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## ASIA-PACIFIC FORESTRY COMMISSION

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### NEW LANDSCAPES FOR COMMUNITY FORESTRY

### SECRETARIAT NOTE

#### Introduction

1. Community-based forestry (CBF) is broadly defined as initiatives, sciences, policies, institutions and processes that are intended to increase the role of local people in governing and managing forest resources. CBF takes many forms, e.g. joint forest management, participatory conservation, partial or full devolution of management rights and private ownership. It includes both collaborative regimes (forestry practiced on land that has some form of communal tenure and requires collective action) and smallholder forestry (on land that is generally privately owned). Throughout Asia and the Pacific, CBF is considered an important modality to contribute to addressing deforestation and degradation. In reality, the potential of CBF can go beyond this.

2. When secure tenure rights and institutional support are provided, CBF has a significant role in helping to improve management, reduce conflict and achieve national targets such as climate change mitigation, forest protection and restoration, food security and nutrition, gender equality and poverty reduction. It is important to understand that:

- CBF encompasses more than just the forest. It needs to be understood at the landscape level, addressing the many challenges and opportunities that exist at this scale;
- CBF is more than handing over responsibilities for forest management to local communities. It needs to provide tangible benefits for these communities with a meaningful return of investments; and
- CBF should be regarded as a genuine transfer of rights (with associated benefits) and responsibilities to local communities. Local communities need to have access to 'good' forest resources rather than just degraded forests as is commonly the case.

3. Recent developments at global, regional and national levels present 'new landscapes' for CBF. Global discourse including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Paris Agreement will have impacts on CBF. Increasing global and local demand for legal and sustainable timber and fair trade in commodities and ecosystem services offer opportunities for CBF to play an increasingly significant role in

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forest and land management. At the same time, strengthened regional cooperation, e.g. through the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the opening up of new markets and trade opportunities, will influence CBF in the future. Likewise, changes in, for example, domestic politics, demographics and resource bases inevitably will have impacts on CBF.

### **New opportunities and challenges for CBF**

4. Rapid developments at all levels are presenting both opportunities and challenges for CBF. The global agreements cited above require inclusive and participatory approaches. The development agenda going forward will have to ensure that ‘no-one is left behind’. This spirit is well embedded in CBF. In that sense, CBF can be an important element of an inclusive, integrated, local-level sustainable development model.

5. CBF has been viewed as an integral part of local natural resource management. Because CBF is implemented by local stakeholders that live within and depend on rural landscapes, it deals with many other issues beyond forestry such as integration of agriculture and forestry for livelihood and environmental benefits, pro-poor social cohesion, the management of various resources such as trees, water and livestock. CBF offers an opportunity for landscape-level management. There are many other opportunities for CBF given recent developments and changes, for example:

- Including CBF as an integral part of countries’ efforts in the achievement of SDGs, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and other targets at the national level;
- Scaling up CBF best practices for more productive and sustainable landscape management;
- Strengthening CBF institutions and participatory approaches at the heart of CBF for inclusive resource management; and
- Scaling up contributions of CBF to local and national economies by ensuring communities have access to more tangible benefits beyond subsistence, including opportunities for adding value and access to domestic and international markets for goods and services.

6. At the same time, recent developments also present some challenges. While CBF has the potential to make significant contributions to many aspects of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, in many locations it is questionable that CBF is at sufficient scale to contribute significantly to the ambitious targets. The ability of CBF to significantly reduce rural poverty and provide tangible benefits to the rural poor may also be questioned and the capacity for CBF to be scaled up beyond very local levels may be an issue. In short, it is timely to revisit the potential that CBF may offer and ensure that its real values can be demonstrated within the new socio-economic and political landscapes that are emerging.

### **Current state of CBF, countries’ targets**

7. While some forms of CBF have been practiced for hundreds of years, Community-based Forest Management, in its current form started in Asia and the Pacific in the 1980s in the form of local initiatives, mainly in response to community demands and concerns about forest degradation. Across 16 countries in the region for which data are available, a total of 185 million hectares of forest land are held under CBF management regimes, accounting for 34 percent of total forest land (Table 1). While many countries in Asia and the Pacific have some type of CBF regime, programmes and approaches within the region are highly diverse. A common factor in most Asian countries is that most forests are legally under government control and CBF regimes generally involve some form of devolution of responsibility for forest

management. Sometimes, but not always, local communities have rights over forests, but in general these rights are highly circumscribed. The situation in the Pacific subregion is somewhat different. In Melanesian countries, in particular, customary landownership, including forest ownership, is legally recognized, however, in some of these countries, communities are prevented by regulatory requirements from exercising effective control over forest management.

8. In Nepal, for example, policy reforms in 1989 and 1993 enabled allocation of forest land to groups for their management, with the groups empowered to use all forest products for their benefit. CBF in Nepal is now a national programme, with almost 2 million hectares (23 percent of the national forest estate) under management by more than 18 000 registered Forest User Groups involving 1.6 million households (33 percent of the rural population).

**Table 1. Extent of CBF in Asia and the Pacific**

| Country                          | Forest land<br>(million ha) | Forest land under CBF regimes<br>(million ha) | % of forest land<br>under CBF regimes |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Australia                        | 123.00                      | 41.90   | 34                                    |
| Bangladesh                       | 2.52                        | 0.27  | 11                                    |
| Bhutan                           | 3.10                        | 0.04  | 1                                     |
| Cambodia                         | 11.12                       | 0.25  | 2                                     |
| China                            | 181.38                      | 108.91  | 60                                    |
| India                            | 68.43                       | 23.20   | 34                                    |
| Indonesia                        | 131.2                       | 0.84  | 1                                     |
| Lao People's Democratic Republic | 18.68                       | 5.90  | 32                                    |
| Malaysia                         | 18.48                       | n.a.  | n.a.                                  |
| Mongolia                         | 12.55                       | 3.15  | 25                                    |
| Myanmar                          | 20.41                       | 0.05  | 0                                     |
| Nepal                            | 6.01                        | 1.87  | 31                                    |
| Papua New Guinea                 | 25.33                       | 25.08   | 99                                    |
| Philippines                      | 18.08                       | 10.96   | 61                                    |
| Thailand                         | 17.22                       | 0.54  | 3                                     |
| Viet Nam                         | 13.52                       | 3.81  | 28                                    |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>548.03</b>               | <b>184.87</b>                                 | <b>34</b>                             |

Source: Based on RECOFTC, 2013 except for Australia (ABARES, 2013) and Mongolia (H. Ykhanbai, personal communication, 2015)

9. Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region have set ambitious target areas for CBF (Table 2). Often this required developing legal frameworks and piloting a system to facilitate the handover of tenure to local communities. This has sometimes proven time consuming and created challenges in meeting the targets.

10. In summary, while CBF regimes are now a major modality of forest management throughout the region and the world, many are performing well below expectations and could do much better if all the conditions required for effective functioning were met. The most effective CBF regimes have a number of common “enabling features” that can guide policy reform. These include secure tenure rights, an enabling regulatory framework, strong governance, viable technologies, adequate market knowledge and a

supportive bureaucracy. Regardless of the importance of each these conditions, they all need to be fulfilled for CBF regimes to operate at their full potential and to deliver the biophysical and socioeconomic outcomes that are expected of them.

11. CBF is currently at varying stages of development across the region, ranging from long-running and relatively mature regimes in India, Nepal and the Philippines to relatively recent programmes in Bhutan and Mongolia. China has the greatest area of forest land under CBF (108.9 million hectares, or 60 percent of the country's total forest land) while Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand each have 3 percent or less of their forest land held under CBF regimes. The rate of increase in the proportion of the region's forest land held under CBF regimes is modest, having grown from 31 percent to 34 percent in the decade between 2002 and 2012.

**Table 2. CBF progress in selected countries**

| Country     | Area<br>ha | Target     |      | % achieved<br>by 2016 |
|-------------|------------|------------|------|-----------------------|
|             |            | ha         | year |                       |
| Cambodia    | 296 240    | 2 000 000  | 2029 | 15                    |
| Indonesia   | 1 672 000  | 12 700 000 | 2019 | 13                    |
| Myanmar     | 113 765    | 919 000    | 2030 | 12                    |
| Nepal       | 1 181 000  | 2 300 000  | 2024 | 51                    |
| Philippines | 4 018 952  | 9 000 000  | 2008 | 45                    |
| Thailand    | 750 457    | 1 600 000  | 2025 | 47                    |
| Viet Nam    | 4 256 375  | 4 000 000  | 2020 | 100                   |

### **CBF at the heart of landscape management, the playing field for cross-sectoral approaches**

12. There is increasing understanding of the value of landscape approaches for addressing opportunities and challenges in natural resource management. For example, at the ASEAN level the Multi-sectoral Framework on Climate Change: Agriculture and Forestry towards Food Security (AFCC) has emphasized the need to take cross-sectoral, inclusive approaches and mechanisms to address the many challenges and opportunities linked to achieving the SDGs, including Food Security (SDG 2). This reflects the growing recognition of forests' role in the water-energy-food nexus, as well as in the fact that change in one sector of the nexus usually affects the others. In relation to landscape approaches, CBF offers several advantages. CBF facilitates strong local- and landscape-level governance. The participatory decision-making that CBF brings at local levels can play an important role in addressing issues of weak governance that often affect forests in the region. For example, the mandated number of women in the Executive Committee of Community Forestry User Groups in Nepal has played a transformative role in strengthening women's active participation in civil society organization platforms, where women's leadership has proven to be a valuable political voice.

13. The participatory approaches at the heart of CBF are being scaled up to the landscape level through CBF networks and associations. By coming together through formal and informal networks, local-level CBF user groups are able to collectively address common challenges as well as take advantage of opportunities. This can include, for example, watershed forest management that impacts those living downstream, and coming together to share lessons learned and innovative ideas for improving forest landscape management. CBF can be a good model for local landscape institutional set-up. Local CBF

committees, rules and regulations may not necessarily focus only on forestry issues *per se*. There are other important and interlinked issues such as water management, livestock grazing area, agriculture development, agroforestry and so forth that are part of CBF-led institutions at the local level and can be applied in landscape approaches.

### **Real benefits for communities through commercialization of CBF**

14. Many organizations, including FAO and RECOFTC–The Center for People and Forests, are emphasizing the need for landscape approaches (i.e. forest and landscape restoration [FLR]), if forest restoration efforts are to be successful. FLR emphasizes the need to focus not only on ecological rehabilitation but also on enhancing the well-being and tenure rights of people living in and around the areas being restored. For successful FLR in the context of CBF, it is crucial that communities receive real benefits from their investments in forest landscapes. The basic logic of CBF underpins this requirement. That is, if an enabling environment built on strong and clear tenure and rights is in place then communities will invest resources and time in their CBF, bringing with it multiple benefits. Many governments in the Asia-Pacific region are adjusting legal frameworks to allow communities to make use of CBF to improve their well-being beyond meeting subsistence needs. For example, in Myanmar the recent revisions to the 1995 Community Forestry Instructions emphasize the importance of local communities being able to commercialize timber production.

### **Points for consideration**

15. The Commission is invited to share views, discuss and make recommendations on the following:
- New roles and opportunities for the CBF approach given the changing sociopolitical landscapes, new global agreements as well as changing regional and national contexts;
  - Assess existing CBF regimes to identify ways to improve their effectiveness and extent;
  - Ensuring that CBF can include timber management and provides tangible benefits to local people;
  - Programmes and activities that might be implemented in the region to enhance the role of CBF in the SDGs and Paris Agreement;
  - Modalities and approaches to mobilize financial support for CBF in the region to ensure that CBF can be adapted and scaled up for bigger impacts; and
  - Approaches for collaboration to enhance CBF for landscape-level resource management.