forestry roundtable and the Consorcio Ambiental Dominicano in the Dominican Republic). Participatory processes in forest policy development and management planning are being increasingly used (for example Grenada and Suriname used highly participatory processes in development of their national forest policy). A framework that enables granting of clear access and commercial use rights is an essential factor for local communities to make and improve their livelihoods based on the sustainable use of forests (for example harvesting of charcoal at the Mankòtè mangrove in Saint Lucia).

c. Sustained and long-term support and capacity building of the community and local organisations is required to enable them to participate effectively in community forestry initiatives. Where government agencies or others are seeking to engage a community in a community forestry initiative, a long-term commitment needs to be made to building the capacity of the community group, especially in key areas such as internal governance, leadership, strategic visioning and planning, fundraising, policy-influence and communications, networking, and business development and management. The Forestry Department in Jamaica assigns a rural sociologist to provide intensive and sustained support to establishing and strengthening the Local Forest Management Committees and this process has been very successful. Mentoring community groups in this way is an important strategy for community forestry.

d. Government agencies must develop key capacities to be able to effectively promote and facilitate community forestry. Capacity-building is also needed for those seeking to promote and facilitate community forestry, including senior forest managers and other staff of forest management and other government agencies. Skills and knowledge is needed in areas such as facilitation; conflict management, negotiation and mediation; communication (including advocacy); stakeholder identification and analysis; stakeholder mobilisation; community profiling and rapid social assessment; collaborative management and partnership building; participatory resource mapping; community-based tourism; business development and management; and participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation. Where these capacities are weak or lacking, government agencies should seek to build them internally (for example through staff such as rural sociologists and social foresters) or use other partners (including non-governmental organisations such as the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute). Investments in human, financial and technical resources are needed to support community forestry initiatives. All of this must be supported by a value system and culture within the government agency that values communities and their perspectives as important and recognises their interests and rights to participate in forest management. Developing capacity to facilitate community forestry in small forestry agencies is challenging, and opportunities for regional and internal exchanges and partnerships (including with civil society) need to be explored.

e. Community forestry initiatives can be implemented via formal or informal co-management arrangements, but in all cases they should be based on sustained efforts to develop mutual trust and respect. Even where formal co-management arrangements exist, community forestry initiatives can break down if there is mistrust, poor communication, and unclear and/or un-negotiated perspectives and needs. It takes time to build relationships and trust and this requires a sustained investment by the government agency. While formal arrangements can allocate clear management rights and responsibilities to local communities, they may have the disadvantage of being less flexible. Informal co-management arrangements can work where there is trust and community organisations and government agencies partner for mutually beneficial outcomes. These arrangements can easily be adapted as capacities and trust are built. However, even informal arrangements should not rest solely on inter-personal relationships, but rather should be for-

malised into policies and processes within the government agency.

3. Conclusion

Forests in the Caribbean are critical resources for economic development and many rural communities, and especially the poor, continue to depend on forest goods and services to support their livelihoods. However many forests, especially in the Caribbean islands, have already been cleared and continue to be lost or seriously degraded. Conservation of forest resources will be increasingly difficult due to increasing demands (legal and illegal) on forest resources caused by the global economic recession. Natural disasters, especially hurricanes, are a severe threat to forests and people. Caribbean countries, their forests, and rural communities dependent on forests for their livelihoods are especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Community forestry is a key strategy in addressing these intertwined challenges and can play an important role in developing sustainable livelihoods for rural communities, adapting to climate change, and reducing risks from natural disasters (for example through community involvement in mangrove conservation and replanting). The potential of community forestry in climate change mitigation efforts, including carbon offsets and markets, should be closely examined. Particularly if properly supported, community forestry will contribute to poverty reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk reduction, conservation of forest biodiversity and improved well-being of Caribbean people.

Caribbean Natural Resources Institute

The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) is a regional technical non-profit organisation which has been working in the islands of the Caribbean for over 20 years.

Our mission is to promote equitable participation and effective collaboration in managing the natural resources critical to development.

Our programmes focus on research, sharing and dissemination of lessons learned, capacity building and fostering regional partnerships.

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