

# 2 Participatory Forest Management in Myanmar

## 2.1 Emergence of Participatory Forest Management in Myanmar

Increasingly, community-oriented approaches are being recognised as crucial for sustaining forest resources, especially in mountain areas. The concept of and approach to participatory forest management are still relatively new in Myanmar. Since its inception in 1885, the MFD has practised a silvicultural system called the 'Myanmar Selection System' (MSS). Under this system, forest areas are allocated and organized into 'Working Circles' (WC), based on productive and functional aspects, for systematic management.

Forests that are earmarked to fulfill the needs of local people are called 'Local Supply Working Circles' (LSWC). LSWC cover about 0.5 million hectares, approximately two per cent of the total WC areas. The management and allocation of forest resources from Local Supply Forests (LSF) are under the authority of the MFD. These forests are being rapidly degraded and gradually denuded under the constant stresses of population pressure, excessive fuelwood cutting, and encroachment.

In the last two decades, a programme was introduced for establishing fuelwood plantations in local supply reserves in the vicinity of villages. Although this village-owned plantations' programme was introduced in the 1980s, it has not been taken up by local people. One reason was the lack of proper extension activities when the programme was introduced, another that the plantations were controlled by

the Forest Department and there was a lack of clarity related to both land tenure and tree tenure. This top-down approach failed to help in the protection and management of forest resources and did not reduce forest degradation. Recognition of this led to the emergence of a programme for people-centred participatory management of forest resources, also known as 'Community Forestry (CF)'.

The Government of the Union of Myanmar has recognised the need to implement participatory forestry programmes and has initiated participatory forestry projects in different parts of the country. As a prelude to strengthening and expanding community-based forest programmes, a progressive Forest Law was enacted in 1992 to replace the Forest Act of 1902. A Forest Policy of 1995 was promulgated, consistent with the Forest Law of 1992, and Community Forestry Instructions (CFI) of 1995 were brought out to facilitate field activities.

A crucial element of the newly enacted Forest Policy of 1995 is the active participation of people in the conservation and rational utilisation of the forests. The Forest Law 1992 encourages any individuals, communities, or groups to establish and own fuelwood plantations, even in a reserved forest, if it is deemed appropriate by the Myanmar Forest Department. The MFD clearly recognises the rights of the rural communities involved in forest plantation activities to the produce from these plantations. However, the ownership of the land still resides with the government.

The participatory forest management approach is a bottom-up approach, and it is different to the conventional approach which is normally top-down. It emphasises active participation of the people most dependent on forest products. Indigenous knowledge is also given proper consideration and combined with modern approaches in order to achieve a better impact in managing valuable natural resources.

## 2.2 Community Forestry Policy and Programmes

In Myanmar, community forestry is defined as the active participation and involvement of local people in one or all of the following forestry activities. (It doesn't cover management of existing forest.)

- Establishing woodlots in fuelwood deficient areas to meet local people's requirements for energy and other minor products
- Planting trees and crops on farmlands to provide minor tree produce and food for users' groups and facilitate income generation

Community forestry approaches have recently been introduced in some watershed areas, in the 'Central Dry Zone', and in the deltaic areas of Myanmar where the rate of deforestation is quite severe.

The Community Forestry Instructions (CFIs) of 1995 highlight the following as the objectives of community forestry:

- to enhance the national economy;
- to attain environmental stability and balance of the ecosystem; and
- to meet the social needs for food, fibre, fodder, and fuel in rural areas.

The CFIs also state that it is the task of the District Forest Officer to allot a manageable piece of land to users' groups, with the authorisation of the Director General of the MFD, in order that the group can establish a community forest or woodlot. Initially, this land is allotted to the group for 30 years. At the end of this time, the duration may be extended with

the Director General's approval and depending on the activities and wishes of the users. The benefits derived from the community forest are to be shared among the members of the users' group, and no royalties will be levied on forest products extracted from the community forest by the users' group for domestic purposes.

Tree planting along farm perimeters, in gaps, and along roadsides has been encouraged by the Forest Department to meet the need for fuelwood and other household products such as poles and fodder. Now people, especially those living in the fuelwood deficient 'Central Dry Zone', are adopting community forestry to attain self-sufficiency in fuelwood and other forest products.

The Forest Law of 1992 also allows communities to establish fuelwood plantations in the proximity of urban areas for commercial use by private entrepreneurs. This provision has now drawn the attention of local communities, especially in the dry zone. According to the CFIs, groups or communes of local people have the right and privilege to establish and manage their own plantations. They can utilise or market the products from these plantations. Until recently, fuelwood plantations were owned by the government and entirely managed by government staff without any intervention by the community. In 1996, as a new step in community forestry promotion, control over some fuelwood plantations established by the Forest Department was transferred to local communities. Under the CFIs, people's active participation is intended to play a key role in the reafforestation and rehabilitation of denuded areas.

The different problems faced in the three main regions of the country are summarised below.

### 2.2.1 Taungya in the Mountains

There are large areas of degraded and denuded forests in Myanmar resulting from the impact of heavy *taungya* (shifting cultivation) cutting in the watersheds of the four main river systems, and this has led to an increase in erosions and landslides. Heavy siltation is affecting dams and

uncontrolled heavy discharge is leading to breaches in water impoundage, resulting in flooding.

As a result of their geographic isolation, and exacerbated by poor communications and poor literacy rates, mountain dwellers are the most disadvantaged group in terms of both social and economic well-being. *Taungya*, which is their traditional farming practice, is environmentally unfriendly and not very productive. A comprehensive Human Development Initiative (HDI) programme by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of the Union of Myanmar has been introduced as an initial step to help this group in conserving natural resources through active involvement at all levels of community development activities, from planning to implementation.

### **2.2.2 Fuelwood in the Central Dry Zone**

The 'Central Dry Zone' of Myanmar constitutes about one-third of the country's total area. It has a population of 14 million, of which 11.3 million live in rural areas. This area produces many of the major agricultural cash crops such as cotton, peas, chillies, and sunflowers. It also supports about a half of the nation's cattle population. Environmental degradation is now proceeding at a greater pace as a result of deforestation resulting from excessive cutting of fuelwood. In order to address this issue, the Forest Department has been conducting a nation-wide greening programme, with special emphasis on the 'Central Dry Zone' area which is the most critical area in the country. In order to have a more effective impact, the Ministry

of Forestry, with the support of the government, launched a special project in 1993 to be carried out in nine critical districts of the 'Central Dry Zone'. The main objective of this project is to improve the standard of living of the disadvantaged rural populations of the 'Central Dry Zone' by promoting greening activities to alleviate the acute fuelwood shortage, and by improving the environment.

### **2.2.3 Mangroves in the coastal regions**

The UNDP/ FAO (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization) assisted Community Multipurpose Fuelwood Woodlots' Project was implemented within the 'greening project' for the duration of two years from 1994 to 1996. The project emphasised peoples' participation and public awareness in forming community woodlots. With the help of the project, village resource management committees have been formed in some 40 villages in the project area.

Mangrove forests occupy extensive areas of the coastal regions of Myanmar. Mangroves are depleting at an alarming rate, especially in the Ayarwady delta, as a result of excessive harvesting of fuelwood and charcoal, and deliberate clearing for farming. The mangrove ecosystem is fragile and is essential for sustained production of fish and inland swamp rice cultivation. Various projects have been launched in these areas from 1992; the most recent one being the UNDP supported Community Development of Ayarwady Mangroves' Project initiated in 1994. It is an integrated project, and includes activities to rehabilitate degraded mangrove areas with grass roots' participation.