



CANARI Policy Brief

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Participatory Forest Management in the Caribbean: Impacts and Potentials

Making better use of forest resources for equitable, sustainable development

Throughout the world, forest management has been responding in recent years to demands for greater equity in the distribution of forest resources and to the failure of traditional forestry approaches to achieve sustainable development objectives. Increasingly, stakeholder participation, or **participatory forest management**, has become an important element of forest management strategies. Participatory forest management can be defined as structured collaboration between governments, commercial and non-commercial forest resource users, interested organisations, community groups, and other stakeholders, to achieve shared objectives related to the sustainable use of forest resources.

In the island countries of the Caribbean, forest resources tend to be limited in extent, largely accessible to the human population, and under constant pressure for conversion to other uses. In the absence of a strong surveillance and enforcement capacity, which none of the countries of the region can financially or politically afford, stakeholder participation provides the only avenue for effective management. It is also the most effective framework for addressing objectives of poverty alleviation, economic development and social equity in the management of natural resources.

For these reasons, many countries in the region have been revising forest legislation, policies, procedures, and management plans to include directives and strategies for stakeholder participation in decision-making and management. Government forestry agencies have increased their efforts to work with and through non-governmental partners, in some cases pushed along this path by international assistance programmes. Forestry administration personnel have received considerable training in fields

related to participatory forest management. While there has been real progress in some countries, too often these changes are taking place without adequate information based on experience, and within a broader context of continuing centralised management, which limits their scope and potential effectiveness. This brief, which is based on a study conducted by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute on the use of participatory forest management in ten countries of the insular Caribbean, provides some guidance for the further development of participatory forest management in the Caribbean.

A look at participatory forest management in the Caribbean

Forest management partnerships in the Caribbean involve forest management agencies, NGOs, community groups, businesses, local resource users, and technical assistance organisations. The different stakeholders often play multiple roles, including mobiliser, partner, facilitator, regulator, and technical advisor. NGOs have been crucial in supporting the participation of weaker community and resource user groups.

The motivations of different stakeholders vary. Forestry administrations and other governmental stakeholders are usually interested in increasing their management capacity by securing the help of other partners. Local resource users tend to be interested in improving livelihoods, income, and quality of life, while other civil society stakeholders may be motivated by concerns about equity and social justice. In entering into partnerships, negotiation on objectives is often needed, resulting in projects that have both environmental and socio-economic dimensions and that require input from a range of non-traditional actors, such as water resource management agencies, development NGOs, ministries of community development, and tourism enterprises.

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Participatory forest management embraces many types of partnerships and arrangements. In the Caribbean, the following types are the most common:

Type of arrangement	Characteristics
Contractor/contractee relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives and outputs defined by the contracting party • The arrangement only defines the rights and responsibilities of parties to contract, not others who may affect or be affected by management
Loose collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives generally defined by initiating party; entry open to others based on interest • Parties not bound by a formal agreement
Formal collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives defined jointly by parties to agreement • Roles, responsibilities, rights and benefits clearly spelled out and to some extent binding • Important stakeholders may be left out, affecting the potential for achieving management objectives
Multi-stakeholder management or advisory bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives defined by multiple stakeholders • May not result in actual reallocation of responsibility but function only at an advisory level • May influence or define policy • Benefits to participants least direct; maintaining interest can be a challenge

Keys to lasting partnerships

Some examples of long-standing PFM arrangements are described in the boxes below. These and other enduring stakeholder partnerships tend to have many of the following characteristics:

- C National forest policy is generally favourable to stakeholder participation and provides some level of guidance for the development of collaborative arrangements
- C At least one technically competent actor, whether a government agency, NGO, or international assistance agency, takes the lead to get the process started and maintains support until the arrangement is functioning effectively
- C The objectives of all parties are respected, even when they differ, and are compatible with overall management objectives
- C The roles and responsibilities of all parties are clearly spelled out and fully meet management requirements
- C The rights of all parties in the arrangement are secured through a formal agreement, a policy directive or a management plan accepted by all
- C The benefits to all parties are perceived by the parties to be commensurate with their investments
- C Mechanisms for ongoing dialogue and negotiation among the parties are effective and their rules are based on principles of mutual respect and equal rights.

The Asa Wright Nature Centre: A Private Initiative to Manage Both Private and Public Forest Land

The Asa Wright Nature Centre (AWNC), located in the forests of Trinidad's Northern Range, was established under private ownership and management in 1967 for the purpose of protecting forests through a strategy of ecotourism and land acquisition. Starting with only 193 acres in 1967, the AWNC is now responsible for the management of 1000 acres of forest acquired through strategic land acquisition using returns from its successful ecotourism activities. This includes 250 acres of undemarcated forest reserve that Government has leased to the Centre for 99 years in compensation for 36 acres of mineral-rich land compulsorily acquired from AWNC in 1980.

AWNC forest lands are managed through a mix of loose partnership arrangements and formal agreements. The Board of the AWNC comprises eighteen unpaid, voluntary members (10 resident national and 8 non-resident international) representing a range of development perspectives - from ecology to economics. National members constitute the Board of

Management responsible for overseeing the implementation of Board decisions by staff.

Formal arrangements have been developed with surrounding communities to provide services to the AWNC. Village entrepreneurs provide transport and off-site tour-guide services, and there is a cadre of on-site, trained nature tour guides, who are from nearby communities, employed at the Centre. Local residents benefit directly as employees, suppliers of agricultural produce and other services or indirectly through social support activities provided by the Centre, e.g. a managed playground in the village, family health and vacation benefits to employees.

Stakeholder conflicts are rare but when they do arise, are managed effectively through internal facilitation strategies. Benefits to the environment have been watershed and wildlife protection and reduction in squatting. Revenues from the Centre's ecotourism enterprises are ploughed back into its land acquisition and public education programmes.

Impacts of participatory forest management

Much more research is needed to fully understand the impacts that participatory approaches have had and potentially could have on the management of forest resources in the Caribbean. But a review of existing cases gives evidence of some significant positive impacts, as well as unanticipated negative ones that may disproportionately affect poor or otherwise marginalized stakeholders. Some of the impacts that have been observed include:

Type of Impact	Observations
Ecological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource degradation has been reversed and ecosystem health restored through stabilized use patterns and the control of overuse Managed harvesting of trees by resource users has resulted in more rapid regeneration
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Livelihoods of persons who depend on forest resources have become more secure as a result of better managed forests (whose products can be sold at a higher price), increased skills, and the exclusion of competitors A few participatory arrangements have generated local employment Livelihoods of those excluded from access to forest resources have become less secure, with fewer economic opportunities
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder groups that have become active partners in participatory arrangements have benefited from learning and information sharing, increasing their management capacity and skills Forest resource users who have been excluded from new management arrangements (and who often include the poor and powerless) may have been alienated and demotivated to protect forest resources Changes in management arrangements have resulted in shifts in local power dynamics, producing new conflicts by favouring some groups at the expense of others
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The culture, attitudes, and even structures of forest management agencies have become more focused on fostering links between forests and development Management agreements between governments and other forest stakeholders are being used more frequently, but it has been difficult to move away from traditional structures and relationships The involvement of external agencies has had both positive and negative impacts, on the one hand supporting capacity-building, while on the other hand fostering dependency on outside financial and technical support
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of participatory forest management experiences for advocacy by NGOs and regional organizations appears to have sensitised policy-makers on the usefulness of participatory approaches Experience with stakeholder participation, even if not fully successful, moves policy in a direction more favourable to participation

Bosque Seco: Forest Communities Mobilizing for Forest Protection and Economic Development

The residents of the small community of Cabeza de Toro in the southwest of the Dominican Republic have long relied on the Bosque Seco (Dry Forest) for lumber, charcoal, and other goods that supplement their income from small-scale agriculture. In 1975, however, the community's way of life was threatened when the government declared the area a "Charcoal Zone" and truckloads of outsiders began to clear-cut the forest for commercial charcoal and lumber. Well-connected landowners also took advantage of the situation by seeking to grab title to state lands in the forest. For the residents of Cabeza de Toro, the onslaught of outsiders resulted in the pollution of their water supply and loss of livestock, but also in increased business for local shops, bars, and restaurants. Although initially divided, the community with the help of a local development organisation began to come together around a strategy to protect the resources of the forest in order to assure their own future livelihoods. Some of the components of the strategy included:

C the establishment of a Committee for the Protection of the Dry Forest, which worked to sensitise the community on the requirements for natural resource conservation

C the formation of a team of voluntary forest wardens, who

trained timber harvesters and charcoal producers in techniques to minimise the negative impact on the forest

C initiation of dialogue with local and national government agencies to seek solutions to the problems caused by the new policy

These discussions resulted in an arrangement whereby the community, through the Committee for the Protection of the Dry Forest, selects the forest wardens, who receive a stipend from the government; controls the harvesting of lumber in the forest and has the right to seize and sell illegal lumber; and manages the transport of products from the forest, assuring that all income for that service remains in the community.

The experience of Cabeza de Toro has motivated other communities in the Bosque Seco to organise. There are now thirty-one similar associations, which are united under the Federation of Producers of the Bosque Seco, and which work in close collaboration with the national forestry administration. The government relies heavily on these associations to assist in the management of the forest and is pursuing similar approaches in other parts of the country.

“Our Forest, Our Policy, Our Future”: Grenada’s Participatory Forest Policy Process

In Grenada, many of the problems affecting forests, including deforestation, soil erosion and natural resource degradation, are simply a result of people struggling to obtain a livelihood. And because many of these activities take place outside Forest Reserves, the Forestry Department had little control over them. While Forestry Department staff realized that forest management was not only about the production of timber in Reserves, but also about multiple forest uses on both public and private lands, the national forest policy, prepared by external consultants, provided no guidance on working with forest stakeholders.

As a result, in 1997 the Department embarked on the development of a new forest policy that involved all stakeholders and that looked beyond the management of the Forest Reserves. The well-facilitated eighteen-month process, which was led by a Forest Policy Process Committee comprised of representatives of agencies and sectors with a major stake in forest management, included the following components:

C sub-sector studies of forest policy issues such as watershed management, recreation, and wildlife conservation

C administration of questionnaires to a wide range of stakeholders and the general public

C radio call-in programmes to seek public input on forest management issues

C consultation meetings with fourteen communities or stakeholder groups

C a consensus-building workshop involving over 180 stakeholder representatives to develop a policy vision and objectives

C a feedback workshop following the drafting of the policy to seek review and comments from stakeholders.

The resulting policy, which was approved by Cabinet in September 1998, addresses the country’s social, economic, and cultural needs and as such is owned by all Grenadians. But its implementation requires a restructuring of the Forestry Department so that it can effectively play the roles of facilitator, partner, and advocate. This difficult restructuring process is now underway.

How forest policies can support effective stakeholder participation

Forest policies in the Caribbean region are becoming more supportive of participatory approaches, but the overall policy framework still tends to favour centralised forms of management. Some measures that could make forest policies more effective include:

- Greater stakeholder involvement in policy formulation, with processes like the one used in Grenada (see above box)
- Systems for continuous and participatory policy review
- Policy support for capacity-building of management partners, and especially for non-governmental stakeholders
- Policy guidance in support of benefits and incentives for participating stakeholders

Policy should be informed by solid research on the approaches and strategies that are most likely to achieve objectives of forest conservation and sustainability. Some of the questions that research needs to address include:

- What forms of training and technical assistance are most effective in increasing the capacity of the different partners?
- How does participatory forest management affect different stakeholders through changes in power relations, development of new rules regarding access to forest resources, the allocation of rights and benefits, and the imposition of new or changed responsibilities?
- What are the characteristics of effective and equitable processes of negotiation among partners regarding objectives, actions, and the allocation of rights, responsibilities, and rewards?
- What are the characteristics of efficient and cost-effective systems for monitoring effectiveness in meeting ecological, economic, social, and institutional objectives?
- What are the costs and benefits of decentralised versus centralised management arrangements?

Caribbean Natural Resources Institute

Fernandes Industrial Centre
Administration Building
Eastern Main Road, Laventille
Trinidad and Tobago

Telephone: 868 626-6062 • Fax: 868 626-1788
Email: info@canari.org • Website: www.canari.org