

SUSTAINABLE FORESTS

Edited by
Jeffrey Sayer, Neil Byron and
Gillian Petrokofsky

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INTRODUCTION

Forests, People and Livelihoods

Neil Byron

To many, it may seem self-evident that the purpose of managing forests is to improve the well-being and quality of life of those who live in and around the forests, and to sustain that stream of benefits into the very distant future. But it was not always so. The aim of this volume is to present some of the most important and influential recent articles discussing the role of forest management in sustaining human well-being, under the very general heading of “Forests, People and Livelihoods”.

The objective of this Introduction is to explain the volume editors’ reasons for selecting this particular set of papers, and to provide the context in which each contribution provided new insights. We are therefore relating only one view – from a universe of possible views – of the evolution of public concern about and academic interest in the subject matter of this volume: the livelihoods of forest-dependent households and communities; their involvement and role in forest management, including traditional and indigenous knowledge; and their relationships with forest management agencies and personnel.

This Introduction to Volume III endeavours to relate the emergence of “community forestry”, “social forestry” and “forestry for local community development”; of interest in forest tenures and tenure reform; of research into the traditional (and potential new commercial uses of) non-timber forest products (NTFPs), particularly for the people who live in and near remaining large areas of natural forests, who are usually indigenous and often very poor. This overview has been organised in a way that attempts to explain:

- the selection of key papers for this volume;
- the relations between work in such broad areas as tenure, gender, livelihoods;
- the cross-fertilization of ideas across countries and academic disciplines; and
- the evolution over time of a broad but cohesive body of research, concerning local people and their livelihoods, in forestry.

INTRODUCTION

It is not intended as a summary of all the included papers, or an assessment of their impacts and significance. Rather, it is to explain their contexts and connectedness.

The narrative is historical and, for ease of exposition, proceeds through three periods:

- 1 An emergence/discovery phase (approximately 1975 to 1985)
- 2 A consolidation/experimentation phase (approximately 1985 to 1995)
- 3 A mainstreaming phase (with continuing learning and adaptation) (1995 to present).

Although there were no single events that marked the start and end of these periods, in retrospect it seems possible to identify three distinct phases and the combination of factors – significant publications or conferences, the creation or demise of international institutions, and/or the emergence of influential new leaders – that significantly shifted forestry thinking and practice internationally. We may already be entering a fourth phase, but it is still too early to describe its attributes or how, why and from where it has emerged.

We have tried to make the bibliography for this overview extremely broad and inclusive, but the articles selected for reproduction in this volume have been carefully chosen to ensure coverage of at least seven broad themes:

- 1 Access and tenure: whose forest is this?
- 2 Importance of traditional and indigenous uses
- 3 Emerging markets for non-timber forest products (NTFPs)
- 4 Participation and gender
- 5 Challenges in implementing community forestry
- 6 Agroforestry, smallholder farm forestry and urban forestry
- 7 Lessons for the West?

However, these are not discrete themes – indeed the purpose of this chapter is to show how these themes interact, and how developments in one area affect the others.

Some readers may be surprised that many, perhaps most, of the authors in this volume are not conventionally trained foresters. The focus here is on *people*; how they generate their livelihoods in and from the forests and how changes in the forests affect their well-being. For this reason, the insights of social scientists – especially anthropologists, sociologists, human geographers and economists – have been absolutely critical in the development of the current body of knowledge and practice. Similarly, much of the important early work on NTFPs was by ethnobotanists who understood the importance of these products to the livelihoods, even the survival, of forest-dependent people.