

Mabu community forest, Mozambique.

forests &
biodiversity

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Why Community Forest Management matters

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**Friends of
the Earth
International**

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What is Community Forest Management?

Community Forest Management is the best way for people and communities to benefit from forests and land without depleting natural resources or damaging the climate.



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Building a temporary shelter in the depth of the Mabu forest.

The term Community Forest Management (CFM) encompasses many different communal resource management practices used by forest-dependent Indigenous Peoples and local communities around the world.

CFM offers an alternative to the industrial forestry practices that have devastated forests and driven severe social injustices. It blends appropriate technology, ancestral knowledge and community practices relating to resource use.

However, CFM is not just a technical approach, it is also a major opportunity for communities to exercise political control of their territories and resources. It is a key component of 'Buen Vivir', a social and political alternative to the current drive to commodify and privatise land, forests and biodiversity. Buen Vivir promotes a beneficial and respectful coexistence between human beings and nature, in contrast with socially and environmentally destructive economic activities.

In many respects CFM is 'shorthand' for community management of and control over natural resources more generally. Forests are intricately linked to other aspects of the environment, such as soil health and water recycling. Thus CFM also incorporates the use of aspects such as water, pastures, fisheries, biodiversity, sacred spaces and territories in general. It can include a wide variety of approaches, from the traditional use of forests by Indigenous Peoples, through to peasant and urban communities that collectively use, take care of and/or restore vital resources (Baltodano and Díaz, 2004; Baltodano, 2012; GFC, 2015).

As well as being highly beneficial for forest-dependent local communities and Indigenous Peoples, CFM is an effective and economically viable alternative to destructive industrial logging and offers a win-win solution to biodiversity loss and climate change.



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Above: Community Forest Management in El Salvador.

Left: Community Forest Management in Costa Rica.

Why do we need Community Forest Management?

Promoting, supporting and strengthening CFM offers a positive and socially beneficial way of reducing biodiversity loss, and mitigating and adapting to climate change. It also has the potential to stop global deforestation by 2020. CFM plays three key and distinct roles:

- Better protection of forests, biodiversity, soils and water

CFM is extremely effective in halting deforestation and biodiversity loss. This has important positive outcomes in terms of soil erosion and consequent flooding, and in terms of protecting water resources.

An increasing number of studies show that forests managed by local or indigenous communities can be equally, if not more, effective than those managed solely for the purposes of protection. For example, a meta-analysis of published case studies covering 40 Protected Areas and 33 CFM experiences in Mexico, South America, Africa and Asia found that as a whole the areas under CFM presented a lower annual deforestation rate than those under absolute protection regimes. The CFM deforestation rate was also less variable (Porter-Bolland *et al*, 2012).

- Direct benefits for community rights and livelihoods

CFM helps to deliver social and economic justice, because it is very much focused on decentralised power and decision-making relating to forests, resources and territories, and protecting and strengthening communities' rights and livelihoods.

CFM is particularly widespread in Nepal for example, where it began to be implemented in the late 1970s. It was specifically established to enhance livelihoods and stop environmental degradation and has been very successful (Stevens *et al*, 2014).

Similarly, Brazil's rapid reduction in deforestation rates has been achieved by implementing CFM principles in such a way that it makes an important contribution to both sustainable development and social justice. In particular, it recognises Indigenous Peoples' rights, after many decades of denial of those rights. This is an important contribution to both sustainable development and social justice and demonstrates that it is possible to implement an alternative model of development that does not involve deforestation (Boucher *et al*, 2013).

- Significant contributions to climate change mitigation and adaptation

Increasing the area of forests under CFM would make a significant contribution to mitigating climate change. Forests play a key role in regulating local weather patterns (Sanderson *et al*, 2012) and stabilising the planet's climate (CIFOR, 2015). Forests absorb 2.6 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide each year, about a third of all the carbon dioxide released from burning fossil fuels (CIFOR, 2015).

An analysis of 80 forests in 10 countries across Latin America, East Africa and South Asia shows that CFM is associated with high levels of carbon storage (Chhatre and Agrawal, 2009).

Studies in Brazil, Honduras, Niger and Nepal have all shown that forest loss is reduced or reversed in community forests (Stevens *et al*, 2014).

CFM can also play an important role in allowing Indigenous Peoples and local communities to adapt to and withstand the impacts of climate change. For example, CFM activities such as mangrove restoration projects have been shown to provide protection against extreme weather events.



Community planting trees in Costa Rica.



Youth Workshop on Community Forest Management in Costa Rica.

Why Community Forest Management matters

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Community Forest Management: what are the secrets of success?

Research shows that there are a number of key factors underpinning successful CFM initiatives.

In particular a meta-study encompassing 69 cases around the world identified the following as variables that have a significant influence on the success of community forestry:

- *tenure security*
- *clear ownership*
- *congruence between biophysical and socioeconomic boundaries of the resources*
- *effective enforcement of rules and regulations, monitoring and sanctioning*
- *strong local leadership and organisational capacity*
- *expectation of benefits*
- *common interests among community members*
- *local authority.* (Pagdee et al, 2006).



River in a community forest in Costa Rica.



Four communities share the Mabu forest in Mozambique.

Threats to Community Forest Management?

There are many ways in which CFM and the benefits it brings can be undermined. These include:

- *Threats to land and natural resource rights, especially communal rights, and other traditional processes.*
- *Conflict between formal and customary laws.*
- *Pressure to switch from communal to individual rights.*
- *Escalating land acquisitions and land grabbing, for farming, industrial forestry or the extractive industries, fueled by uncertainty and disputes over land tenure and rights.*
- *The increasing value of forest products, especially when combined with corruption.*
- *A general weakening of traditional governance systems, mostly due to the influence of Western lifestyles, and migration to cities for employment and education.*
- *Climate change and environmental pollution.*

Many solutions chosen by governmental decision-makers to address the problems of biodiversity loss and climate change can also pose a direct threat to CFM.

For example, the Protected Areas approach employed in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) often results in the exclusion of communities from their territories, preventing CFM—even though it is now known that CFM is as effective as the Protected Areas approach, and in many cases more effective (see above) (Bray *et al* 2008; Ellis & Porter-Bolland, 2008; Nepstad *et al* 2006).

Similarly the ongoing debate in the Convention on Biological Diversity about how to fund biodiversity conservation is driving the financialisation of nature, which also poses a major threat to CFM. This is because the outcome of this debate may transfer control over nature from communities into the hands of corporations, by creating new and profitable markets.

The market-oriented mechanisms in use and proposed by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change can also be very problematic for communities and their ability to continue to conserve biodiversity.

The commodification of forests, carbon markets (Lohmann, 2006) and REDD+¹ policies based on carbon markets and offsets are antithetical to CFM. This is because they increase the risk that communities will suffer land grabbing by external investors seeking to profit from high value forests. They also increase the chances that communities become involved in long-term high-risk and complex legal contracts that may bring them little or no benefit and change their traditional ecosystem management practices (FoEI, 2014). In addition they are not effective in reducing greenhouse gas emissions (FoEI, 2014b).

Finally, there are significant issues relating to many false ‘community forestry’ processes because they are actually oriented to involving communities in destructive commercial logging operations by large companies. These include many ‘Community Forestry’ and ‘Sustainable Forest Management’ programmes in which governments mandate the communities who inhabit forests to control or supervise industrial wood extraction operations for a very small percentage of the profits.



Deforestation for palm oil in Ucayali, Peru.

footnote

¹ REDD stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in developing countries and the plus sign refers to the inclusion of conservation, sustainable forest management and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks, which allows monoculture plantations to be eligible for REDD funding. To find out more go to REDD Monitor, www.redd-monitor.org/redd-an-introduction/

Why Community Forest Management matters

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Conclusions and recommendations

There is an increasing body of research demonstrating that CFM is both a viable and equitable solution to deforestation, forest degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change.

Genuine CFM is an attractive win-win policy because in addition to protecting forests it helps to deliver social and economic justice, by decentralising power and decision-making with respect to forests, resources and territories, and protecting and strengthening communities' rights and livelihoods.

CFM also contributes to both climate change mitigation—by reducing deforestation—and adaptation, especially in coastal communities. Forests and related community management activities have been shown to provide protection against extreme weather events.

Friends of the Earth International therefore recommends that:

- *All governments should recognise, protect, and promote Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' rights, access to natural resources, and traditional knowledge, at the national and international levels. This means putting into practice policies and laws to consolidate traditional territories under the control of communities, and supporting the effective implementation of those measures financially. It also involves recognition of the importance of communally held land tenure. Governments should also help to map community forest boundaries, expel illegal loggers and provide other practical assistance relating to CFM.*
- *All governments should ensure that CFM is developed in ways that promote community autonomy, secure and clarify land tenure, protect communities' rights and their access to land and resources, and respect and recover traditional knowledge.*
- *This is complemented by the promotion of small-scale wood production, and local markets and solidarity economies that are insulated from the rigours of global competition. Important related activities include the expansion of agroecology and agroforestry activities, and support with relevant technical assistance and training.*
- *CFM and community management of other resources should be the policy of choice to deliver on the Convention on Biological Diversity Aichi Target 11, rather than Protected Areas.*

- *The Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change should reject false solutions, such as REDD+ and policies which lead to the 'financialisation of nature'.*
- *The Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change should ensure that debates about funding biodiversity conservation and the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change support and promote genuine CFM instead of 'innovative financial mechanisms'.*
- *Forest user communities need the public provision of basic infrastructure; strategic planning spaces for addressing resource and climate change issues; capacity-building on new technologies/information; and policies to finance and facilitate the recovery of traditional knowledge. It is important to have regard for gender-differentiated aspects of biodiversity conservation and management too.*
- *In addition it is important to reverse or dismantle the many threats to CFM. This includes reducing the use of and demand for food and timber commodities and products that are produced on the back of deforestation.*

Above all, it is essential that any approach to CFM is based on a genuine move away from industrial forestry and the real devolution of decision-making over forests and resources to those who know and understand what is needed—the local communities and Indigenous People who have inhabited them for generations.

For a more detailed explanation and account of the relevant literature on this topic please read FoEI's complementary online publication "Why Community Forest Management matters: a background briefing", which can be accessed at: www.foei.org/resources/publications/publications-by-subject/forests-and-biodiversity-publications/community-forest-management-background-briefing

Please also see: Baltodano J., 2015. El Manejo Comunitario de Bosques (MCB): una oportunidad para conservar y restaurar recursos vitales para el Buen Vivir de las sociedades humanas, Javier Baltodano, Coecoceiba-Friends of the Earth Costa Rica, www.foei.org/resources/publications

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