

Community forestry in northern Cambodia: *1

— Formation process and regulations —

Sokh Heng *2 · Iida Shigeru *3

Forest policy makers in Cambodia now believe that community forestry could become a successful forest management strategy. After a decade of trial, however, methods for developing community forestry in a specific site remained unclear. This study aims to understand the formation process of community forestry development in northern Cambodia at the local level and to examine existing rules and regulations of a community forest in Stung village. Field investigations and interviews by using semi-structured questionnaires were conducted to collect necessary data and information. The study revealed that almost 33 projects of community forestry development in Siam Reap province, northern Cambodia, are initiated by a facilitation team from at least a non-governmental organization and proceeded through a series of progressive steps. These include 1) site selection, 2) case study, 3) workshop, 4) mapping, 5) formation of Village Forest Committee and 6) forest management plan. At all steps the local community plays central roles in making decisions with support from the facilitation team. The bottom-up process in community forestry development in northern Cambodia not only empowers local people with full rights on forest resources but also enables them to establish rules and regulations suited to their cultural and socioeconomic conditions.

I. Introduction

A new wave of community forestry in Southeast Asia is an important departure from conventional forest management by the governments. Community forestry was defined by FAO in 1978 as any situation that involves local people in a forestry activity (Arnold, 1991). During the period leading up to this new inception of forest management, rural development professionals believed that community forestry could be successful. This opinion was based on the positive results of numerous activities and projects worldwide in the previous decades. However, many questions regarding development and adaptation of community forestry methods to different scenarios remained (Peluso *et al.*, 1994).

In Cambodia, community forestry was first put into practice in 1994 in Takeo, a southern province where forest resources has been severely depleted in the past decades (Sokh *et al.*, 2000). This approach of involving local people in forest conservation has proved successful. In the late 1990s, the concepts of community forestry spread all over the country, in particular, the northern parts where local people depend more on forest resources for their livelihood. While the government of Cambodia still lacks of financial and legal supports on

community forestry development on a national scale, non-governmental and international organizations play a crucial role in community forestry development.

There have been efforts to formulate community forestry guidelines and other related rules at national level in the past few years. However, the efforts have been hindered by a lack of practical information from the current practices (Thomas, 2000). More studies are needed to document experiences from the field practices and evaluate the existing community forestry projects in order to provide policy makers with practical information as well as to community forestry organizers for improving their projects.

This study was generally designed to fulfill this gap of information. It attempted to document experiences and knowledge learned through community forestry development in the province of Siam Reap, northern Cambodia. The study specifically tried to figure out the formation process of community forestry development and its adaptation in Siam Reap province and to understand the regulations and rules of a community forest of Stung village developed through the existing process.

*1 Sokh, H. · 飯田 繁：カンボジアにおけるコミュニティ・フォレストリーの形成過程

*2 九州大学大学院生物資源環境学府 Graduate School of Bioresource and Bioenvironmental Sciences, Kyushu Univ., Fukuoka 812-0053

*3 九州大学大学院農学研究院 Faculty of Agriculture, Graduate School, Kyushu Univ., Fukuoka 812-0053

II. Study area and method

Data and information for this study were collected during a field survey to Siam Reap province where, for the last decade, the number of community forestry projects has been increasing rapidly. The study finally focused on a single community forestry development of Stung village in Prasat Bakong commune, Siam Reap province (Fig-1). The community forestry project of Stung village started in October 1998. The territory of the village used to be an area mostly covered by dense forests until the late 1980s. At present, Stung village has only nine hectare of forests remaining due to excessive cutting by villagers and looting by outsiders.

This deforestation in the territory of Stung village came to an end when the village began the present community forestry project. The project is now being financially supported by the Belgium government and implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The remaining forests, nine hectares, in Stung village now are being designated for conservation and management as community forests for the benefit of the village.

Located close to the main road from the capital Phnom Penh to the northern part of the country, Stung village has a total population of 736 living in 137 households. All villagers are farmers whose livelihoods in part depend on forest resources in and around their village. Some farmers of Stung village depend mainly on the community forests for their income generation.

In this study, after a thorough field observation, interviews were carried out by using semi-structured questionnaire to get data and information from several groups of villagers with different personal and socioeconomic backgrounds. Other key informants are village chief, project organizers and provincial government staff in charge of community forestry in Siam Reap province. Secondary data and information such as reports, unpublished papers, project documents and other materials were also relied upon to support the primary data and information of the field survey.

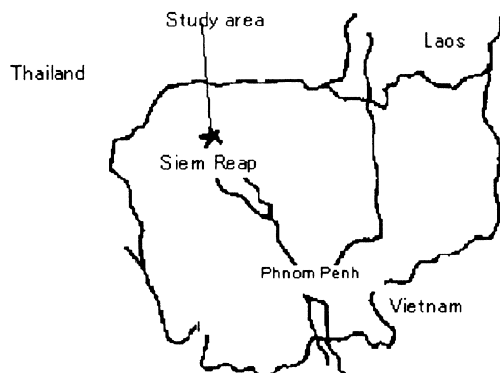


Fig-1. Map of Cambodia and study area

III. Results

In order to have a clear picture of community forestry in northern Cambodia, three important aspects are worth considering: 1) the present context of community forestry in Cambodia, 2) steps in its development and regulations and rules of existing community forestry projects.

1. Overview of community forestry in Cambodia

Until recently, Cambodia's forest lands have been extensive owned and managed by the central Forestry Department. The combination of civil unrest and lacks of law enforcement has limited the capacity of Forestry Department staff to manage their forest resources in a sustainable fashion. The remaining forest lands, currently estimated at ten million hectares or 58 percent of total land area, are in various stages of degradation. There have been efforts at all level to address this problem of uncontrollable deforestation in the last decade. Most of those efforts have been failed. Eventually, in the early 1990s, some forest officials began to realize that the help and involvement of local communities were essential for forest protection. As a result, the Forestry Department with cooperation from a non-government, Mennonite Central Committee, set up a community forestry project in Takeo province in 1994. This has become the first community forestry model ever implemented in Cambodia.

In this project, villagers were given responsibilities of protecting degraded forest lands and enrichment planting of fast growing trees and indigenous species. In return they were granted rights to all forest resources and access to agricultural lands (Ung, 1996). Following this successful experiment in Takeo province, the concept of community forestry has quickly spread nationwide. It is not clear how many community forestry projects are being implemented in the whole country up to now. However, among 22 provinces, Siam Reap has the largest number of community forestry projects. It is said to have 33 projects running under the support of various non-government organizations and international organizations.

Nevertheless, until the present day, there have not been any laws, policies and institutional frameworks to establish community forestry at national level. Realizing that community forestry has potential in conserving forest resources and improving livelihoods of the local communities, the government started in early 1999 the formation of a community forestry policy to define its scopes and extent in the country. However policy development of community forestry has been mainly in the form of the drafting the legislation and guidelines.

In order to improve the implementation of community forestry for the sustainable and equitable forest resource management in Cambodia, there needs to be a clear policy which is supported by legislations and guidelines that define roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, i.e., local communities and the government. Recently there are

indications that the drafted law on community forestry has been sent to the National Assembly for discussions and approval.

2. Formation process of community forestry development in Siam Reap province, northern Cambodia

The community forestry in northern Cambodia dated to the early 1990s when a number of NGOs and international organizations started various rural development projects. The most remarkable one is the Participatory National Resource Management in the Tonle Sap Region. This project is financially supported by the Belgium government and implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. As previously stated there are now a total of 33 community forestry projects and forestry related projects in Siam Reap under this main project. Totally community forestry projects now cover more than fifteen thousand hectares of mostly degraded forest lands scattered across the province. More than six thousand households from 83 villages are participating or engaging in these community forestry projects.

Since the community forestry projects in Siam Reap are mostly developed through participatory process within the provincial framework, it is necessary to examine their formation process at local level. The local level planning forms the basis of implementing community forestry, where all stakeholders work together to improve forest management and solve problems. This section describes steps in community forestry formation in the northern province of Siam Reap.

At local level, community forestry development in the

northern province of Siam Reap is usually carried out through 6 main progressive steps. In all steps the local communities play the principal role with technical support of a facilitation team comprising of the FAO field staff and provincial forestry staff. The six steps include a) Site selection, b) Case study, c) Workshop, d) Mapping, e) Development of regulations and rules and f) Management plan. A schematic diagram of the steps in community forestry development in Siam Reap is provided in Fig - 2 below.

a) Site selection

As mentioned earlier, in Siam Reap province community forestry projects are usually initiated by a facilitation team of provincial government staff with cooperation of non-government organizations. This establishment of liaison with appropriate authority is to ensure the smoothness of the designation of any community forests and ongoing implementation. The facilitation team usually comes to choose a site to develop community forestry basing on some important criteria. An area is said to have a potential of community forestry if its local community are interested in community forestry and requesting assistance to set up the project. It is very helpful if the area has an indigenous forest management system. Other criteria are that the area has not serious disputes of forest resource use and that the users of that forest resource are all from the same community with less different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

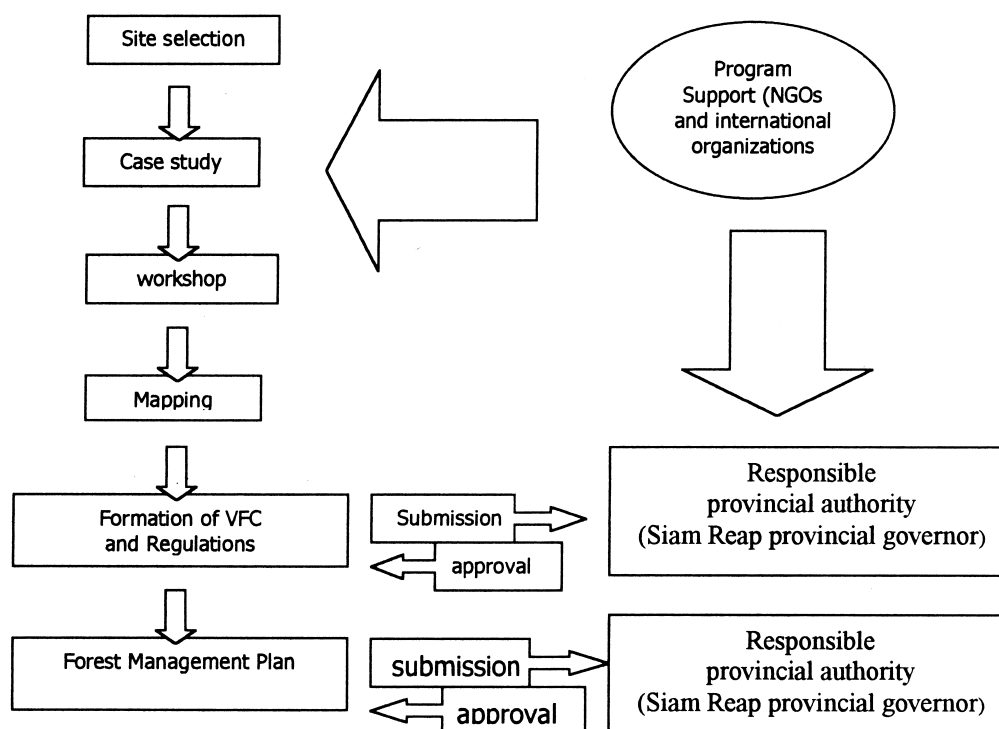


Fig-2. Steps in community forestry development in northern Cambodia

b) Case study

After having selected the area for the designation of the community forest the facilitation team comes to the target area to conduct a case study. There are two important tasks at this step. First the team introduces ideas and scopes of community forestry to villagers or forest users. They then conduct a case study of participatory information collection in which local villagers play very important roles. Participatory Rural Appraisal is usually used from this step until the completion of information collection throughout the process. The information to be collected at this stage mainly include history of land use and tenure, existing community organization if there is any, forest resource use, indigenous forest management systems, conflict in forest resource use and existing methods that local people have used to solve the problems locally. At the time the team have all desired information in hands, villagers are encouraged to join with the team to analyze the results and plan for further steps. The next step after the completion of case study is to conduct a workshop.

c) Workshop

At this stage all different forest users of the target area are called to participate in a workshop held by the facilitation team. The purpose of the workshop is to disseminate information about the designation of the community forests more widely and to seek consensus on some important matters such as community forest boundaries, management activities, forest allocation, formation of a forest management committee, benefit sharing and the establishment of forest regulations. Forest users are facilitated to discuss and find solutions if there is any overlapping claim of the forest areas in consideration.

d) Mapping

Upon the completion of the workshop the team and villagers go to the field again to draw a map of the targeted forest areas. Since boundaries of most of villages and forest areas in Cambodia are not clearly recorded on any official maps that recognized by the state, participatory sketch maps are of importance. These sketch maps are supposedly prepared by villagers with the help of the facilitation team. Technical maps using GPS also need to be prepared by the facilitation team and discussed with the villagers with ground checking. Boundary demarcation of the community forest is also carried out at this stage. After reviewing and verifying all produced maps the facilitation team and the villagers plan for further steps.

e) Formation of Village Forest Committee and forest regulations

Developing a regulation in community forestry establishment is the most challenging but important task. The regulation is to be prepared by the villagers themselves with the technical assistance of the facilitation team. It specifically focuses on forest use, management activities, roles and responsibilities of members of forest management committee, benefit sharing and

measures to suppress crimes against the designated forest areas. There is an emphasis that the established regulation must be reviewed and finalized with all villagers and that they must be clearly understood and accepted by all.

This step also includes the establishment of a Village Forest Committee. In some cases it is called Forest Management Committee. This organization usually comprises of six persons in which five are selected by secret vote by villagers themselves. Another person is usually a representative who holds post in the local authority such as village or commune chief. Final regulation of community forestry is submitted to the provincial governor through concerned authorities for official recognition and approval.

f) Forest management plan

Upon the approval and in respect of the community forest regulation the villagers are facilitated to prepare a management plan for the designated forest areas as their final step in setting up their community forestry project. The forest management plan is usually prepared basing on the specific purposes and needs of the local community in the area. Among other important tasks taken at this step are to assemble any quantitative data or description of the forest resource, carry out participatory forest inventory and analyze data, and discuss forest management options. In analyzing forest management options villagers are assisted to have in-depth discussions on some important matters such as expected management inputs, expected resource outputs and distribution of costs and benefits. Villagers then are to choose management alternatives with their preference. After having discussed and verified with all community members the newly produced forest management plan is submitted to the provincial governor through concerned authorities for official recognition and approval. The villagers begin to operate their community forestry project once they get official approval.

3 . A case of Stung village community forests

With a total area of 9 hectares the community forests of Stung village was established in 1998 through steps of community forestry development as described above. Although the management plan for the designated forests has not been established, villagers have formed a Forest Management Committee and the regulation of their designated forests. This regulation or status of community forests in Stung village and its Forest Management Committee were recognized and approved by the provincial government. Some features of the regulation of Stung village community forests are as follows.

a) Forest Management Committee of Stung village

The Forest Management Committee of Stung comprises of six persons including a chairman, a vice chairman, a secretary, a treasurer, an advisor and an assistant. All of them but the advisor are members of Stung village and were selected by vote by villagers themselves. The advisor is a senior government

staff working in the local administration. He was invited to serve as an advisor in the Forest Management Committee to ensure the ongoing implementation and provide legal support when necessary. Fig-3 shows the overall structure of the Forest Management Committee of Stung village.

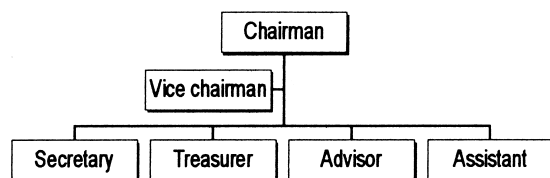


Fig-3. Structure of the Forest Management Committee of Stung village

b) Regulation of Stung village forest

The forest regulation of Stung village states clearly that all resources in the community forest areas including forest lands, forest products, wild animals, watershed and its resources are under the management, conservation and use of the community of Stung village. Cutting of timber is prohibited for a period of 30 years. However, members whose houses need to be repaired can ask for permission from the Forest Management Committee for a collection of timber and poles needed.

Collection of bamboo and bamboo shoots are banned for 3 years starting from October 1998. Encroachment on the present community forests lands and hunting are permanently prohibited while the whole community can carry fishing out once a year. Fishing is to be conducted by the Forest Management Committee with all villagers for the benefits of the village.

Villagers can collect all non-timber forest products for household consumption and sale for private income generation. However, for medicinal plants, they need to have prior permission from the Forest Management Committee.

c) Law enforcement

In order to protect forests and ensure the smoothness in the community forestry implementation the regulation of Stung provides a measure of punishment on anyone, community member or outsider, who commits crimes against the designated forests.

Notably, the regulation states that anyone who felled a tree for timber or pole will be punished 300,000 Riels (approximately 80 US\$). It is relatively high if compared to the living standard of the rural poor in Cambodia where people earn about 3000 Riels or one US\$ a day. Chopping a living tree branch for fuelwood will be warned for the first time and punished from 5,000 to 10,000 Riels for the second time, depending on the tree species. Hunting wild animals and birds will be subject to a punishment of 50,000 Riels and 10,000 Riel per head, respectively. And fishing

by traditional tools will be punished 10,000 Riels per tool. The heaviest punishment found in the regulation of Stung village community forests is 400,000 Riels. It is applied to fishing by using harmful tools such as electricity and explosives (Table - 1).

Table - 1. Types of crime and fine in the regulation of Stung village community forests

Types of violation		Fine (Riels)*
Felling a tree		300,000
Chopping a branch		5,000~10,000
Hunting	an animal	50,000
	a bird	10,000
Fishing by	traditional tools	10,000
	harmful tools	400,000

* One USD is approximately 3700 Riels as of 2001

Source: Field survey

IV. Conclusion

The recent move toward community forestry is clearly a significant shift in forest policy development in Cambodia. Community forestry projects have mushroomed across the country in the last decade of fairly stable politically condition.

This study provides a broad view of the formation process in community forestry development at local level in Siam Reap province and the existing rules and regulations of the community forests of Stung village. Thanks to technical and financial supports from various non-governmental and international organizations Siam Reap has become a leading province in community forestry development.

A number of non-government and international organizations have been playing very important roles in community forestry development in Siam Reap. While the Government of Cambodia is unlikely to have resources to directly control and manage all forest resources in the foreseeable future these organizations still have to play an inevitable role in community forestry development not only in Siam Reap province but also throughout the country.

The concepts and steps in community forestry development, introduced by these organizations in Siam Reap, provide a framework for active participation by the local communities in forest management. In the current development of community forestry the local communities are given the legal rights and responsibilities for managing, using and benefiting from designated forest areas. However, it should be noted that these rights and responsibilities are being recognized only up to the level of the provincial government. Therefore, the scope for community forestry development in Siam Reap province as well as for the whole country may still have been limited by the lack of laws, policies and institutional frameworks at national level. Unless these problems are addressed, some authorities at lower levels may hesitate to embrace the establishment of community forestry and its implementation within their territory.

In addition, some local communities may have been unwilling to engage in community forestry activities. This is because of the fact that they may have felt little assurance that their user rights on forest lands and time, human and financial resources that they invested in community forestry development would provide economic return in the foreseeable future. If local people are empowered with management skills and given user rights that are ensured by national forest laws like other countries there is a significant scope for sustainable forest management through community forestry in Cambodia.

Reference

- Arnold, J. E. M. (1991) Community Forestry: ten years in review, 29 pp, FAO, Rome.
- Peluso, N. L. *et al.* (1994) Introducing to community forestry. 4pp, FAO, Rome.
- Sokh, H. *et al.* (2000) Bull. Jpn. For. So. Kyushu Branch 53: 5-8.
- Thomas, F. (2000) Community forestry guidelines, Sustainable forest management project. 45pp.
- Ung, S. (1996) Strategy for community forestry in Cambodia. 115pp, Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok.

(Accepted November 22, 2001)