Since Myanmar’s 1995 Community Forestry Instruction, forests have gradually been handed over to community management across the country. How are Forest User Groups performing? Are the Community Forests improving in condition? And are there improved livelihood benefits? This paper summarises findings of an assessment of 16 randomly selected Forest User Groups across 4 key regions.

Key points:
- Myanmar’s forests have been rapidly degrading: dense forest have more than halved in extent over the last 20 years. Rural livelihoods, food security and tenure security to village lands have also been under increasing strain.
- Devolving control of village land resources to local people in an equitable manner can help address both challenges. Community Forest Forestry (CF) represents an effective, low cost, equitable and potentially pro-poor policy response towards doing this, and has proved its efficacy in numerous other countries.
- Implementation of the Community Forestry Instruction, 1995 has been slow. There are 572 Forest User Groups (FUGs) in Myanmar. Most formation has been occurring in the context of donor-funded projects.
- FUGs have generally become effectively institutionalised at formation and almost all FUGs have been managing their forests responsibly and effectively. Reasonably effective protection has led to natural regeneration, and in many cases they have also created plantations. The regenerating community forests are now providing a wide range of livelihood benefits for communities, in terms of basic needs and ecosystem services, as well as development of ‘social capital’ at the village level. Community Forestry based enterprise development is a key potential for the future to incentivise forest protection and stimulate local economic development.
- Despite their achievements Forest User Groups face a range of challenges: poor understanding of CF provisions, conflicts over enforcement and disputes over benefit sharing. The sustainability of some FUGs is even in question. Elite capture is a serious problem for a small number of FUGs, and equity is a more general concern.
- FUGs need better support if they are to overcome their problems. Forest Department needs to play a more pro–active role in backing up FUGs, particularly when they try to enforce regulations against outsiders.
- Policies and support strategies are needed to ensure CF is socially inclusive of marginal groups, women and especially poorer households who may be the most forest–dependent. CF should respect and protect their livelihoods.
- Scaling up CF is a major challenge for Myanmar. To achieve policy targets Myanmar must now find more permanent approaches and structures to form FUGs and provide them post formation support. Encouraging self–initiation of FUGs can be a significant way. Engagement with the private sector may also facilitate this. There are also new international trends such as Payment for Ecosystem Services and REDD may also provide funding opportunities, albeit transitional.

We conclude that Community Forestry represents a major policy opportunity to redress forest decline and improve rural livelihoods. But to achieve its potential it now requires stronger promotion at policy level and stronger support at field level, both for formation and post–formation. It also requires a more sensitive pro–poor and pro–food security–oriented implementation approach.

However during this brief study we have not been able to clarify several key issues pertaining to CF: particularly the extent to which CF may extend rather than devolve state influence over village lands through defining land use mosaics as ‘forest’, the extent to which CF may thereby negatively affect food security, and the extent to which CF may affects women’s livelihood practices and land use if resources become controlled by men. Further research is needed in these areas.

Figure 1: Land Use Change in Myanmar

Forest reservation was initiated by the British after 1856 creating a national forest estate that is currently 183,825
km², or just over half of the remaining forest area. But its creation involved superseding customary village authority of village forests (Bryant 1997). Local Supply Working Circles were created to supply local needs under Forest Department (FD) management, but these have not been a success, with most becoming encroached or degraded.

Over recent decades there has been a gradual devolution of control of natural resources back to local people. Community Forestry has been a prevalent policy around the world for returning control of village forests to communities, thereby mobilising them to protect and sustainably manage the forests to fulfil their livelihood forest product needs locally. (Larson et al. 2010)

Implementation of Community Forestry

Community Forestry in Myanmar was launched through the Community Forestry Instruction (CFI) issued in 1995.

Implementation began immediately, and has been promoted by several international donor-supported projects (e.g. UNDP, JICA, DFID - see Box 1 below) as well as through FD promotion, and in a few cases self-organisation by communities. Implementation received a major boost through the Forestry Master Plan (2001) which mandated that 2.27 mil. acres (1.36% of the country) be handed over to FUGs by 2030-31.

Annual progress of Community Forest establishment over the last 15 years had averaged 6,943 acres (2,810 ha) per year. Figure 2 shows the annual level of handover, illustrating that handover peaked in 2001-2, but has been declining since.

Box 1: Myanmar’s Community Forest model, as specified in the CFI 1995

- A group of interested local people (although not necessary all village households) together form a Forest Users’ Group (FUG) and select a Management Committee (MC) by consensus.
- The Management Committee identifies the area for Community Forestry and prepares a location map.
- The Management Committee then applies, via the Township Forest Officer (TFO), to the District Forest Officer (DFO) for permission to establish a Community Forest.
- The Township Forest Officer assesses the suitability and availability of the area, and submits the application to the DFO with the map and recommendations. (For land at the disposal of the State, if it is not forest land, the TFO must also get the approval of the concerned State/Regional authority)
- On getting the DFO’s permission to establish the Community Forest, the Management Committee draws up a Management Plan (MP) with assistance from the FD, and submits the plan to the DFO.
- After confirmation of the Management Plan, the DFO issues a Community Forestry Certificate (CFC) with the relevant rules, etc. attached. The land lease is 30 years initially; extendable and inheritable.
- The FUG Management Committee then establishes the Community Forest. The FUG can harvest timber fuelwood and NTFPs according to management plan provision, and can sell products surplus to village needs. The FUG must follow the Management Plan, and if they deviate from it DFO can revoke the certificate.
- The Forest Department must provide, free of charge, seeds and seedlings for the first rotation, and necessary technical support.

Figure 2: Annual Community Forest Handover Level

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Box 2: Donor Support for the Implementation of Community Forestry

The formation process for Community Forests and Forest User Groups involves a significant effort. To date most formations have been under the support of donor-funded projects. The main ones are:

United Nations Development Programme ‘Human Development Initiative (HDI)’

Since 1994, UNDP has played a major role in promoting sustainable rural development and food security through its Human Development Initiative (HDI) programme.

- The 1st phase ran from early 1994 to late 1996;
- The 2nd phase ran from late 1996 to late 1999;
- The 3rd phase ran from late 1999 to early 2002.

Community forestry was part of the programme, to both satisfy local communities’ basic needs and achieve environmental conservation in Southern Shan State, Dry Zone and Ayeyawady Division. After the HDI third phase, a three-year Integrated Community Development Project formed HDI-IV, but has had minimal emphasis on community forestry.


In cooperation with the Forest Department JICA has undertaken a three-year “Community Forestry Training and Extension Project” (COMFORT) in the Dry Zone starting from August 2003. COMFORT was designed to provide knowledge and skills of FD staff for promoting participatory forest management in Myanmar. COMFORT has formed 117 users’ groups, having 6985 members, covering a total area of 12,728 acres of community forests. Of these, 26 users’ groups with 1,661 members have received community forestry certificates for 3,812 acres of community forests.

UK Government Department for International Development ‘Pyoe Pin’

The Pyoe Pin Programme has supported CF activities in Kachin State through two NGOs (EcoDev and Shalom Foundation), contributing about US$700,000 for two years from February 2009 to February 2011, and covering nine townships. EcoDev has established 14,784 acres of CF for 25,618 households, while Shalom Foundation has accomplished 14,160 acres of CF for 1,187 households. Two CFs have been granted certificates so far, and the remaining CFs are still awaiting them.

Forest Resource Environment Development and Conservation Association (FREDA) ‘Mangrove Reforestation Project’

FREDA has been implementing this project phase by phase in the Ayeyawady Delta since 1999 in cooperation with Action for Mangrove Reforestation (ACTMANG) of Japan. During Phase I & II, the project established 7,892 acre of mangrove community forests. The 5-year Phase III started from 2009.
There are now 572 FUGs with certificates, managing 104,146 acres of forest, (with more awaiting their certificate). Implementation progress to date has been highest in Shan (221 FUGs), Mandalay (99 FUGs), Rakhine (85 FUGs), Ayeyawady (49 FUGs) and Magway (40 FUGs). Map 1 below shows the distribution of FUGs by region.

Of Myanmar’s 127,459 square miles of forest cover (48.8% of the country’s land area) the 104,146 acres (163 sq .miles) handed over for Community Forestry so far represents only 0.13%. The rate of CF handover has been far too low to meet the Master Plan’s 30-year target (i.e. 2.27 million acres by 2030), for which we would need to hand over 50,000 acres (approx. 20,000 ha) per year, an almost ten times higher rate. The FD also aims to obtain 4.13 million m³ of wood fuel from community forests, i.e. 25% of the country’s total wood fuel requirement of 16.53 million m³ by 2030, a target also unlikely to be achieved at the current rate. Thus finding ways to increase the rate of handover is essential.

Box 3: Taking Stock: Our Study Approach

We conducted a study in 2010 to take stock of the achievements of the past 15 years of Community Forestry in Myanmar. We sought to understand how community forestry is currently working, and to identify pathways for CF to fulfill its potential in the future.

We first developed a detailed inter-disciplinary research design, taking advice from a range of stakeholders in late 2010. We then selected two States and two regions (Kachin, Mandalay, Shan, and Ayeyawady) for study, to reflect the diverse environments where CF is happening. We then randomly selected 16 FUGs within these from the Forest Department lists of registered FUGs.

We conducted field work in the Community Forests and the associated Forest User Group villages during October to December 2010. The community forests were assessed, the local Forest User Group institution researched, and a total of 272 households were interviewed.

Diverse Forest User Groups and Community Forests

The 16 FUGs we studied comprised a wide range of local conditions. The basic details are shown in Table 1.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Forest User Groups</th>
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<th>CF area (acres)</th>
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Our study sites ranged as follows:

- from very small to very large villages (populations from 171 to over 39,000)
- from very small to very large FUG membership (from 5 to 263 households)
- from very small to very large Community Forests (from 33 to 1200 acres)
- a range of forest types: from moist deciduous and dry deciduous to mangroves
- from ‘young’ to ‘old’ FUGs (only 4 years to 16 years)
- a range of different livelihood practices: long fallows cultivation, sedentary cultivation, forest product collection, livestock, toddy palm harvesting and so on.

Map 1: Myanmar Forest Cover, Distribution of Community Forests with Study Sites (numbered)

Village forests were degraded pre-formation

In almost all the study Community Forests (13 of 16, or 81%) the local people said the forest areas were relatively...
degraded prior to introducing community forestry. The degradation was primarily because they were apparently de facto open access and the village lacked the authority to regulate their use within sustainable levels by users both within and beyond the village. In the remaining 3 FUGs (19% of the sample) the forests and other land uses were in moderate condition prior to CF but the trend was uncertain, partly due to tenure insecurity (see Table 2, column 1 below). However this aspect of our study is not entirely conclusive, and the issue of pre-CF land use, tenure and condition demands further investigation.

**FUGs effectively institutionalised at formation**

Almost all of the study FUGs (14 of 16, or 88%) were initiated in the context of donor-supported projects. The remaining two were self initiated. Self initiated CF can be a significant and low cost approach to scaling up Community Forestry in the future.

Villagers were motivated to protect them to improve their condition, ensure environmental services (like water supply), basic needs (fuelwood and grazing etc.) and for income earning opportunities.

We found that overall the formation processes have been effective. We found 50% of the study FUGs (8 of 16 sites) to have been well institutionalised at the time of formation, and a further 31% to have been moderately well institutionalised. Problems include a lack of detailed understanding of CF processes due to too brief initial trainings and orientation.

However for 3 FUGs (19% of the sample) the institutionalisation has been seriously flawed; particularly due to elite capture problems. The ostensible ‘self selection’ of FUG group runs the risk of elite capture; some were formed from a handful of households leading to inequity in control and use of community resources. (See Table 2, column 2)

Study villages show a spectrum of equality-inequality. In some cases it is clear the poorest were depending on these resources, so they may have borne the brunt of post-formation restrictions for regeneration. However as the resource regenerates benefits return and often at a higher and more sustainable level. A more socially inclusive and pro-poor approach to formation and forest management planning is needed to ensure the interests of poorer members of the village are protected.

**FUGs are protecting and managing their forests**

FUGs have introduced a range of different management regimes according to the size, type and condition of the forests they manage and the management objectives. Regimes may involve areas under collective plantation, collective protection for natural regeneration, areas of individual agro-forestry plots, and combined collective plantation on individual plots. Figure 3 illustrates these.

Species choice is a critically important issue in planning, and we found planting options may have been limited to those recommended by the Forest Department, rather than local preferences. Also the legal marketing status of teak remains unclear to many villagers, affecting whether they plant teak, a species which could provide significant incomes.

Forest protection remains a difficult challenge for almost all FUGs, as outsiders try to continue to harvest forest products even after protection is introduced. Because many villages don’t want to get into conflictual relations they look to the FD to mediate, but in most cases the FD staff are not backing them up. Nevertheless, we found two groups having ‘good’ protection and 13 ‘moderately good’ protection (with a degree of ‘porousness’), only one having ineffective protection (see Table 2, column 3).

Plate 1: The forest survey team with FUG members

Thus our findings indicate almost all FUGs have introduced quite effective management and protection.

Figure 3: Study FUGs – Management regimes

Figure 4: Growing stock (timber volume) of Natural and Plantations in study Community Forests (m³/ha)
Community Forests are improving / regenerating

The forest study data shows us that forest regeneration is occurring across virtually all villages. 13 of the 16 study sites (81%) have forests showing overall good or good forest health by composite indicators (see Table 2, column 4). Natural regeneration has been relatively successful although better in Kachin and Ayeyawady (due to more moist conditions) and weaker in Shan and Mandalay.

Plate 2: Mangrove regeneration at Nyaungtapin CF

The success of CF plantations has however been sub-optimal: in most study sites: despite survival rates for saplings being generally good, the mean annual increment (i.e. annual growth rate of saplings) is below desirable levels. Conditions in the Dry Zone are particular challenging: all our Mandalay FUGs are struggling to ensure their plantation efforts succeed: and survival rates are significantly lower than elsewhere in 2 study FUGs (36% and 54%). Across almost all CF we are seeing improving ‘ecosystem services’ e.g. water supply, soil condition and biodiversity habitat.

Plate 3: Improving water sources in Taungkya CF

One of the most dramatic ecosystem services has been storm protection in the delta region: in one site the regeneration of the community forest seems to have been the decisive factor in protecting the lives of villagers when cyclone Nargis hit.

Overall communities are significantly contributing to the national re-greening objectives enshrined in the CF Instruction.

Regeneration is leading to livelihood benefits

We found almost all FUGs have regenerated their forests and this is providing a range of benefits: timber, fuelwood, fodder, Non Timber Forest Products and ecosystem services, particularly water. The patterns of benefits are complex, depending on the forest type and condition, and the livelihood practices, but the overall picture is very positive.

Plate 4: Taungkya Community Forest, Shan

To summarise, we found:

- an apparent increase in sustainable timber and poles off-take in 50% of sites
- An apparent increase in sustainable fuelwood off-take in 11 sites (69%), though a reduction in one site.
- An apparently balanced picture in terms of fodder, with 2 sites increasing, two reducing availability, and one stable.
- Increasing wild food harvesting in two sites
- Increasing medicinal plant harvesting in 7 (44%)
- Increased bamboo harvesting in one site
- Increased harvesting of ‘other’ NTFPs in five sites (31%) – these vary by forest type, and include yam, turmeric, cardamom, seeds and propagules.
- In three sites agroforestry cultivation has increased for commercial crops

Plate 5: Yams collected from Taungkya CF

Environmental services are also improving:

- Six study FUGs (37.5%) reported improving water supplies, a particularly important issue in dry zone
areas. However one site experienced declining supplies.

- Seven study sites (44%) experienced improved soil protection benefits, including reduced soil erosion and improved soil condition and nutrient cycling.
- All 4 delta FUGs studied experienced improved environmental protection from storms, and of course in the context of Nargis the community forests saved many lives in these villages.
- Finally three groups expressed the aesthetic benefits from improved forest condition.

Box 4: Life-saving ecosystem services from Community Forestry

The environmental protection function of community forestry has been most evident at Byant Gyi Gon FUG in Aveyawady. The village leader personally initiated formation of CFUG after hearing radio report on the CF initiative in 1995. Thirteen years later, when Cyclone Nargis hit the Delta region in 2008 the mature community forest took the brunt of the impact, and all villagers here survived, whereas in neighbouring villages without CF over 30% of people were killed.

There are a number of wider livelihood benefits which the FUG members mentioned. One is security of access and tenure for the Community Forest, ensuring security of product flows into the future. Another is the ‘social capital’ such as improved social cohesion, experience of deliberative decision-making, improved rapport in the village, leadership skill development and so on.

There is undoubtedly much potential here for enhancing the livelihood benefits through both livelihood oriented forest management and also value addition and marketing development.

Costs and Benefits of Community Forest mangrove plantation

We performed an economic cost-benefit analysis for one plantation at Wargon study site in the Delta region. This illustrates a very high positive net return. The net cash flow across the 9-year old plantation has shown a FRR of 24.28%, meaning that one Kyat invested in the plantation over the project period has generated K0.24 per year for every year that the K1 remains committed to the project.

Figure 5: Costs, benefits and net cash flow of the 1 acre plantation (Kyat / year)

Since the forest rotation has been set at 10 years, if the plantation is clear-felled at the 10th year, there will be large lump sum revenue and in consequence the profit will increase significantly.

Box 5: Case study of Wuyan FUG, Kachin

The growing population had intensified forest extraction from the large 1200 acre forest area, which had gradually deteriorated.

In 2006 Ecodev NGO initiated the formation process (with donor support from PyoePin). Local people wanted to improve forest conservation and regulate use, especially by outsiders from town, and defend against cases of land grabbing.

The FUG was formed with 33% of village households. Other households felt it was not relevant for them, and some poorer households could not afford the time.

The FUG was effectively formed, and members attend regular meetings, participate in forest activities, and 94% have high confidence in the management committee. In the management plan they have split the forest into three areas: at the top of the hill a 600 acre conservation area, in the mid areas a 300 acre timber production plantation, and the lower 300 acres area an agro-forestry area on separate household plots.

The forest protection introduced has been generally effective, although it is proving very difficult to stop the most determined illegal cutters coming from outside, and more support from the FD office is desired.

Even after just 3 years of concerted efforts the improvement in forest condition is clearly evident: water supplies from the forest springs have increased significantly, and soil fertility in agricultural land around the forest area is improving due to nutrient transfers.

Villagers are now getting forest products such as fuelwood poles and posts. The FUG is also distributing timber for community development, for school and bridge construction. There is improved availability of wild food, especially wild pigs and guinea pigs.

Wuyan is one of the more successful FUGs; due to a combination of factors: Good leadership and social cohesion within the village, strong post-formation support from NGOs, and a constructive relationship with the FD and local authorities. Wuyan FUG is now active in organising a local FUG network.

Distribution of costs and benefits is probably moderately equitable but somewhat unclear

How are benefits being shared, and is it fair? We were really not able to answer this issue conclusively during this brief study, as it would require very detailed examination of the pre-CF tenure and access conditions and land use practices, to compare against the post CF situation.

However what evidence we could collect indicates a tentative positive finding. We found six of the 16 study
sites (37.5%) seemed to be reasonably equitable in their benefit-sharing practices. The best of these are both highly inclusive and specifically pro-poor in ensuring the poorest households get their needs considered.

Half the study FUGs (50%) were assessed to be ‘moderately’ equitable: there are some good aspects (e.g. equal sharing, inclusion etc.) but these are balanced by some less equitable aspects (e.g. villagers who are non-members, sometimes the poorest households, feel excluded, and specific groups are getting more of the benefits of regeneration; these may even be neighbouring villagers or the FUG management committee.

A small number (2 or 12.5%) show poor equity. These groups are very small FUGs who have taken over forest land from the larger village, and are benefiting from it well, but with significant problems, such as conflicts. Three of the 16 sites (19%) are stagnant (3 of 16) with little sign of well, but with significant problems, such as conflicts. Three of the 16 sites (19%) are stagnant (3 of 16) with little sign of activity. The stagnated and inactive sites were in the overall extent of FUG collective activity. The stagnated and inactive sites were in the overall extent of FUG collective activity. The stagnated and inactive sites were in the overall extent of FUG collective activity. The stagnated and inactive sites were in the overall extent of FUG collective activity. The stagnated and inactive sites were in the overall extent of FUG collective activity. The stagnated and inactive sites were in the overall extent of FUG collective activity. 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The stagnated and inactive sites were in the overall extent of FUG collective activity.

Figure 6 below summarises the overall extent of FUG performance. Shan and Mandalay, which also have a higher proportion of ‘moderately active’ FUG sites. Kachin and Ayeyawady FUGs are performing better, and this is probably related to better formation and post-formation support, as well as better environmental conditions for forestry to succeed (e.g. more rainfall).

Only 5 of our study sites (31%) are actually submitting their annual reports. Even otherwise well-performing FUGs are neglecting this duty, and the benefits of going to the trouble of submitting this seem unclear. Record keeping is also worryingly poor, indicated by lack of management plan in 7 of the study sites (44%).

Conflicts exist in 69% of our study sites, and of these 31%. are serious problems. The most prevalent problem is conflict over enforcing regulations on extraction. However there are also conflicts to do with perceived inequitable exclusion from FUG membership in three sites (19%)

Post-formation support is generally perceived to be moderate (44% of sites) or poor (31%), with only two, both relatively recent FUGs in Kachin experiencing a ‘good’ level (12.5%) from NGOs. Support was unclear in 2 sites likely to be mediocre.

Thus sustainability is a serious challenge, and demands improved post-formation support to be secured.

**Sustainability may be in question**

Can FUGs sustain their achievements? We found half the study FUGs (50%) are currently continuing to function well. Five of 16 FUGs (31%) are functioning moderately well, but with significant problems, such as conflicts. Three of the 16 sites (19%) are stagnant (3 of 16) with little sign of collective activity. The stagnated and inactive sites were in Table 2: Key indicators of Study FUG Performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Group</th>
<th>State/ div.</th>
<th>1 Prior Forest condition <strong>tentative</strong></th>
<th>2 Institutionalised at formation</th>
<th>3 Forest protection effective?</th>
<th>4 Forest Condition</th>
<th>5 Improved Livelihood Benefits</th>
<th>6 Equitable? <strong>tentative</strong></th>
<th>7. Currently active?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Wuyan</td>
<td>Kachin</td>
<td>x (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Gweyutyan</td>
<td>Kachin</td>
<td>✓ (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Shwe Myin Thar</td>
<td>Mandalay</td>
<td>✓ (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.Yatketkyi</td>
<td>Mandalay</td>
<td>✓ (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.Myay-thintwin</td>
<td>Mandalay</td>
<td>✓ (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.Letpante</td>
<td>Mandalay</td>
<td>✓ (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.Mineln</td>
<td>Shan South</td>
<td>✓ (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.Pway Hla</td>
<td>Shan South</td>
<td>✓ (x)</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.Lweiy Nyeint</td>
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<td>✓ (x)</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.Nau-taungkya</td>
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<td>✓ (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.Kone shine</td>
<td>Shan South</td>
<td>✓ (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.Taung Kya</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Nyaung-tapin</td>
<td>Ayeyawady</td>
<td>✓ (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Byankkkone</td>
<td>Ayeyawady</td>
<td>✓ (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Telbinseik</td>
<td>Ayeyawady</td>
<td>✓ (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Warkone</td>
<td>Ayeyawady</td>
<td>✓ (x)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: x = poor; ~ = moderate; ✓ = good (according to composite metrics)

Figure 6: Summary of multi-criteria assessment of the 16 Study FUGs.
Policy, legal and institutional issues

Foresters generally understand the Community Forestry provisions in the CFI 1995. During the study Forest Department staff were interviewed in the townships where we conducted the field study. We found a relatively high level of understanding of the Community Forestry Instruction and CF concepts across the staff. The most senior level had the clearest understanding (averaging ‘excellent’) and the Forest Guards and Day wagers had the next highest score (75% had a ‘very good’ understanding and level of commitment. The other levels averaged a majority of ‘very good’ level of understanding.

Despite generally good awareness levels amongst FD staff CF handover has been slow. This is partly because the CF Instruction at present lacks the status of a law and therefore is not treated as equivalent to the Forest Law. To improve handover there is a need for stronger policy, as well as stronger direction from senior levels.

Limitations of this study and issues for future research: tenure, food security, gender

This study has been the first of its kind, to attempt to systematically assess how Community Forestry has been working in the field in Myanmar. It was conducted with modest resources over about 3 months of fieldwork. Devolving natural resource governance to the local level, through policies like Community Forestry involves complex and multi-facetted processes. Whilst we are satisfied with the significant achievements we feel the study has made, we recognise there are several areas which, under the resource constraints, we have not been able to assess conclusively, and which therefore demand further examination with a more detailed social science approach:

We have focussed primarily on the performance of community forestry according to its own terms – i.e. the increase in forest cover in areas labelled community forests and the possibility of benefit sharing from those areas. We have not examined the more complex land use dynamics which introducing community forestry may precipitate. Local people have a range of responses to the proposition of introducing community forestry, and the changes that it leads to. The threat to the continuity of fallows cultivation in upland land use mosaics when they become labelled as ‘degraded forests’ threatens the food security for some households. On the other hand, despite the restrictions, introducing CF may still be attractive to villagers as a route to more secure land tenure, especially as taungya cultivation typically lacks tenure security. Even within households, the pros and cons are likely to be different between men and women, who use the local village lands in different ways according to their culturally ascribed roles.

The issue of the relationship between the state and the village is a delicate one in Myanmar, and CF inevitably affects this relationship in ways we have not examined. Thus what we might call the ‘micro-politics’ of Community Forestry and the ways it changes land use practices, the livelihood coping strategies and the effects on food security are still; somewhat unclear, and demand more detailed and systematic further investigation.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. IMPROVE THE LEGAL AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT FOR DEVOLVING LOCAL LAND CONTROL TO THE VILLAGE

The current policy environment for CF, based on the CFI 1995, is fundamentally sound. However it has limited force as the CFI lacks the status of policy or law. The CFI provisions should also be enhanced in the light of experience:

- Local people should control local land use for their food and livelihood security. Community Forestry as well as other policies should support this principle.
- The legal basis of CF should be strengthened – from Instruction to a new Law
- CFUGs should be socially inclusive – they should be formed from all of the village as far as possible, not just a self-selected group. There should be also a specific gendered and pro-poor approach in policy and support for equity
- Community based forest product processing and marketing represents a potentially important opportunity for rural enterprise development. Regulations need to be clarified to villagers (e.g. for teak) and where appropriate liberalised to support the FUGs. Control over harvesting is currently in FD hands – this should be relaxed.

2. SUSTAIN AND ACCELERATE FUG FORMATION

Donor-funded projects have been the main initiators of CF formation (UNDP, JICA, DFID), although NGOs, the FD, and committees themselves have played significant initiating roles as well. Donor support is not however sustainable, and having effectively developed and demonstrated the CF model can work, projects in this sector have declined, leaving an uncertain funding future for sustained CF handover and post formation support. Myanmar’s main CF challenge is now how to sustain progress in the absence of widespread donor support.

There are numerous diverse location-specific enterprise / commercial opportunities that might also provide a strong incentive for communities, NGOs and the private sector to invest in long term CF support. Other funding opportunities may arise from payment for ecosystem service, particular REDD and other carbon forestry schemes.

- The government needs to prioritise the accelerated handover of Community Forests, and develop strategies, mechanisms and targets for doing this
- The FUG formation process needs to be streamlined and made easier and lower cost in order that the implementation of the Master Plan targets is not contingent on donor support. Promoting self-initiation is a significant opportunity.
- Government and other partners can develop initiatives responding to the changing international opportunities.

3. STRENGTHEN SUPPORT PROVISION TO FUGs

The leading FUGs are institutionally robust: their forests have matured, ecosystem services and livelihood benefits. They are leading Myanmar’s CF programme into a ‘second generation’ phase of more active forest management for multiple benefits, more equitable benefit distribution and are exploring new areas of activity like enterprise development and network development.

- The best FUGs need tailored support as they move into new areas of activity and develop networks which can provide support to other FUGs.

Most FUGs are in urgent need of support however, across a range of issues: institutional mentoring; conflict resolution; enforcement of forest protection and so on. The weakest groups need re-formation. But support needs are not being met: after initial formation, support has declined as so far the FD has not reoriented adequately to fulfilling this role, leaving a ‘support vacuum’ in which many CFUGs are stagnating.

- The FD must play the lead support role in the post donor scenario. A renewed support initiative from Government is vital to consolidate the achievements of existing FUGs.
- Forest Departments need to monitor FUGs on an ongoing basis in order to be provide timely need-based support, likely to include the following areas: awareness raising and leadership support, technical forestry training and guidance and renewal of management plans, harvesting checking and approval, enterprise development, protection enforcement support, conflict management, promotion of equity / pro-poor / gender sensitivity; membership reform and inclusion of non-members, networking facilitation, remedial action for stagnating groups.
- Forest Departments will need a significant re-orientation to fulfil this role, as well as increased resources. There may need to be a specific CF unit, and/or enhancement of the extension unit
- Support provision must be diversified: Encouraging alternate service providers as partners to the Forest Department can also spread the load. These can include both NGOs and also Community Based Organisations such as leading FUGs themselves and their networks.

4. IMPROVE MONITORING AND ADAPTIVE CO-LEARNING PROCESSES

This study, conducted in a short space of time with limited resources, has initially addressed the many complex and location specific experiences and issues.

- The annual reporting requirement, which currently few FUGs or FD field offices are observing, could become the basis for an effective monitoring and multi-stakeholder co learning programme, linked to a need-based FD support service
- There is a need for ongoing programme assessment to link with policy development. This could ideally be based around Participatory Action Research in conjunction with FUGs

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