

Community Forestry & Biodiversity Conservation in Northeast India 2004-05

Community
Forestry
International

Overview

The northeastern Himalaya and neighboring montane tracts are not only a “hot spot” of biodiversity, but of cultural diversity as well. Over the centuries, unique human ecological relationships have evolved, based on the dependence of indigenous communities on the region’s forests. During the British colonial period, Independence era, and up to the present time, Indian governments have respected the unique and remote nature of the Northeast, while working to integrate the region into a larger nation state.

This has inevitably led to confusion and conflict over forest management, with both national models and laws prevailing at some points, and with many exceptions being made. With demographic pressure from outside migrants mounting and industrial timber demands growing, there is a need for a consistent forest policy framework that provides land and forest security, while clearly identifying management rights and responsibilities. CFI’s project in Northeast India (2003-2005) is to address the vast environmental

and social problems by facilitating the development of a new policy framework that supports indigenous forms of forest conservation and management.

In 2004, Working Group members and researchers will expand the dialogue to include communities engaged in forest management in seven northeastern states. The dialogue process will result in a series of state profiles and policy recommendations that will be published and disseminated in 2005.



Special points of interest:

- *Established CFM Working Group*
- *Publishing Legal Review of the Northeast*
- *Developing state CFM profiles*
- *Identify CFM Field Sites*
- *Leverage Co-Financing*

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Project Highlights

1) Established an institutional framework and process that will facilitate a multi-stakeholder, civil society dialogue, leading to the formulation of a series of forest policy recommendations to planners from the northeastern states and to national policy makers.

2) Produced the first report documenting and analyzing the legal and policy history governing

forests in Northeastern India.

3) CFI colleagues at the Northeast Hill University are developing profiles for each of the northeastern states describing the status of community engagement in forest stewardship.

4) The NE Working Group has identified seven locations for field assessments of commu-

nity forest management systems and are underway for case study research.

5) CFI has secured an additional \$.5 million from USAID’s Global Development Alliance to co-finance Community Forestry in the Northeast as well as Lao PDR.

CFM Working Group

In 2003, a blue-ribbon panel of senior planners and foresters was created to formulate policy recommendations for states and national government concerning how best to promote community-based forest conservation in the Northeast India. The Secretariat for the Community Forestry Working Group for Northeast India is located at the Northeast Hill University in Shillong, Meghalaya, the leading academic institute in the region. The Secretariat is linked to India's Ministry of Environment and Forests through its regional branch for National Afforestation and Ecodevelopment, providing the group with a direct link into national policy formulation. Senior planners who participate in guiding the program represent all seven of the region's state forest departments. The

Working Group also includes representatives from local NGOs and media.

The CFM Working Group met for the first time April 21-23rd, 2003. There was a strong consensus among the members that a regional forestry dialogue was urgently needed, as existing CF policy directions were poorly informed and program coordination was minimal between the states. Further illegal logging, deforestation, land conversion, and poaching were widespread, threatening forest ecosystems throughout the region.

The group identified a series of critical policy questions that need to be resolved by the Working Group. It was also agreed that recommendations for

policy reform at the state and national level would be a major output of the Working Group. The group sanctioned a legal review of all policies and laws affecting community rights and responsibilities over forest lands.

To inform the policy recommendations, the Working Group agreed that a series of diagnostic field studies and community dialogues should be initiated under the program to identify critical constraints and failures of existing policy and programs in terms of their capacity to promote community involvement in forest conservation.

CFM Legal & Policy Review

In 2003, the Enviro-Legal Defense Firm, a Working Group member, produced the first report documenting and analyzing the legal and policy history governing forests in Northeastern India. The purpose of this paper is to identify from an historical standpoint, how the northeast differs from peninsular India in terms of the legal rights of communities to forest lands. ELDF is also in the process of preparing three

"We have always managed our forests, the trees are our life spirit, without them we die."

northeast district level case studies of forest policy and legal contexts. In 2004, ELDF will meet with communities in the northeast to assess local

perceptions of the forest policies and laws and seek their recommendations regarding ways to improve the forest policy environment to reduce conflict between community and government, create opportunities for more sustainable use, and enhance protection against internal and external threats to forest resources and watersheds.

CFM State Profiles

The Northeast Hill University is developing profiles for each of the northeastern states describing the status of community engagement in forest stewardship. These reports will include the forest area under community management, the number of communities involved in forest stewardship, important traditions of management in each state, as well as emerging community forestry movements. They will also review the staffing levels and capacity of state forest departments and NGOs working on forestry related issues.



CFM Working Group for the Northeast

CFM Case Studies

In 2003, the Working Group identified seven locations for field assessments of community forest management systems. Each case study represents a different ethnic community including Nagas, Mizos, Khukis, Garos, Donyi-Polo, and Kila communities. The purpose of the case studies is to document traditional forest stewardship prac-

tices, as well as contemporary management issues. Ultimately, the analysis seeks to identify how the existing forestry policies of the state and nation impact community forest conservation, and how those policies and programs can be improved to better support the efforts of villagers to sustainably manage local forests. Some of the case

study sites are located on the periphery of protected areas with high biodiversity conservation values.

Candidate Sites

Mizoram (Zonunmawia)

Muthi village is located near Aizawl, the capitol of Mizoram. The community has approximately 500 hectares of Safety, Supply and Reserve Forests. This site has strong traditions of forest management common to the Mizo tribe. The Mizo forests traditionally are held by clan chieftan. The group suggested that a broader micro-watershed around Muthi be considered to capture greater diversity and inter-village relationships

Nagaland (Imtienla Ao)

Mongsenyimti village is located in Mokokchung District in Nagaland. The village has approximately 800 households, with community forests, clan forests, jhum blocks, and some reserve forests. It is an Ao tribal area, an important clan of the Naga's Putu Menden group. The field site is located 3.5 hours from Jorhat, which is serviced by plane three times a week.

Manipur (Ibobi)

Two candidate sites were proposed for Manipur. They include: Makhana (100 HH) and Leikhampompi (30 HH) villages are located 22 km from Imphal. These villages include both Naga and Kuki tribals with a mix of reserve and community forests. There is a community-based biodiversity project in the area. Shifting cultivation is a major issue in the area.

Tripura (Vincent Dahlang)

Kila Village is located in southern Tripura, close to Riapur. The village has 80 households, and mostly bam-

boo forests. Most of the forest is reserve lands located on hilltops. Due to the predominance of reserve forests, JFM may fit besting Tripura. There is also a tradition of "Ashaban" or "Forests of Hope." It is also located near the Tishna Wildlife Sanctuary. This is a tribal area, and currently many tribal areas have insurgency movements.

Arunachal (Mamang Dei)

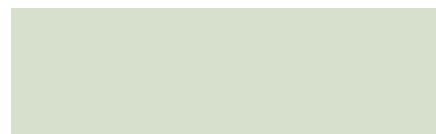
There are many forms of community forest management among the cultural groups of Arunachal. The project will include community forestry systems in the south central of the state around Itanagar. The Donyi-Polo (Sun-Moon) people have strong traditions of management. The Worldwide Fund for Nature-India, is already conducting a community-biodiversity management project among the Monpa peoples of Tawang area in Northwest Arunachal.

Meghalaya (Mr. Merak)

Major traditions of community forest management are found among the Garo, Khasi, and Jaintia communities. NEHU has already identified 18 case study sites in earlier research. These include traditional systems like the sacred forests of Mawphlang, and the more recently established Village Forest Development Committees (VFDC). There are also many examples of Clan forests, many of which are being privatized.

Assam

Under review



CFM Co-Financing for the Northeast

CFI has secured a three-year grant of \$500,000 from the Global Development Alliance of USAID to co-finance the project entitled CFM in Northeast India and a similar project in Laos. The grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation was extremely strategic in securing the USAID funds, as the GDA program required a partnering arrangement. The funds will allow the MacArthur program to be expanded to include the establishment of a Community Forestry Legal Support Facility in Guwa-

hati Assam to be staffed by a young team of environmental lawyers. The CFLSF will act as a regional clearing-house for information on community rights and responsibility for forest conservation and management. CFLSF staff will assist forest departments, NGOs, Universities, and community groups to access information regarding past and recent laws and policies affecting their forest tenure and rights.

The additional funds will also allow for the Working Group to facilitate a

series of dialogues with participating communities to better assess their recommendations to improve government policies, regulations, and guidelines affecting forest protection and use. The CFLSF will also assist participating communities to gain better documentation of their legal rights and responsibilities over local forests. The new grant will also allow CFI to facilitate exchange between programs underway in Laos and Cambodia.

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