



**CARIBBEAN NATURAL RESOURCES INSTITUTE  
(CANARI)**

**LOCAL FOREST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES: A NEW  
APPROACH TO FOREST MANAGEMENT IN JAMAICA**

**Tighe Geoghegan and Noel Bennett**

**Prepared in collaboration with  
the Jamaica Forestry Department  
and with the support of the European Commission**

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## Executive Summary

Throughout the world, forestry departments have been rethinking the way they work in order to meet the challenges of a changing sector. As forestry in many countries becomes less about timber production and more about watershed protection, biodiversity conservation, and tourism, the range of stakeholders grows larger and more diverse, while regulation and enforcement become more difficult. Management that emphasises collaboration with stakeholders over regulation makes sense in this new context, but it involves risks. Jamaica stands out for its willingness to meet these risks head on, and in doing so has begun to create a new and positive dynamic between the Forestry Department and the people it serves.

This paper presents the results of research by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) and the Jamaica Forestry Department (FD) on one component of Jamaica's new approach: the establishment of Local Forest Management Committees (LFMCs) to involve stakeholders in managing forest reserves. In order to better understand the requirements for effective stakeholder participation in forest management, the research followed the establishment of the first LFMCs for two years. These LFMCs are in the Buff Bay/Pencar Watershed Management Unit, an exceptionally steep watershed, which supports a range of uses that impact on its forests and the services they provide. The area has among the highest poverty rates in Jamaica.

Eighteen months after their establishment, the LFMCs had become a channel of communication between the FD and local stakeholders that is valued by both. They have contributed to the Department's watershed management plan; helped it to better understand problems occurring within reserves; suggested ways in which forest management can be improved through collaboration with stakeholders; identified opportunities for increasing the contribution of forest reserves to local development; and translated some of these into small but ambitious projects.

Despite their progress, the LFMCs have not yet taken root. Participation in meetings has declined, and some important stakeholder groups are not represented. Challenges that must be overcome if the LFMCs are to succeed include:

- C a sometimes unclear understanding of what the LFMCs are meant to achieve and how their objectives and priorities are set
- C an overreliance on reaching stakeholders through local organisations, which do not represent all important stakeholders and are often weak, undemocratic and unstable
- C impediments to the participation of the poor, who tend to be marginalised from community life
- C disinterest of some government agencies, which have not found a compelling reason to participate
- C an insufficient understanding of how various forms of power (legal, informational, economic, social) affect the work and development of the LFMCs.

While they have not yet had a major impact on forest management, the LFMCs are having some influence (and could have more) on national policy and on the institutional culture of the FD. The FD is ahead of the policy curve in Jamaica, which appears to support decentralisation and delegation while consolidating authority at the highest levels of government. While the 1996 Forest Act defines a centralised, hierarchical structure for forest management, the FD's management approach

emphasises participation, and the experience of the LFMCs has reinforced its commitment to stakeholder involvement.

The establishment of the LFMCs is part of a wider effort by senior management to transform the way the FD works and staff perceive their roles. Training has done much to change perceptions and attitudes, but efforts to establish LFMCs in other watersheds have demonstrated that the commitment and skills of some staff are still wanting. The value of the LFMCs as pilots could be enhanced by more opportunities for staff from other regions and from the central office to be involved.

Like FD staff, LFMC members need specific knowledge and skills to contribute meaningfully to management planning. Their limited knowledge of forest management constrains their ability to assist in developing the management plan for the watershed. While forest management training for LFMC members would be costly, it would substantially increase the usefulness of the committees and assure that they do not become simply rubber stamps.

One meaningful role is in identifying opportunities to improve local livelihoods, especially of the poor, through the sustainable use forest reserve resources. Although the poor currently make little use of the forest, opportunities in tree plantation, nature tourism, and timber extraction exist and are being explored by the Committees.

The main lessons from the experience of the LFMCs that can be useful in developing them further and in extending the approach to other areas within and outside Jamaica include:

1. *Advisory bodies comprising only organisational members have limitations if the objective is to include all major stakeholders.* Mechanisms are needed to involve unorganised stakeholders, and to assure that the voices of stakeholders are balanced fairly and do not mimic and reinforce inequitable local power structures.

2. *The objectives of the collaboration should determine the structure of collaborative management.* The objectives of all parties need to be clear before the structure of the institution can be considered, and that structure should be based on the local institutional context, which will vary over time and from place to place. Institutions for participatory forest management should use and build on what already exists rather than adding new layers to the local institutional landscape or attempting to prop up weak organisations in order to secure their involvement.

3. *Continuous improvement approaches offer the opportunity and challenge to build dynamism into management planning.* Flexible alternatives to rigid management plans can respond to changes in the natural, socio-economic, and political environment as they occur, while giving stakeholders an ongoing role in management.

4. *A commitment to participation has major implications for the way organisations are structured and operate.* For forestry departments, a collaborative approach is likely to require changes in rules and procedures, budget allocations, and the responsibilities, training needs, and working conditions of staff.

5. *Participatory forest management requires the full, knowledgeable, and equitable participation of all appropriate stakeholders.* Making participation work means responding to the capacity needs of different stakeholders, paying attention to the balance of power within the arrangement, and sharing an understanding of how - and by whom - different types of decisions are made.

6. *Incentives and benefits are the key to getting and keeping stakeholders involved.* Stakeholders in participatory management arrangements expect benefits, ranging from improved watershed management to employment opportunities, for themselves and for their community. They may also require incentives to maintain their involvement.

7. *The influence of external factors needs to be understood and taken into account in the design of participatory approaches.* While the involvement of international assistance agencies and technical advisors can be valuable, it can also skew agendas and or create unrealistic standards and expectations.

8. *Forest management that benefits stakeholders cannot be separated from other aspects of environmental management or local development, and requires a diversity of partnerships.* The management of the Buff Bay/Pencar watershed illustrates the integrated nature of development, incorporating forestry, agricultural extension, land use planning, environmental education, and numerous other disciplines.

9. *Effectiveness on the ground should feed back into policy.* Experiences such as that of the LFMCs have the potential, through well-designed feedback loops, to influence the national political context, and the views of politicians, in ways that are favourable to participatory approaches.

## Acknowledgements

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A somewhat different version of this paper has been published in the International Institute for Environment and Development Gatekeeper Series, under the title *Risking Change: Experimenting with Local Forest Management Committees in Jamaica* (Gatekeeper Series no. 110).

## Acronyms

CANARI	Caribbean Natural Resources Institute
FD	Forestry Department
FIDCO	Forest Industries Development Corporation
JAS	Jamaica Agricultural Society
JCDT	Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust
LFMC	Local Forest Management Committee
NEPA	National Environment and Planning Agency
NWC	National Water Commission
RADA	Rural Agriculture Development Authority
TFT	Trees for Tomorrow Project

# **Risking Change: Experimenting with Local Forest Management Committees in Jamaica**

**Tighe Geoghegan<sup>1</sup> and Noel Bennett<sup>2</sup>**

## **Introduction**

This paper presents the results of a research project undertaken by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) in collaboration with the Jamaica Forestry Department (FD) between June 2000 and May 2002. The project sought to improve understanding of the requirements for effective stakeholder participation in forest management by examining a pilot participatory management mechanism for one of the FD's management areas.

The research followed the establishment of Jamaica's first Local Forest Management Committees (LFMCs) from the planning stage until they were established, meeting regularly, and beginning to undertake their own activities. A Research Advisory Committee, whose members included persons familiar with the local and national context, assured the research's practical relevance by suggesting issues to explore and providing feedback on preliminary findings. The research results were also shared periodically with the LFMCs themselves, and their feedback was incorporated into the findings presented here.

## **The context, globally and nationally**

The modern trend towards stakeholder participation in forest management, which began in the 1980s, has spread throughout the developing world as governments have tried to come to terms with growing demands on forest resources in the face of their own human and financial constraints.

In Jamaica, structural adjustment led to policies during the 1970s and 1980s favouring reallocation of forest reserves for commercial timber and coffee production, reducing the role and capacity of the FD. Without adequate management during a period of national economic crisis, remaining reserves were illegally exploited for timber and fuelwood and squatted for agriculture and residential use. The results of the conversion of forestland and lack of management included increased soil erosion, landslides, flooding, and declining water quality.

The FD was revitalised in the 1990s with support from the United Nations Development Programme and the Trees for Tomorrow (TFT) project, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, which emphasised the development of participatory approaches to forest and watershed management. This assistance supported new forestry legislation, enacted in 1996, followed by a National Forest Management and Conservation Plan and updated Forest Policy. Adopted by Cabinet in 2001, these documents define a central role for stakeholders in managing forest resources. The primary mechanism for implementing the strategy of community participation is the establishment of Local Forest Management Committees.

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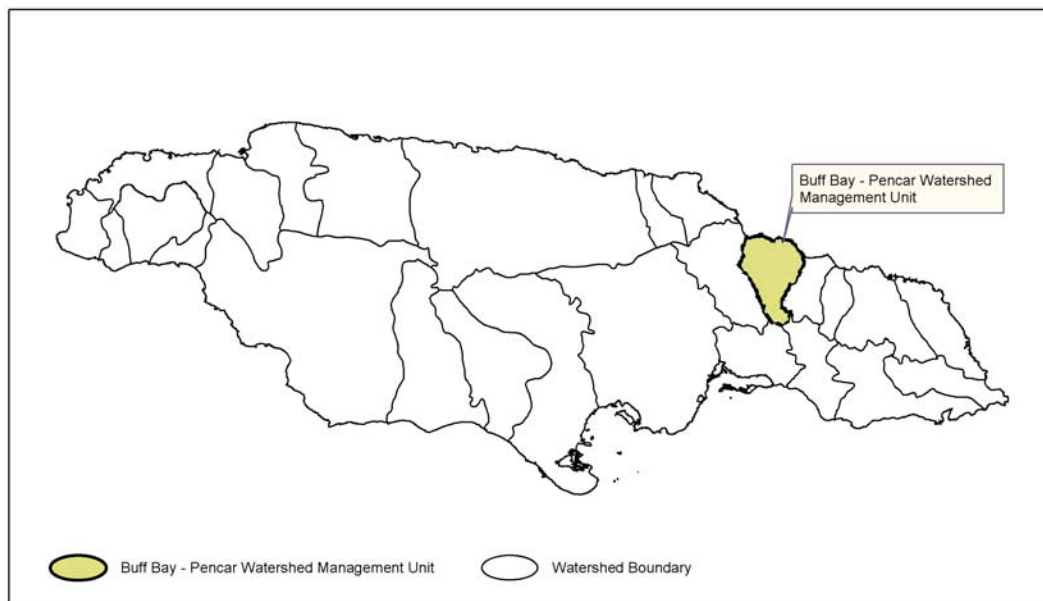
The concept of LFMCS was not entirely new to Jamaica, where a government policy of delegating management responsibility to local organisations evolved in the early 1990s in response to a need for reduced public expenditure, pressure from international development agencies, and lobbying by NGOs. This policy has produced a range of experiments in participatory resource management, including the delegation of protected area management to NGOs and the establishment of community-based advisory committees and Parish Development Committees. The results of these efforts have however been mixed and therefore do not provide much guidance on how to set up local-level forest management committees.

## The place: the Buff Bay/Pencar watershed

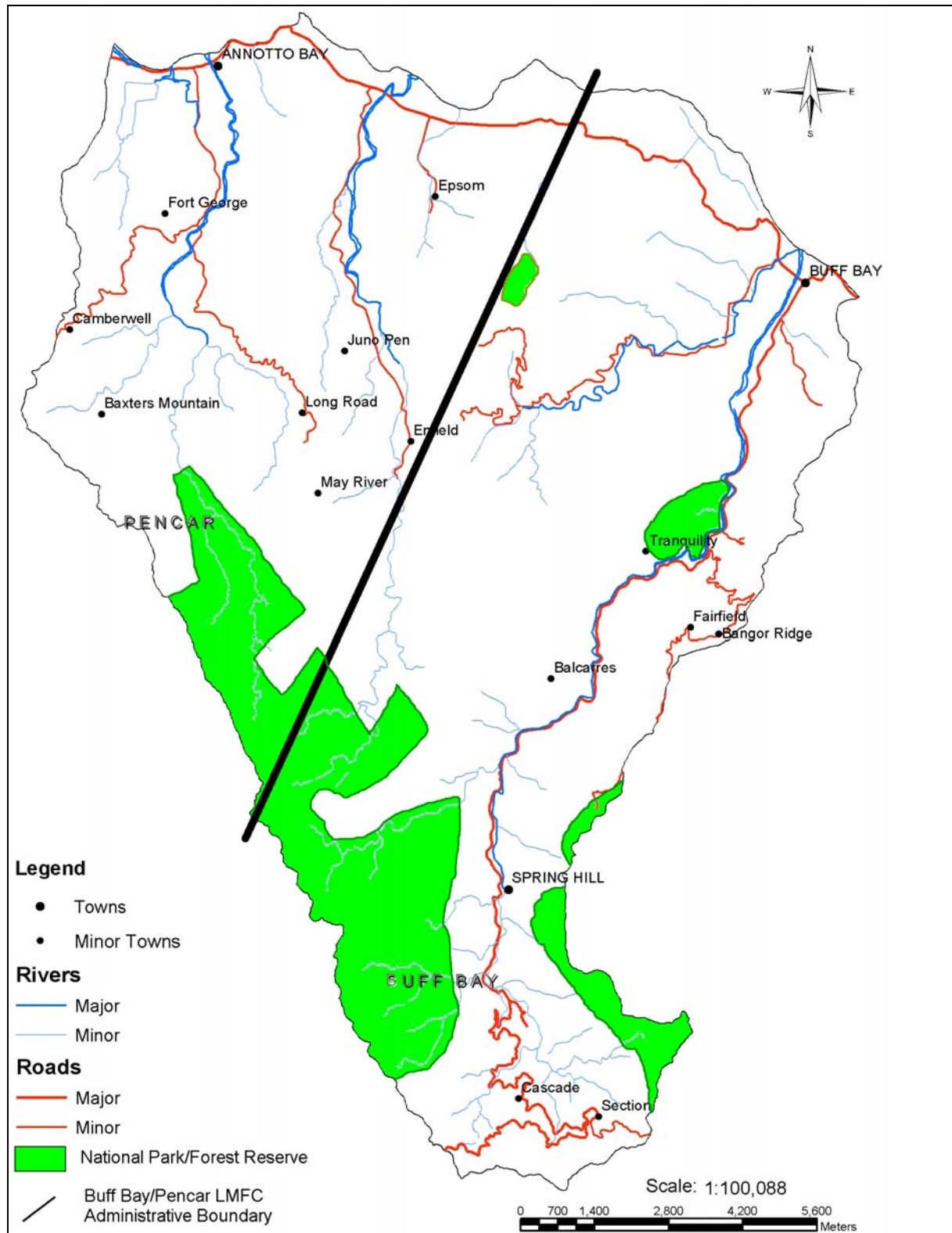
Using the country's Watershed Management Unit system (Figure 1), the TFT project selected a pilot watershed, Buff Bay/Pencar, based on a range of biophysical, social, and logistical criteria, to test new approaches to watershed management.

The 20,000-hectare watershed includes two major drainages that run from around 2000m in the northern Blue Mountains to the coast (Figure 2). Some of the upper watershed is forest reserve and overlapping portions of the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park, but much of the forest, especially on the Buff Bay side, has been converted to coffee plantations over the past twenty years. The land drops steeply to the sea, and deforestation appears to have increased the frequency and severity of landslides and flooding that periodically damage crops and infrastructure in the area. The middle and lower reaches are dominated by small mixed-crop farming. Most of the substantial income from the Blue Mountain coffee grown there goes to absentee landowners, and the area is ironically among the poorest in Jamaica, with poverty rates estimated in excess of 25%. The watershed's population is around 30,000 and farming is the major occupation.

**Figure 1: Map of Jamaica with Watershed Management Units**



**Figure 2: Buff Bay/Pencar Watershed**





## **The idea: how the LFMCs were established**

The idea for Local Forest Management Committees comes from the 1996 Forest Act, which permits the Minister responsible for forest management, in consultation with the Conservator of Forests, to “appoint a forest management committee for the whole or any part of a forest reserve, forest management area or protected area”. The Act defines the functions of these committees as:

- (a) monitoring of the condition of natural resources in the relevant forest reserve, forest management area or protected area;*
- (b) holding of discussions, public meetings and like activities relating to such natural resources;*
- (c) advising the Conservator on matters relating to the development of the forest management plan and the making of regulations;*
- (d) proposing incentives for conservation practices in the area in which the relevant forest reserve, forest management area or protected area is located;*
- (e) assisting in the design and execution of conservation projects in that area; and*
- (f) such other functions as may be provided by or under this Act.*

In early 2000, encouraged by the response to TFT’s community outreach, the FD decided to test the LFMC concept in the Buff Bay/Pencar watershed. Because the Buff Bay and Pencar portions of the watershed were separated by their geography and lack of road connections, individual committees were proposed for each. Since the FD wants to develop LFMCs in other watersheds, it has taken a learning approach that includes the research described in this paper as well as participatory assessments by the LFMCs and FD staff.

In September 2000, the FD held meetings to assess stakeholders’ interest and get feedback on proposals regarding the Committee’ objectives, composition, and structure. The response was positive, and the LFMCs began meeting in November 2000.

Membership is open to “all community groups, organisations, NGOs and private sector entities present in the Buff Bay and Pencar sub-watersheds whose members are willing to participate” (Forestry Department n.d.). Invitations were extended to a wide range of organisations identified during earlier sociological fieldwork. National and local government agencies with an interest in watershed management were also invited.

The LFMC members opted for a formal structure, and the FD drafted constitutions that the committees finalised and accepted. The committees elect their own officers and meet bimonthly, with joint meetings of the two sub-watersheds twice a year. The FD serves as the secretariat for the committees.

## The stakeholders: who are the LFMCs meant to represent?

The FD broadly identified the watershed stakeholders as small and large farmers, local communities, government departments, community institutions including schools and churches, and non-governmental and community-based organisations. The design of the LFMCs was based on an assumption that the interests of individual stakeholders could be represented by existing local and national organisations. While in theory, membership in the LFMC is open to all stakeholders; it is legal entities and formal organisations that have been targeted and invited to join.

A stakeholder analysis (Table 1) shows that despite the FD's efforts at inclusion, some important stakeholders have been left out. These include the poorer segments of the community who tend not to be involved in associations but who were a major target of the FD's outreach work. Other stakeholders, including private forest landowners and forest resource users, are also not directly represented (although some may be members of organisations such as citizens associations, which represent different interests on the committees.) The FD continues its outreach to many segments of the community, but the issue of representation of these stakeholder groups has not yet been addressed.

**Table 1**  
**Buff Bay/Pencar Forest Lands Stakeholder Analysis**

Interests/ Objectives	Stakeholders	Sources/basis of power	LFMC Representatives	Gaps
<b>Watershed resource management agents</b>				
Resource sustainability Watershed protection	Government	Laws governing watershed use	FD, National Environment and Planning Agency, National Water Commission (NWC)	None, but participation of some agencies has been sporadic
	Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust (NGO manager of Blue and John Crow Mountains NP)	Delegation instrument and co-management agreement	None	Was invited but has not participated
<b>Forest resource owners</b>				
Protection from landslides, flooding, etc. Acceptable use of neighbouring lands	Private landowners	Large landowners have access to political directorate; smaller landowners have little power		Not directly represented, as no organisations exist specifically for private forest landowners
	Government	Power to determine how public lands are allocated and used	NWC	National Land Agency, responsible for unallocated state lands, has not participated. NWC's participation sporadic
<b>Forest resource users</b>				
Access to resources Sound management to maintain supply and quality	Timber harvesters Fuelwood and charcoal producers	Mostly poor, sometimes operate illegally; little power, few advocates with power		No representation (and no recent timber harvesting licenses issued)

Interests/ Objectives	Stakeholders	Sources/basis of power	LFMC Representatives	Gaps
	Tourism enterprises	Mostly small-scale; access to limited support from Ministry of Tourism.	One small ecotourism operation (River Edge)	No representation of sector except River Edge
	Water abstractors	Licenses and agreements with the National Water Authority	NWC	NWC (no private abstractors operating in watershed)
<b>Off site forest resource enterprises</b>				
Maintenance of supplies	Sawmills	Very little, since much of their lumber comes from illegal operations		Saw millers are not organised and tend to avoid the attention of government
<b>Watershed (non-forest) land users</b>				
<p>Access to land</p> <p>Protection from erosion, landslides, flooding, etc.</p> <p>Access to adequate supplies of clean water</p> <p>Revenue earning opportunities from forests</p> <p>Social and economic opportunities through use of local resources and employment in forest management initiatives</p>	Farmers (large and small, landowners and tenants)	Large operators have access to political directorates; Coffee Industry Board is powerful advocate for coffee farmers; other small farmers must rely on (often weak) Jamaica Agriculture Society chapters for advocacy support	Coffee Industry Board  JAS chapters  St. Mary Banana Co. (large plantation operation)	Most farmers represented only if members of an active JAS chapter
	Residents (legal and illegal)	Largely through their national political representatives; local government being reactivated but still weak  Residents derive security and support from local government institutions such as schools and police	Local citizens associations and development NGOs  Government service agencies (schools, police, National Works Agency, Public Health Dept.)	Representation dependent on status of local organisations and individuals' participation in them; many associations are weak  Illegal residents (squatters) are not easily identifiable and not organised  Participation of government service agencies sporadic  Churches represent widest spectrum of communities, but are not members of LFMCs (although some church leaders have been supportive)
<b>Watershed resource enterprises</b>				
Access to primary products	Agricultural producers and marketers	Co-ops receive some support from politically- connected local development NGOs	Local agricultural cooperatives  Coffee Industry Board	Local co-ops are members of the LFMCs but tend to be weak and poorly supported by farmers

Interests/ Objectives	Stakeholders	Sources/basis of power	LFMC Representatives	Gaps
<b>Forest conservation advocates</b>				
Biodiversity protection, natural resource conservation, sustainable use	Interested citizens (local and national)	NGO advocacy organisations	Portland Environmental Protection Agency	Some environmental NGOs operating in area are not members
	International agencies operating in Jamaica	Control of funds for major environmental initiatives	Trees for Tomorrow Project (Canadian International Development Agency)	U.S. AID manages a national watershed project; has attended LFMC meetings but not a member

## The stakes: what do people want from the LFMCs?

### *How the LFMCs are seen by the FD*

Forestry Department documents consistently define a forest management role for the LFMCs, e.g., “The Local Forest Management Committee... together with Forestry Department staff, will manage the forest within a watershed area” (Forestry Department 2000). But the responsibilities described in these and other documents, including the Forest Act, are those of an advisor and supporter rather than full management partner: “The LFMC will act in an advisory role to the FD for the management of the forested Crown land...” (Forestry Department 2001); “its most important role is to monitor the implementation of the Local Forest Management Plan” (Forestry Department 2000).

Interviews with FD staff help to clarify this inconsistency. While the Department intends that the main roles of the LFMCs will be advisory and informational, it also expects that through the LFMCs, stakeholders will take on or assist with certain management responsibilities, particularly monitoring of activity within forest reserves or assisting in the management of specific sites. The FD does not expect the LFMCs or their members to be involved in technical aspects of forest management, or that legal authority will be vested in them, at least not in the short term. On the other hand, some staff hope that the input of the LFMCs will make the FD’s policies and practices more relevant to local development. One officer felt that the main purpose of the LFMCs was to optimise the sustainable returns to the community from forest resources, while another mentioned the need to meet local expectations of economic benefits through work with the FD.

### *The FIDCO legacy: expectation of jobs*

In the late 1970s, in order to make Jamaica self-sufficient in lumber, the Government established the Forest Industries Development Company (FIDCO) and transferred to it more than 20,000 ha of public land, including forest reserve, for timber production. Approximately 1,750 ha were in the Buff Bay/Pencar watershed.

Between 1978 and Hurricane Gilbert in 1988, which destroyed about half of its plantations across the island, FIDCO employed many local people in cutting and planting trees and building roads. Upon completion of salvaging following Gilbert, FIDCO went into decline, and with it the local jobs that people had depended on to supplement their other economic activities. Throughout most of the 1990s, the FD was little seen in the area. Its increased recent presence as a result of TFT-supported outreach has raised hopes within the watershed and especially among the poor for a new era of economic benefits through work in the forest.

### *Views and expectations of LFMC members*

At early LFMC meetings, exercises were conducted to identify members’ expectations. Members expressed concern about the link they perceive between deforestation and poor land use in the upper

watershed and landslides and flooding during the rainy season. They would like the LFMCs to support watershed protection through environmental education and reforestation. Members would also like more local economic opportunities through timber harvesting, jobs with the FD, and indirect use of forest resources for activities such as ecotourism. At the same time, they are concerned about biodiversity conservation and would like the local population to take greater responsibility for forest protection.

Some members who are also active in other aspects of community life see the LFMCs as a potential vehicle for achieving some of their longstanding development objectives. One local educator, for example, hopes that the LFMCs, by serving as a forum for addressing one set of local development issues, can contribute to a larger objective of increased community-based governance and decentralised development planning.

### ***Expectations of other institutional actors***

The priority given to watershed management by the Government of Jamaica is illustrated by the establishment by the Prime Minister of a National Integrated Watershed Management Council comprising high-level representatives from government and civil society. A national Watershed Policy, now under review, includes provision for Local Watershed Committees “to spearhead work at the local level”. The National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA), the agency responsible for implementing the Watershed Policy, hopes LFMCs can serve as Local Watershed Committees in some areas. Although initially not very active, NEPA has recently begun attending LFMC meetings more regularly to develop this concept.

Some other government agencies have also seen the LFMCs as potentially supportive to their missions, but their participation has depended on the availability and personal interest of local officers. Other agencies apparently have not seen the relevance of the LFMCs to their own mandates, and have not been involved in their development.

## **The preliminary results**

In their first eighteen months, both LFMCs met regularly and addressed a range of matters, including making licenses to harvest trees within forest reserves available to local people, the expansion of the FD’s free seedling programme to include fruit trees, and the creation of opportunities for local people to assist with reforestation and serve as honorary forest wardens. These discussions and suggestions have been reflected in the forest management plan for the watershed, which was prepared by FD technical staff (Forestry Department 2001). The plan is intended to be the major vehicle for the input of the LFMCs in forest management planning and decision-making, and the LFMCs are expected to assist in finalising it and monitoring its implementation. However, the research required for the plan took considerably longer than anticipated, and although FD staff presented elements of the draft plan to the LFMCs for feedback on several occasions, the draft was only completed in November 2001 and in May 2002 had still not been presented formally to the LFMCs. An abbreviated or “popular” version is being prepared, with the technical sections moved to an appendix for easier comprehension by local stakeholders.

Without the management plan to focus their work, the LFMCs have explored with the FD opportunities for collaborative forest management projects. These discussions have resulted in a project by the Pencar LFMC to establish a plant nursery and demonstration agroforestry plot on forest reserve land, under a Memorandum of Understanding with the FD. Funding has been secured

and the project is getting underway. Encouraged by the Pencar LFMC's success in obtaining funding, the Buff Bay LFMC is preparing a proposal for an ecotourism project in its portion of the watershed.

### ***What has worked well***

The LFMCs are still in their infancy; their role and purpose are not yet clearly defined; the two committees have not established individual identities; and they cannot yet help much in dealing with complex forest management issues. They have however managed to make small but important contributions to the watershed forest management plan.

According to a participatory evaluation held at the second annual joint meeting of the LFMCs, the *process* of developing the LFMCs has also resulted in important benefits, particularly in enhancing local understanding of the value of forests and the requirements for effective management. Committee members feel that they have personally learned a great deal about watershed management, and that the FD's outreach to schools and CBOs has made a significant local impact.

This success came at a cost. The awareness campaign, designed and led by TFT and FD rural sociologists, included 88 field visits to promote the idea of the LFMCs in the four months prior to their establishment, as well as training programmes and presentations at schools and communities. In addition, the FD provided local farmers with over 30,000 tree seedlings through its private planting programme. Agroforestry demonstration plots were set up in conjunction with local schools and farmers throughout the watershed. The groundwork for community engagement was laid over the two years prior to the establishment of the LFMCs through activities including a forest inventory and socio-economic and agroforestry studies.

This outreach work has depended on the commitment and coordination of the FD field staff, from the local forester to the regional officer. This team has been unusually open to change and to adapting work habits and hours to the requirements of participatory forest management. They also appear to have developed strong relationships of mutual trust with the members of the LFMCs. They are realistic about stakeholders' expectations and the FD's limitations in meeting them, and have been creative in finding ways to make a difference.

TFT's reimbursement of LFMC members' travel costs and provision of refreshments for meetings and special events has been an important contribution to the process. The need for this type of support when seeking the involvement of poor rural stakeholders, however, raises concerns about sustainability when international funding is no longer available.

### ***What has not worked well***

The LFMCs have suffered from the organisational weakness and instability of many of their members. A study of the Pencar watershed (Mills 2001) estimated that 14 of the 19 original community-based members were dormant or very weak one year after the LFMC was established. This, along with the failure of local organisations to represent some important stakeholder groups, may indicate that the strategy of using CBOs to make the links between the LFMCs and individual stakeholders needs to be reconsidered.

The geography of the watershed has been a challenge to participation. Setting up separate LFMCs for each sub-watershed was a wise decision, but the distance from the tops of the watersheds to the coast, isolation of upstream communities due to poor roads, and limited contact between many communities within each sub-watershed constrain bringing people together.

Another concern of members is the poor participation of national and local government agencies. Many issues being addressed require information or coordinated responses from a number of agencies, and their lack of involvement has been felt. Given the constraints that they work under, all of Jamaica's government agencies must make trade-offs regarding the use of their limited human resources. It seems that the FD and the LFMCs have not yet been able to make a strong case for commitment by these agencies.

Another obstacle to the LFMCs' development, though not noted in the participatory evaluation, has been the delays in presenting the watershed forest management plan for its review and input. These delays have left the LFMCs without a clear purpose or agenda for their meetings and hindered their ability to contribute meaningfully to management.

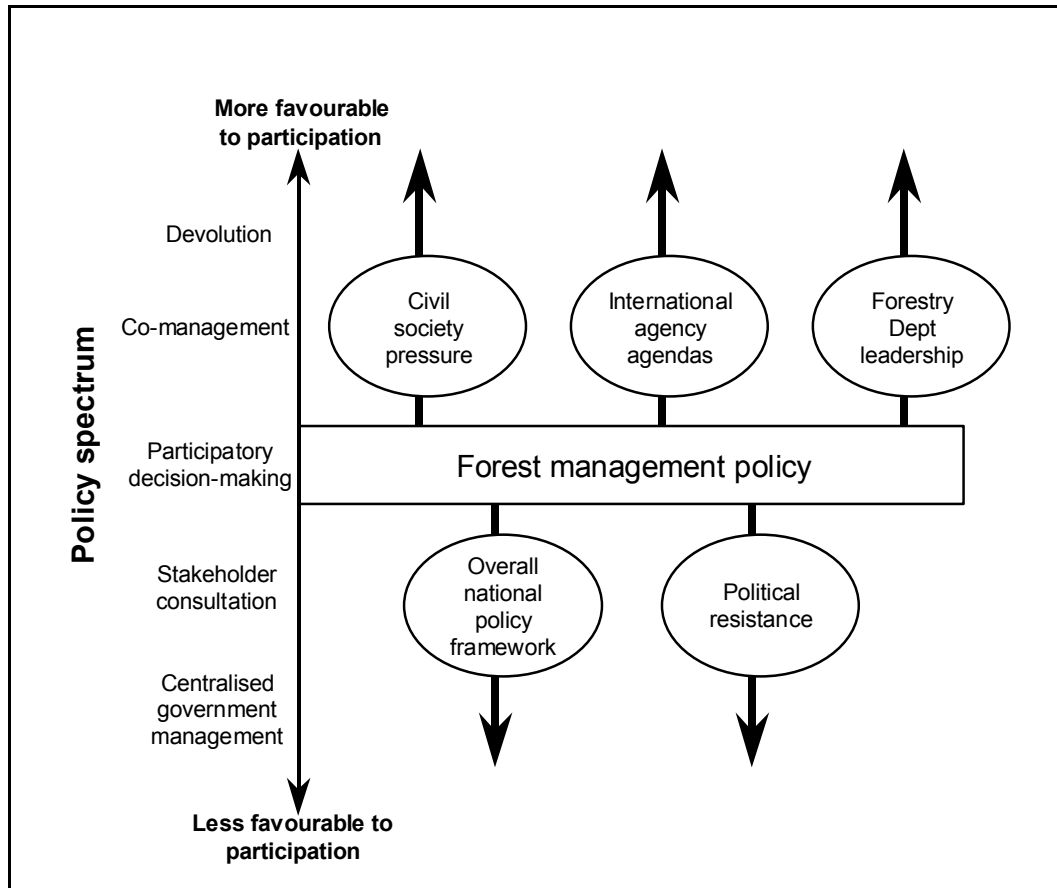
### **Where the LFMCs fit in the overall policy context - and policy debate - in Jamaica**

In Jamaica since the early 1990s the policy rhetoric has supported decentralisation of decision-making and devolution of management responsibilities to local entities. The rhetoric is not matched by the institutional context, though, which centralises authority within the government ministries. This situation reflects a continuing debate within government and society generally on the appropriate extent of stakeholder participation in management and decision-making. While the country's active NGO community and international donor agencies have effectively pushed for policies more favourable to stakeholder participation, politicians and civil servants have largely resisted the structural changes required to implement them, and this resistance acts as a "glass ceiling" to policy reform (Figure 3).

Reflecting this context, the Forest Act defines a centralised management structure, in which all responsibility for management of public forest lies with the FD and all authority with the Conservator on behalf of the Minister. But it also provides for stakeholder input through forest management committees.

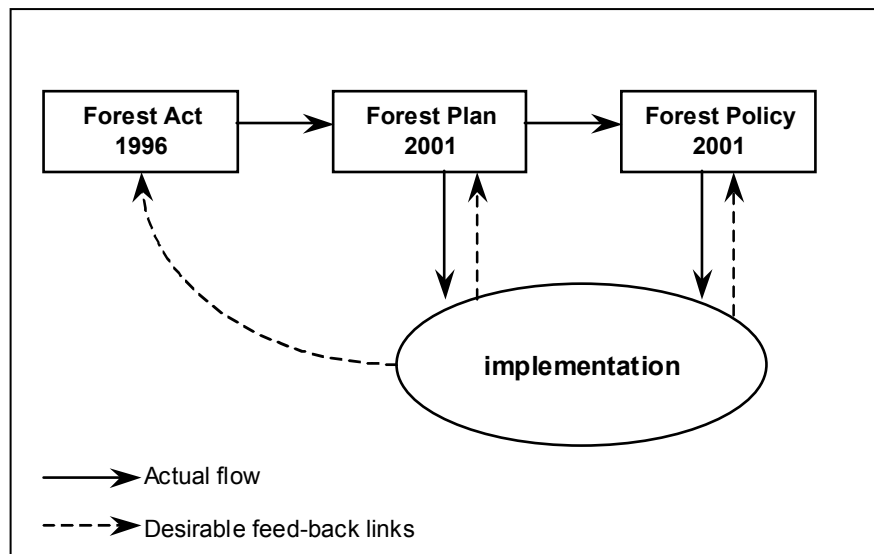
The Forest Act provided the basis for the 2001 National Forest Management and Conservation Plan, but the process of developing the Plan was a consultative one and resulted in a revised Forest Policy that places much stronger emphasis than the Forest Act on local participation and management partnerships, with the formation of LFMCs given prominence within an overall strategy of community participation. The establishment of the LFMCs is the concrete result of this policy guidance. The failure of the Forest Act to permit delegation of management authority is now seen by the FD as a potential constraint to implementing aspects of the Policy and the Plan, and the Department is looking into having the Act amended. This reflects a dynamic interaction between legislation, policy, and experience on the ground (Figure 4), as well as an activist stance towards policy by the FD.

**Figure 3**  
**Factors influencing forest policy in Jamaica**





**Figure 4**  
**Actual and potential links between Jamaica's forestry legislation, policy, and experience**

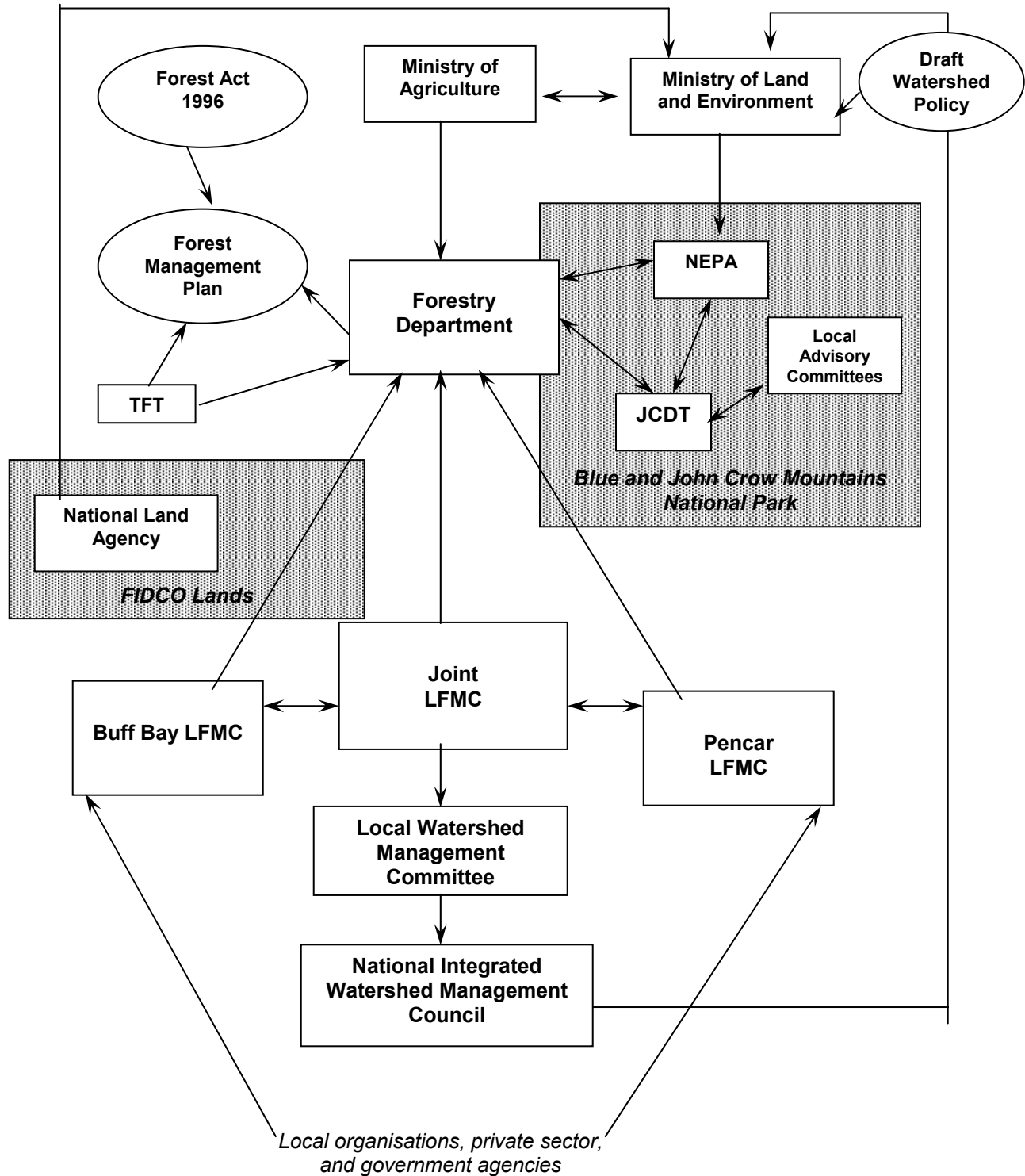


### ***Other policy influences***

The proposed watershed policy and the institutional arrangements it defines also impact on the LFMCs. The FD established the LFMCs expecting that they would eventually be absorbed into a Local Watershed Committee, whose scope would cover all watershed issues and not only the those related to forests. While this has not occurred, the LFMCs remain a piece of the strategy for implementing the watershed policy.

The management of protected areas and the administration of lands formerly held by FIDCO also contribute to the LFMCs' policy environment. The portion of the watershed within the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park is governed by a co-management agreement between the FD, which is responsible for the forest estate within the Park, NEPA, the government agency responsible for protected areas, and the Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust, an NGO that has been delegated by NEPA management responsibility for the Park. The lands formerly leased to FIDCO, including forest reserve lands, were turned over to the Commissioner of Lands and are now managed by the FD. The institutional landscape in which the LFMCs operate is therefore from a formal policy perspective very complex. Figure 5 illustrates the way the landscape was seen by the FD at the inception of the LFMC pilot project.

**Figure 5**  
**Formal policy and institutional linkages, Buff Bay/Pencar LFMC**



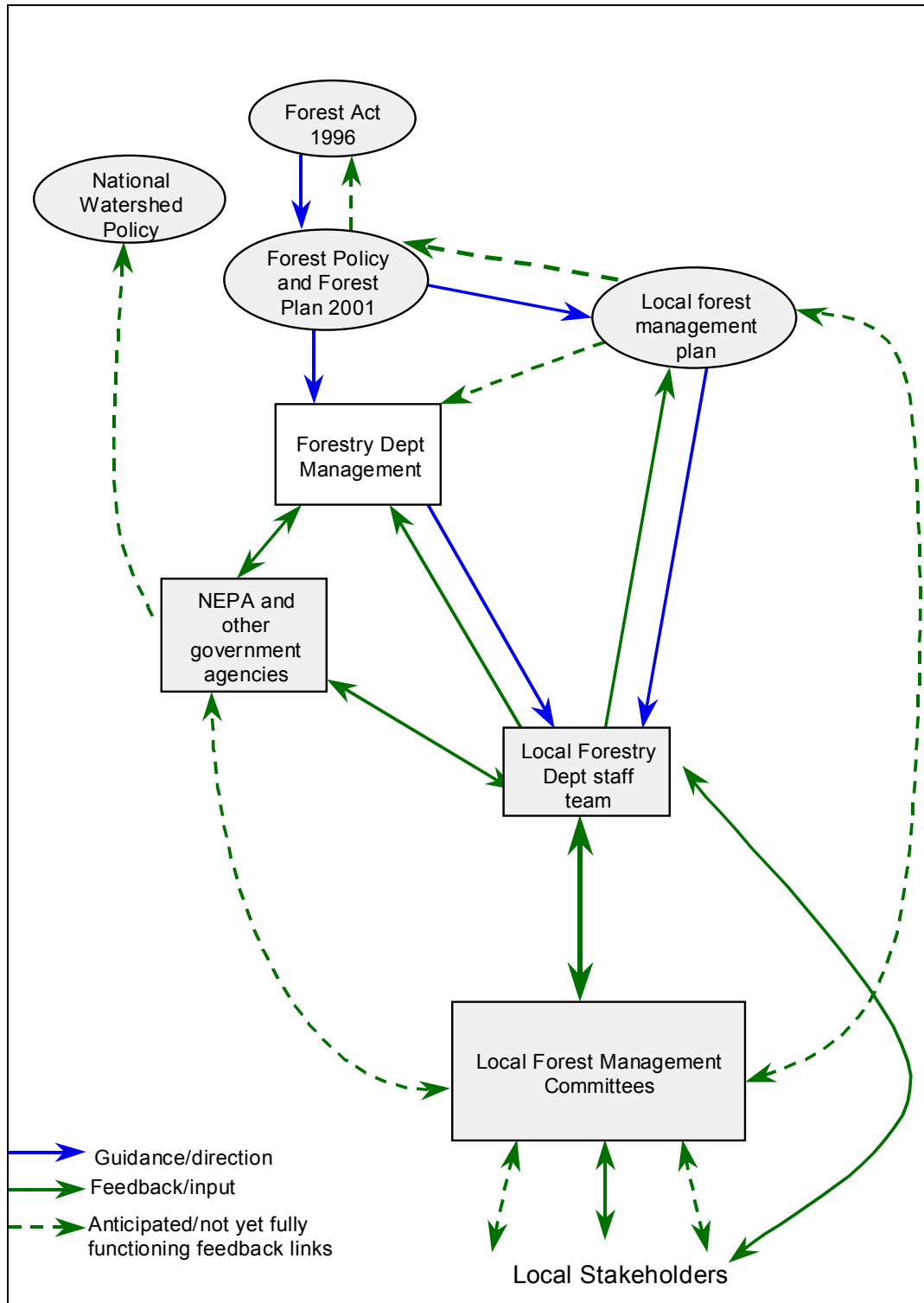
### ***The actual institutional landscape***

The actual institutional linkages that form the LFMCs are a good deal simpler than the above discussion would imply. In actuality:

- C no Local Watershed Committee has been established for the watershed and it now appears that the LFMCs themselves may serve that purpose;
- C the LFMCs have not gotten involved in issues related to the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park or the disposition of FIDCO lands (though they could do so eventually);
- C the main driver of the LFMC is currently the interaction between FD staff and a small number of interested local groups and individuals;
- C the local FD staff also provide the feedback between the LFMC and FD management, as well as to other government agencies that are not active members of the LFMC

Assuming that the feedback loops will eventually function as anticipated, these arrangements should provide effective channels between stakeholders on the ground and the policy process (Figure 6). The weakest link may be between the LFMCs and the central FD office, which provides the main impetus for the process at the policy level, but whose staff is somewhat isolated from what is happening in the field.

**Figure 6**  
**Existing and potential policy and institutional linkages, Buff Bay/Pencar LFMcs**



## **The LFMC experience and the institutional culture of the Forestry Department**

The LFMCs are part of a wider effort, led by the Conservator under the impetus of TFT, to transform the way the FD works and its staff perceive their roles. The implementation of the National Forest Management and Conservation Plan, with its emphasis on community participation and cooperative management arrangements, requires different attitudes and skills than were needed in the days of strict protection and enforcement. While some members of staff realised early that most issues facing the Department have a social dimension that cannot be addressed solely with technical forest management skills, others felt threatened by the proposed change and initially resisted.

A training programme on community outreach and participatory forest management, for staff at all levels, has done much to change perceptions and attitudes. The training has been supplemented by a manual titled *Working With Communities* to assist staff in carrying out participatory processes.

The staff directly involved in the development of the LFMCs have been profoundly influenced by the experience and are now among the Department's most outspoken proponents of participatory forest management. One factor contributing to their changed attitudes was the extensive support and field training that they received from the TFT and FD rural sociologists during the initial stages of the project. Although impossible to assess, it also appears that the Buff Bay/Pencar staff were personally unusually open to participatory approaches.

The development of the LFMCs has had little impact on other staff, however. This may be because there are few opportunities to share experiences across the Department, due to geographic dispersion and the lack of effective intra-departmental mechanisms for information sharing. Efforts to build on the Buff Bay/Pencar experience through the transfer of staff to other areas slated for LFMCs have not had the expected impact. Given existing resources, it has not been possible to provide the same support to field staff in other areas as was provided in Buff Bay/Pencar.

As the local staff have become more committed to participatory forest management, they have made increasing demands for the resources required to carry out the work. With a grossly inadequate budget and TFT resources stretched thin, this has resulted in some tension between management and the field. While this has not yet significantly affected staff morale, it has the potential to do so and bears attention.

## **Public demand and capacity to be involved: how strong is it really?**

Although the response to the FD's outreach work in the watershed was positive and the concept of the LFMCs well received, there was no local demand for the Committees' establishment, and local organisations give other development issues higher priority than forest management. The LFMCs were "sold" to local stakeholders, who are still working out how they can be most useful in achieving local objectives.

Participation in LFMC meetings has declined, and some of the reasons are logistical or structural, such as meetings being held at inconvenient times or representatives leaving the area and not being replaced. But there also are more fundamental issues impeding the capacity of stakeholders to participate.

### ***The constraints of poverty***

Socio-economic studies (Mills 2001, Wright 2002) indicate that a substantial portion of the population of the watershed may be constrained from participating in the LFMCs, or taking advantage of what they have to offer, due to poor education, the limitations and daily demands imposed on their lives by poverty, and their lack of involvement in the organisations that comprise the LFMC's membership.

### ***The lack of effective stakeholder associations***

Few LFMC member organisations appear to be active and democratic stakeholder representatives. Some represent the interests of only a small number of individuals, and there are no groups that represent some critical stakeholder groups, such as private forest landowners or timber and fuelwood harvesters.

### ***The lack of monetary compensation***

Despite efforts to arrange the times of meetings around representatives' schedules, members must sometimes choose between their work and attending meetings. Given the already marginal returns that many make from farming, any time away from work can be a sacrifice.

### ***Limited technical knowledge and skills***

The LFMC members need a much stronger grounding in forest management if they are to contribute meaningfully on technical issues, including completion and ongoing refinement of the watershed management plan.

## **Forests and sustainable livelihoods: how can the LFMCs contribute?**

The watershed's development needs are substantial. More than half the population is living in or at risk of falling into poverty, and the educated "middle class", most likely to be active in community development, comprises 10% or less (Mills 2001, Wright 2002). High levels of illiteracy (estimated at close to 50%) and of migration by the better educated impede economic advancement. Poverty is concentrated in the upper watersheds, where transportation and communication infrastructure is poor and watershed management issues most critical.

The causes of poverty in the watershed are diverse, but typical of rural Jamaica. They include:

- C marginal returns from farming, partly caused by poor land use on steep slopes;
- C lack of adequate farmland or secure tenure;
- C poor access to resources and markets;
- C limited educational opportunities;
- C vulnerability to loss from landslides and flooding (which may be tied to deforestation and poor land use), praedial larceny, and natural disasters;
- C attitudes of dependency.

Despite traditions of occupational multiplicity, the poor and near-poor focus their livelihood strategies on agriculture, and do not consider the use of forest resources (aside from illegal farming in reserves) as a compelling option. While the watershed's deep-seated economic problems require integrated solutions, opportunities for improving livelihoods through forest resources exist, and some are being developed by the LFMCs.

The Pencar LFMC's nursery and pilot agroforestry plot should provide economic and training opportunities, particularly for women and youth. The project evolved in part from the FD's free

seedlings programme, which revealed a demand from local farmers for training in watershed conservation techniques. Long-term plans include an ecotourism component. The Buff Bay LFMC's ecotourism and sustainable forestry project will also provide local employment.

In both projects, forest reserve land is being allocated for sustainable economic uses. The benefits that accrue will depend on the measures taken to attract target groups and the ways in which the projects are implemented. As the first efforts in this direction, the lessons learned can be applied to other initiatives involving sustainable uses of forest reserve land.

Although timber stealing is a problem, managed extraction of timber and other forest resources is a potential forest use that is not being exploited. The system for purchasing timber in reserves, in place since the 1950s, does not favour the small producer with limited resources since it requires payment in advance. It may however be possible, government financial regulations permitting, for the FD to take a more open and proactive approach by advertising sales of trees and decentralising payment and administration. The LFMCs could assist by identifying local markets for wood for construction, furniture, or craft.

## **Lessons to guide future action**

As a pilot effort, the Buff Bay/Pencar LFMCs were expected to yield lessons to guide the FD's approach to participatory forest management. Some of the most important lessons that have emerged appear to be widely applicable both within and outside Jamaica.

### ***Local organisations have limitations as stakeholder representatives.***

Stakeholder bodies comprising organisational members may fail to include important stakeholders and mimic the power structures within society by giving the most powerful the greatest voices while leaving out the poor and marginalised.

The LFMCs have not achieved equitable stakeholder representation through their organisation-based memberships. Members are not equally capable of representing their constituents, and there are no organised groups to represent some stakeholders. And some stakeholders, including those with political connections or legal mandates, have other avenues for influencing decisions about forest resources, and may prefer to stay out of the LFMCs, in order to avoid trade-offs that they would not otherwise need to make.

Given their current make-up, the LFMCs could eventually become irrelevant or dominated by their most powerful members, thereby leaving behind the very stakeholders they were created to most involve. They could also become co-opted by local politicians, a common occurrence in politically charged societies like Jamaica.

Avoiding such eventualities will require finding ways to equitably involve all stakeholders, including those not represented or poorly represented by existing organisations; and increasing the role and authority of the LFMCs to make them the most legitimate avenue for stakeholder input into forest management planning. It will also be important to involve politicians in ways that balance their influence with the objectives and priorities of other stakeholders; and to monitor political undercurrents that may affect operations and decisions in ways that marginalise some stakeholders.

Changing power balances requires caution, however, as it can have unintended side effects, particularly when weak organisations are propped up without an understanding of the (often very

valid) reasons for their weakness, or when new organisations are created to represent the interests of stakeholders who have themselves seen no reason to organise.

***In structuring collaboration, form should follow function and respect the local institutional context.***

In the original discussions regarding the LFMCs, more attention was placed on their structure than their purpose. Through reflection and dialogue over the past two years, a consensus seems to have emerged that the groups will initially provide information on the local context and feedback on FD policies and plans; will eventually, as their understanding of forest management evolves, become advisors on the content and implementation of the local forest management plan; and will also occasionally collaborate with the FD on management activities. These roles still need to be debated and formally agreed to by LFMC members, however. Following that, it would be useful to revisit the structure of the LFMCs, in order to assure that it is the most appropriate for filling these roles, particularly given the deficiencies of the structure in representing all stakeholders.

For other watersheds, objectives and the local institutional landscape may indicate different structures. One option might be strategic partnerships with effective local NGOs to reach out to unorganised stakeholders and develop and manage LFMCs. Alternatively, existing local institutions that include legitimate representatives of a watershed's stakeholders could take on the role of LFMCs. Many options are possible; what is important is to avoid entering into the process with a preconceived structure in mind.

It is also important to be alert to how changes in the watershed affect the composition of its stakeholders, with new stakeholders emerging while others may become more marginal. Systems for ongoing stakeholder identification and analysis, and adjustments in the structure and composition of stakeholder bodies when needed, can protect them from becoming stagnant and irrelevant over time.

***Stakeholder forums like the LFMCs can be vehicles for a continuous improvement approach to management planning.***

The LFMCs offers a unique opportunity for continuous negotiation among stakeholders on the management and use of forest resources and their own management rights and responsibilities, within the framework of the national forest policy. As economic, social, and environmental conditions change in the watershed, the forest management issues will also change. And as the capacity of local stakeholders to engage in forest management activities increases, so will their potential to take on new roles and responsibilities. Dynamic planning instruments rather than rigid management plans are needed to respond to such changes within the context of defined (although periodically reviewed and renegotiated) conservation and sustainable development objectives. This approach is technically challenging, but can bring important benefits, particularly in sustaining stakeholder involvement and addressing social issues and needs.

Processes of continuous improvement must be accompanied by systems for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. These should include baselines against which to measure change, as well as accountable procedures for following up on the points raised in evaluation exercises, such as the LFMCs' periodic self-assessments.



***Participatory management calls for a new set of tools for forestry administrations.***

A commitment to participation requires forest management agencies to rethink their structures, methods of operation, and budget allocations, and the responsibilities, training requirements, and working conditions of staff. Establishing LFCMs in a watershed with diverse stakeholders and issues required the FD to increase its outreach capability. It demanded flexibility from staff regarding work hours and responsibilities. It required staff training in forest extension, socio-economic survey methods, participatory forest management, and conflict management, training which contributed to their enthusiasm for the work as well as to their effectiveness. Fortunately for the FD, TFT was able to support much of this retooling.

Given its budgetary constraints, the FD will not be able to replicate this labour-intensive approach in other watersheds. Partnerships with organisations already working with local stakeholders are one way to optimise limited resources. The FD can also marshal the experience gained by staff working with the LFCMs to train others in the Department.

In implementing its strategies of community participation, forestry administrations need not only well-trained forest officers but also persons with social science and community development training and skills, to design and monitor interventions, provide basic training and guidance to staff, and analyse outcomes. They also need avenues of communication between management and field staff, and transparency regarding operational decisions that affect work with stakeholders.

***Participatory forest management requires full and knowledgeable stakeholder participation.***

Participatory approaches depend on all partners having the ability to contribute meaningfully and equitably. This is not yet the case with the LFCMs. The FD not only has the legal mandate to manage forest reserves but also the bulk of the technical knowledge, skills and human and financial resources. Achieving effective participation will entail strengthening the positions of other stakeholders through such measures as:

- C training and field opportunities, to enhance understanding of forest management issues and develop skills
- C strengthening the capacity of stakeholder groups to identify needs, set priorities, develop plans, and effectively negotiate between themselves and with other stakeholders
- C amendments to the Forest Act to permit delegation and co-management when they offer the most appropriate option
- C a commitment from the FD to accept and when possible act on the recommendations of the LFCMs, to the extent that they are compatible with the legal and policy framework
- C greater involvement of the LFCMs in the watershed forest management plan, which may require a different approach and format to be more accessible to laypersons.

While the allocation of power within a participatory management arrangement will never be totally balanced, it should fairly reflect the levels of the different groups' stakes. In addition, since the FD alone has the legal mandate to manage forest reserve, it must have a clear understanding with the LFCMs on when they will be consulted, when they will not, and how - and by whom - different types of decisions are made.

***Incentives and longer-term benefits are needed to get and keep stakeholders involved.***

Mechanisms like the LFMCs will only succeed if they are perceived as responding to local needs. Education programmes can demonstrate linkages that make sense to people, such as the link between good forest management and the provision of clean water or control of landslides.

Incentives can encourage participation by offsetting its costs to stakeholders. The Buff Bay/Pencar forest management plan suggests some incentives, particularly in terms of access to forest resources for uses compatible with management objectives. Other incentives could include opportunities for training and technical assistance on aspects of watershed management and soil conservation. The LFMCs could develop this section of the plan further by identifying incentives attractive to local stakeholders.

In countries like Jamaica, poverty issues need special attention. The poverty in the watershed is the result of a complex mix of factors that are largely beyond the capacity of the FD or the LFMCs to address. However, it is possible to insert a “pro-poor” dimension when determining how and by whom forest resources might be used, as well as the target beneficiaries of incentives. The two economic development projects the LFMCs are embarking on provide the opportunity for doing this. The LFMCs could also be advocates on issues of relevance to the poor through their links to national forest and watershed policy processes.

***The influence of external factors needs to be taken into account.***

International assistance agencies, technical advisors, and other “outside” forces exert a powerful influence on participatory processes. In developing the LFMCs, the contributions of the Canadian-funded TFT have been enormous, but present dangers for the future by creating standards that may not always be possible to meet. The watershed management plan, for example, is based on extensive research and meets international standards in its content and detail. Even given the TFT assistance, the preparation of the plan was so labour-intensive that its completion was substantially delayed. In preparing future local forest management plans, the FD will need to take into account both its own technical limitations and the potential for a continuous improvement planning approach that participatory forest management offers. It may also need to set more modest objectives for itself once the support from TFT has ended.

***Forest management that benefits stakeholders cannot be separated from other aspects of environmental management or local development.***

Participatory management requires forestry administrations to work with a diversity of agencies and sectors, in order to address the range of issues that link stakeholders to forest resources. In the Buff Bay/Pencar watershed, the achievement of stakeholders’ forest management objectives is related to, among other things, soil conservation, public education in schools and communities, provision of local economic opportunities, protection of rivers and fauna, and capacity-building of stakeholder groups. None of these are issues that the FD is equipped to tackle alone, and several fall outside its mandate.

This points to a need for new partnerships with government agencies and NGOs dealing with environment and development issues. For example, a watershed management extension and awareness programme for local farmers developed jointly by the FD, RADA, NEPA, local NGOs and the LFMCs could build on the FD’s success in increasing local awareness in the watershed. For this to happen, these potential partners need more encouragement to become involved.

***Effectiveness on the ground should feed back into policy.***

The LFMCs and similar mechanisms have the potential, through well-designed feedback loops, to influence national policy, and the views of politicians, in ways that are favourable to participatory approaches. The lessons from the establishment of the LFMCs have already begun to impact on forest policy instruments. Influencing broader national policies will require that the experience be widely shared and used for sensitisation and advocacy. NGOs have an important role to play in this policy advocacy work.

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