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MAKING THE EU WORK FOR PEOPLE & FORESTS

DOCUMENT FOR DISCUSSION BETWEEN FERN AND ITS PARTNERS

Community forests

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Introduction

Anyone who works with forest dwellers across the world asks themselves the following question at some point or another: Can community forests be a viable alternative to industrial logging? If so, what form would this alternative take and is it achievable?

This question may seem simple at first glance, but that is not the case. This document seeks to analyse this question in the hope of clearing up the debates and discussions between Fern's various partners.

The document was drafted based on discussions and input provided during a workshop organised in Brussels by Fern on 3rd and 4th April 2014, and as such is based on community forest experiences in Nepal, Mexico, Guatemala and Cameroon. The document also takes into account the concerns of participants from other countries, (Vietnam, Laos, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gabon, Liberia) and various other studies. The report will systematically make reference to the workshop's case studies and detailed minutes, and will refer the reader to them for further information.

This document reflects a commitment towards community forestry that is fully supported by Fern and its partners. It has three distinct objectives that will be the subject of specific developments:

1. To outline what various forms of community forestry have in common whilst identifying the specificities of each one, and to highlight how they help (or not) to reach the objectives that we have set for ourselves. This review will examine the legal, economic, political, institutional, anthropological, cultural, geographical and environmental aspects. A comparative study of several case studies – although not exhaustive in nature – will highlight their similarities.

2. To discuss the thought processes and various stages that will be necessary for community forests to be a success on different spatial scales, at the local, national and international level.

3. To contribute to developing tools for advocacy in order to convince decision makers of the advantages of community forests or the need to change the dominant economic system in a more comprehensive way.

Our objective is to develop the skills of users so that they can become part of these processes and put a stop to the more negative and dangerous phenomena for the human groups that they wish to assist and strengthen. In order to do this, it is important, from the outset, to give a frame of reference on the realities observed in the past by highlighting the evolutions and contradictions, and by identifying, where possible, breaches and blockages.

There is no single solution that can work in all situations, or for all types of stakeholders. Giving up on the myth of a 'universal model' is now one of the conditions of success. Let us be clear that this in no way means giving up on the will to change what it appears must be changed, regardless of the challenges that must be faced in order to do so.

Objectives, methods, challenges

Prior to beginning a detailed analysis of what community forests are, we must better outline what we are seeking, say how we are going to proceed, define a few central terms that we will use repeatedly, and remind you of the specificities of the main issues with forest areas.

How to proceed? What method to use?

Our common objectives

'Ideal community forestry', that we would like to see put into place in a specific geographical area and historical context, will be influenced by the specific conditions of the region in which we are working. Its characteristics will vary depending on the ecological environment and the history of the populations that live there. As such, as pointed out in the introduction, there will not be a 'one-size-fits-all' model, but rather a range of variations adapted to each case.

In general terms, we hope to support the inhabitants of forest areas by helping to ensure that their rights are recognised by making sure that they can sustainably manage the resources on the land that they occupy and consequently improve their living conditions.

This position is not only the result of an ethical or moral decision. Having all worked for fairly long periods on different forest lands, we have observed that people who have inhabited forest areas for a long time most often manage natural resources in a way that is more sustainable and consistent with the interests of society in general than those of large logging or farming companies, even when they use the most modern techniques. We are aware that there might be counterexamples, however we base ourselves on the assumption that management by inhabitants, by the 'communities', generally allows for everyone's interests to be better taken into account, with both better protection of the environment and more inclusive development, which in turn lead to a reduction in poverty.

However, we are also aware that the conditions that would allow for this assumption to be valid are far from always being met. Very often:

— forest dwellers are not able to defend their land,

— they are in such precarious situations that they have to choose short-term survival strategies to the detriment of sustainability,

— their governance structures have not been able to keep up with the rapid social and technical changes, etc...

Rather than thinking of an 'ideal community forest', it would be preferable to seek optimal organisational structures that would make it possible to simultaneously satisfy everyone's needs and move towards long-term environmental, economic and social sustainability. Henceforth, these are the processes that should be examined, according to their ability to bring us closer to the objectives we are trying to reach.

The comparative approach

By searching for the 'ideal' model, as legitimate as it may seem, we are in danger of succumbing to dogmatic, unalterable, 'ideological' positions, which would ultimately blind us, by preventing us from understanding the true nature of the phenomena that we are observing. By doing so, we would deprive ourselves of the possibility of taking genuine effective action. Based on the few experiences from various geographical, cultural and social realities, the comparative approach helps us to avoid this pitfall.

However, it involves particular difficulties: although expressed using very similar words, the concepts used to describe each situation can be very different. We must therefore ask ourselves about the meaning of words in each culture, as well as about the changes in this meaning over time. With historical contexts being very different, it is often dangerous to attempt to compare situations and dynamics that are often described with varying degrees of depth in the case studies that we base ourselves on.

Therefore, we must, first of all, define the main semantic categories that we use as accurately as possible, such as 'community', 'business', and 'community forest'. We will then briefly review the nature of the major challenges that determine the development of forest lands today. We will then be able to discuss the legal, economic, political, environmental and cultural aspects of different 'community forests'. Based on the examples studied, and thanks to the previously defined common conceptual framework, we will endeavour to ask ourselves the questions that are likely to have us think beyond the immediate perception that we have of reality. We will be then be able to challenge a part of our analyses and change our perception of what we thought were realities.

It is only once we have successfully carried out this reconstruction and analysis that we will be able to take on the final two parts of this work with a broader range of tools:

— How do we change reality with a few strategies and tactics? And...

— How do we convince our potential allies to become involved in this change?

This exercise is just a first step after the seminar. It will then be our job to broaden and deepen our thinking, individually and collectively, by smoothing out imperfections and, of course, working on new case studies.

Basic definitions

Community forestry

We use the term 'community forestry', according to the participants of the workshop, to define *'a situation in which communities have the right to manage the forest resources upon which they depend, with a view to improving the living conditions of said communities'* (Fern, minutes, 2014. P 1). The definitions of the written contributions were sometimes quite different (see box # 1), but this summary quite faithfully conveys the consensus that came out of the workshop. It clearly highlights that the term 'community forestry' refers to forest management by and from the point of view of communities.

Box # 1. What is community forestry?

Pandey and Paudyal define community forestry for the Nepal case study as *'forestry for the people and by the people'*, as *'the control and management of forests by the people who use them'* (Pandey & Paudyal, 2014, p.2).

In their definition in the Cameroon-Guatemala comparative study, Merlet and Fraticelli include *'all practices and norms of a population and its forms of organisation, 'communities', to govern forest land that it occupies and over which it enjoys rights. This definition (...) includes (...) a range of individual, family, community, entrepreneurial (harvesting, hunting, production, processing, etc.) activities. These fall under the rights held by various individual and collective beneficiaries. These rights are different in nature: rights to use resources, but also management rights and practices, setting of rules and obligations on 'land' managed by a community.'* (Merlet & Fraticelli, 2014, p.2)

Elias uses a very similar definition *'In Guatemala, the expression 'community forestry' denotes a situation in which local communities enjoy rights to access, use, manage and maintain their forestry resources, in accordance with their own institutional agreements, meaning in accordance with their needs, their forms of government, their legal systems and sanction systems, as well as their mechanisms for participation, cost and benefits sharing. These rights include, above all, mechanisms of collective action established by a community for managing and conserving forests, trees and natural resources in general, whether they fall under individual or collective property in the community territorial framework.'* (Elias, 2014, p.4)

Vermeulen does not, strictly speaking, define what he understands by community forestry in his study on Cameroon, but explains that it refers to the management of practices of what the Cameroonian law 94/01 has defined as being 'community forests'. This definition is different to the first three definitions, since it does not consider the non-formalised and non-legally recognised practices of the different inhabitant communities in forest areas as community forestry. (Vermeulen, 2014)

As regards Mexico, Herrera refers to the governance of 'community forests', including within this legally recognised indigenous communities and ejidos, created after the Mexican revolution. He therefore bases himself on the legal recognition of the status of community land, which unlike in Cameroon, covers a significant proportion of forest lands – 50 million hectares (of which 28 million hectares are in indigenous areas) out of 63 million hectares of the country's forests. (Herrera, 2014, p. 4)

Communities (a term that we will discuss later on) and their members may not have management rights recognised by third parties and by the State, but still enjoy de facto management, through use of resources and often through the adherence of locally accepted rules and norms. This situation is often the most widespread. As a result, believing that community forestry begins with the State's legal recognition of management rights would amount to not recognising the existence of customary practices.

From the examination of these first definitions, fundamental components that need to be clearly defined emerge immediately : 'communities', the nature of a 'community forest', the link between the 'land' and the 'forest', the link between companies that exploit the forest, and the community.

Community

The notion of community has very diverse realities depending on the case studied. There are very few commonalities between the very old Mayan communities of the Guatemalan highlands, the new villages from the extractivist camps in the lowlands of the Guatemalan department of Petén, the indigenous communities and the ejidos consolidated or set up in Mexico by the revolution at the beginning of the 20th century, the villages of Nepal that came out of feudalism just a half a century ago, the groups of hunter-gatherers from the African equatorial forest and the so-called 'acephalic' lineage structures of the pioneer fronts in the forests of Cameroon.

Alain Karsenty speaks of problematic 'local communities' in the forests of central Africa. *'(...) the discourse on the 'village community' masks the reality of the appropriation of resource spaces by family groups, and villages are often creations introduced by colonial actions through the grouping together of populations along roads in order to make it easier to control them'.* For Karsenty, external observers often project their own view of the world when they speak about village communities. There is still no community spirit but, for all that, the behaviour of inhabitants is not necessarily that of individualism. (Karsenty, 2008)

Here we will apply a very broad definition of the concept of 'community'; that of a human group that is more or less organised and structured and that can be identified at the local level by specific uses of resources, a shared vision, more or less formalised management rules, and power relations between individuals that make up the community.

Community forestry

We should note that this definition of community immediately implies a link between a 'community' and a geographical space, which then becomes an 'area'. We can see this idea in the definition chosen for 'community forest' in the workshop's minutes: *'a land area managed by communities, (...) [with a view to improving their living conditions], and recognised as such by the State'.* The overlap between forest and area may seem strange, and confusing. However, it finds its roots in the etymology of the word forest[1]: it appeared for the first time in *silva forestis*, the master's hunting reserve, often but not always wooded. The portions of forests closest to the dwelling and used by farmers were then called *silva communis*. It was only later that large wooded areas located at the borders of areas land by lords would take the name 'forests'. (Larrère & Nougarède, 1993. p. 20, 21).

As of now, we understand that the land issue, the status of soil and the nature of the rights that determine the relationships between the men on the land has an essential role in the discussion about community forests. This is not at all surprising since all case studies make reference to it and that a change in land status recognising the community's 'ownership'[2] of the land constitutes, in several cases, a strong claim from the inhabitants. However, holding full ownership of the land is undoubtedly not always an indispensable prerequisite for the smooth running of community forests. We will see that that could also be a risk in certain contexts.

1 The word probably comes from the Latin word *foras*, meaning outside of.

2 We put inverted commas around the word 'ownership', more than other words, because its meaning differs greatly depending on the culture and legal context.

The major challenges of forest areas

Public policies recognising and formalising rights to land and natural resources, policies that promote forms of community forestry or, on the contrary, forest concessions for large companies, public policies that seek to develop agricultural pioneer fronts, or those seeking preservation, are superimposed on specific dynamics of various stakeholders. They all focus on forests, which are at the heart of specific issues that we should briefly discuss before continuing with our analysis.

Most often forests contain important natural resources, the existence of which owes nothing to mankind.

— This includes timber, of course, but also several other non-timber products.

— There are often mining, energy and mineral resources in the subsoil of the forest.

— The forest floor can be used for agricultural purposes once the crown cover has been cleared.

— Forests may also be of special interest due to their vast biodiversity and their role in the climatic balance of the area, leading to their protection and preservation.

Since forests are generally sparsely populated, these various resources are taken over and controlled by different economic and social groups. The aim of this control is to receive potential income, which can vary in nature. Mainly this income comes from *forest rent, mining income and ground rent*. The switch from a potential income to real income can have very different effects. It can come from a change in extraction techniques, from the opening up of the region with the construction of roads and runways; from a change in the effective demand for certain products and, often, it is a combination of these changes that makes it so that resources that were not considered likely to be used for sale quickly become a source of profit. Recently, certain public policies have enabled the emergence of a new type of income. This is the case with the implementation of subsidy mechanisms to reduce carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions linked to deforestation and forest degradation (REDD). Since these new forms of income can be subject to appropriation, they create disputes and are at the heart of questions around 'things' that, until now, were not likely to become marketable 'goods'.[3]

At any rate, the fact that large forest areas are often found on the outskirts of much more densely populated regions means that they often coincide with political borders, and sometimes even national borders. Forests therefore become the site of security issues and the theatre of varying conflicts.

These different characteristics often make forests disputed areas, subjected to often violent conflicts where social groups fight for conflicting interests. The massive dispossession of indigenous peoples and the rapid accumulation of natural resources at the hands of new players are practised in forest areas.

In these often very conflictual contexts, discussion about community forests immediately takes a particular form.

3 Of course, forests are not the only spaces that lend themselves to the emergence of new incomes linked to the implementation of new public policies. We can cite urban and suburban areas with urban planning policies and agricultural land with certain policies that promote biofuels in various countries, or the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy.

Box # 2. Community forests in the 5 countries studied: national issues, but very different issues depending on the case

The cases studies that fuelled the seminar's discussion focused on countries for which the debate around community forests is of national importance. However, the issues linked to the implementation of related management procedures have been very different and have changed over time.

In Nepal, 18,000 community forests cover 1.7 million hectares, or 30% of the country's forest domain, and concern 35% of the country's population. Since the 1960s, with the implementation of village councils and districts (Panchayats), until the 1990s, the Nepalese government, aware of the advancing tide of deforestation and the degradation that had followed the nationalisation of private forests, began to put into place a legal framework that enabled communities to manage the forests themselves. The first objective was to promote their preservation and it was only much later that income generation became underscored at the local level (Pandey & Paudyal, 2014, p.2).

In Mexico, the agricultural changes that led to the revolution at the beginning of the 20th century gave rise to a very particular tenure structure, with the application of the agricultural reform and the establishment of a limit to the size of privately owned land. 85% of forests belong to communities and ejidos. However, from 1940 to 1986, the Federal government granted forest concessions to large private or State companies, (for an average period of 25 years, but this could go up to as many as 60 years) and the communities/ejidos had to sell them their trees, in exchange for compensation, the 'derecho de monte' which was paid into a fund managed by the government and aimed at supporting their development. Following large indigenous and peasant struggles, this concession system was abolished in 1986, thus enabling communities and ejidos to make use of their forest resources. (Herrera, 2014, p 14).

In Guatemala, there are two kinds of community forests. On one hand, there is a great diversity of types of forest management by communities, on land which they were able to keep control of over the centuries, in a country with extremely polarised agricultural structures. This consists of land that falls under various 'communal property' regimes (which stretches across approximately 1.5 million hectares and is home to 16% of the country's forests). On the other hand, when setting up the Maya Biosphere Reserve, and in the particular political context of the application of the 1996 peace agreements, villages of rubber harvesters from the lowlands and inhabitants of the Petén agricultural border, some of whom lived off illegal logging, obtained most of the forest concessions granted by the State. Therefore it is both for preservation and political reasons that more than 20 community organisations, together forming ACOFOP (Association of Petén forest communities), were permitted to manage 482,000 hectares of forests which obtained the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification. (Elias, 2014)

In Cameroon, the 1994 forestry reform, at the instigation of the World Bank, organised the logging of the then still untouched humid forest in the Congo Basin based on large private concessions (commercial and sometimes communal), whilst seeking to give local communities the possibility of recovering a proportion of forest income in the form of royalties. Later on, it became possible to implement small-scale forest concessions on land that was not reserved for forest use, the non-permanent forest domain (Vermeulen, 2014; Merlet & Fraticelli, 2014).

Discovering what is 'common' to different community forests

After having clarified the meaning of the main terminology that we will use in this reflection, we can now go deeper into our analysis by dealing with the legal, economic, political and environmental aspects of these community forestry experiences one by one.

Beyond the differences, we seek to highlight what they have in common. In this way, we will create a first draft frame of reference that can be applied not only to the 4 situations referenced during the workshop, but also to the other examples mentioned by the participants, and more generally, to the new partnerships in which Fern is involved.

This framework will be progressively completed and reviewed based on contributions from different partners based on new historical and geographical experiences.

Legal aspects

The law implemented by governments, that we describe as 'positive' or sometimes 'modern', tends to favour a single beneficiary, the 'owner', by guaranteeing his rights through the issuance of a land title. The Civil Code, implemented after the French revolution and then exported to several countries, maintains in one of its most well known articles the absolute nature of property, 'the right to enjoy and own things in the most absolute manner ...' immediately adding '... provided we do not overstep the limits prescribed by the laws and regulations'. This contradictory wording demonstrates to what extent the subject was, at the time, an essential issue that led to deep-seated changes in social and economic relationships. The ideological affirmation at the beginning of the sentence was not gratuitous, not more than the use of the singular for property, whereas until then the plural was used. (Comby, 2004)

The categories of the States' law in systems inspired by the Civil Code, but also increasingly, and paradoxically, in the recent evolutions of those built based on Common Law, can no longer show the complexity of the real world in a satisfactory way. Guaranteeing the rights of one beneficiary is the same as denying the existence of other beneficiaries' rights. However, on one plot of land there are always several beneficiaries, individuals, but also different types of collective entities. They may be families, lineages, communities, ethnic groups, but also cooperatives, companies or even a local authority or government, etc. The coexistence of these multiple beneficiaries does not generate conflicts when everyone's rights are not the same. Let us note that one individual can be a beneficiary of an individual title and a beneficiary as a member of one or several groups at the same time. This overlapping is often ignored, whereas it is essential to take it into account in order to comprehend the relationship between the group and the individual. (Merlet, 2010)

The rights to land and natural resources can be grouped together into three main categories:

1. the right to use resources,

2. the right to establish rules for the management of resources across a given area,

3. the right to transfer earlier rights to others.

Behind the apparent simplicity of these categories lies, in reality, several different possible combinations of rights. Civilian systems have considerably diminished them by establishing as a universal reference the simplified model of *usus, fructus* and *abusus* – which together define 'property'. (Merlet, 2010)

Customary law systems, in their various forms, are often most appropriate for recognising the diversity of rights and beneficiaries. This does not necessarily mean that they are aligned with the interests of the population. The continued coexistence of the State's substantive law and customary law in many former colonies illustrates the difficulty of applying systems that ignore reality to a great extent. It is this observation that gave rise to the first formulations of what has been theorised as 'legal pluralism'.

This pluralist design of the law does not only show an interest in the former colonial territories. Generally speaking, we observe that the construction of the law is not the work of governments alone. Law is also produced by communities, and within several social spaces that can be superimposed in part, and which have relative autonomy. Communities establish rules and apply them. Therefore, different legal systems always coexist, and the advantage of this legal pluralism approach lies in the fact that it allows us to point out that it is the *power struggles* that exist between the various players that lead to such a system being applied and not another (Merlet Pierre, 2010). The law therefore once again becomes very directly a social phenomenon.

Of course, these very general considerations apply to community forests. We have seen that a community forest was a physical space containing forest resources over which a group of people enjoyed collective and individual rights. This group, that we call 'community', builds and applies rules to manage these resources, with a certain degree of autonomy from the State. It can be affected by internal contradictions between its members. It can also be confronted with other actors that have interests that are different to that of its members. A community forest is therefore a *semi-autonomous social space* of rule and law-making, in the sense of the legal pluralism approach.

Each national context is specific. We observe that it is not so much the formal content of a national legal framework that is important but rather the possibilities that the inhabitants will have to change the situation in favour of their interests. These possibilities will depend on the development of power struggles between the main players, meaning elements which are far from being uniquely played out in the legal field. Essentially, there is no 'good' legal framework.

However, some legal provisions can be effective blockages if there is a power play that allows them to be applied. The issues of community rights over the land is a good example of the earlier affirmation.

> In practice, communities in forest areas in Cameroon cannot obtain recognition of their rights over the land they occupy. Community forest concessions (called 'community forests' by the legislator) were perceived by inhabitants as the only possible way of beginning to consolidate their rights to manage a part of their land. In the Cameroonian context, the claiming of collective land enabling communities to exclude players who seek to claim ownership over the resources they use is absolutely essential. Do they necessarily have to fight to obtain tenure rights over small forest concessions that have been recognised by the State, or is it preferable to negotiate management rights over larger areas and land security which isn't based on land ownership?
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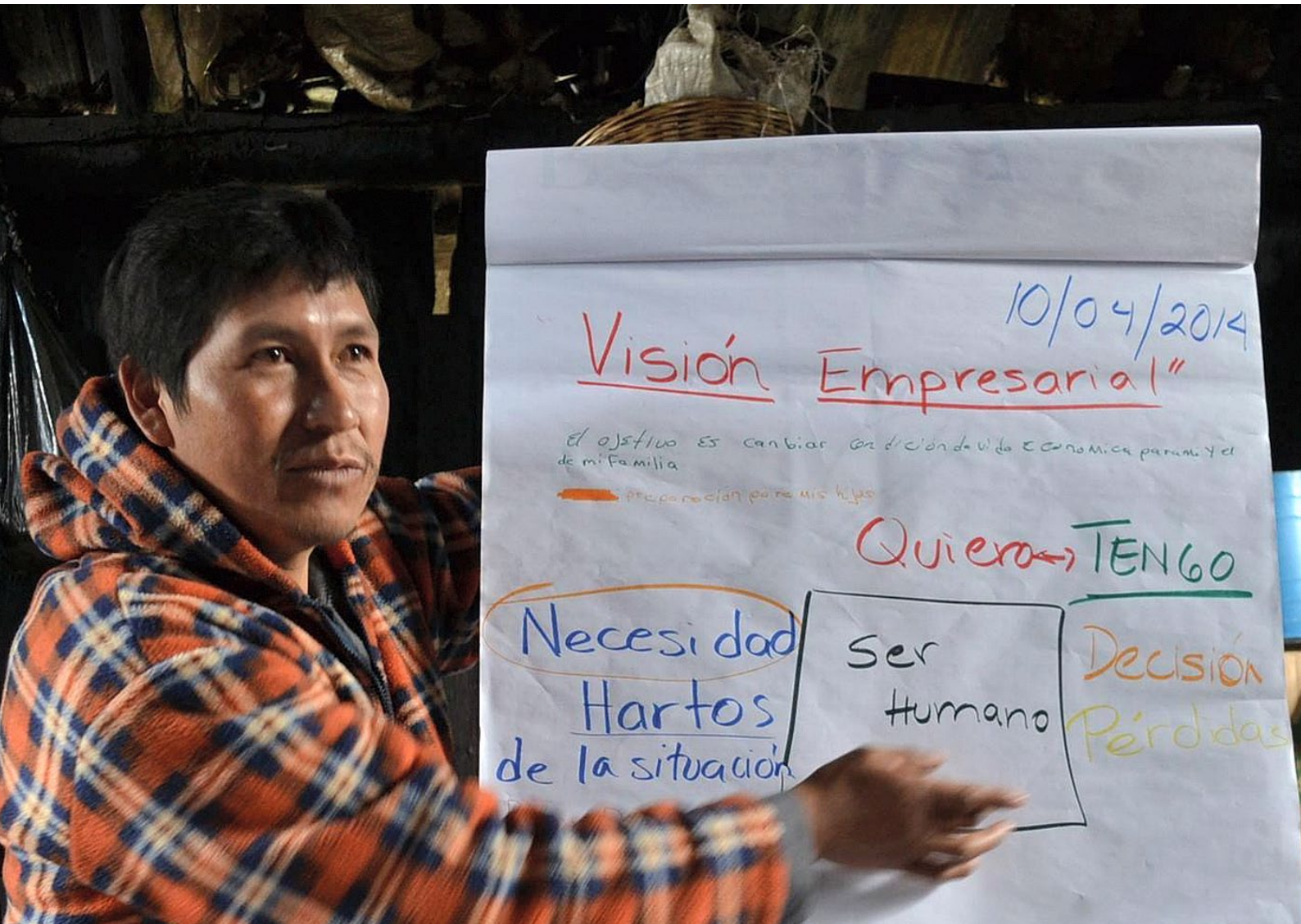
> It's a difficult question for which an answer cannot be provided without a detailed assessment of the realities on the ground. Indeed, absolute ownership, as it is conceptualised in the civil code, is not necessarily adapted to the needs of the communities. On one hand, it opens the door to the possibility of losing land that has become a bank guarantee or a marketable good like

another. On the other hand, granting a community ownership rights over a small piece of land that it occupies may make it easier to evict it from the rest of the land that it controls.

However, the prospects of being able to deeply reform the national legal framework being very slim, such changes may also begin to strengthen the situation of communities and change the ratio of power in their favour.

Is it preferable to develop the legal framework before establishing community forests, or making laws based on the successes that have been recognised in a legal context that didn't take into account this type of project? Once we admit that laws are not only produced by legislators at the state level, but also by the practices of populations at different levels, the question is which came first, the chicken or egg?

Photo: Michel Merlet



Box # 3. Community forests and the construction of the legal framework in the countries studied

In Nepal, community forests are, from the legal standpoint, former state-owned forests, the management of which has been entrusted to the communities in order to promote preservation. The communities receive use rights for a maximum period of 10 years, which is renewable. They must respect the rules set by the State for logging. This is because forests were so degraded that their management was progressively transferred to Community Forest User Groups (CFUG). These CFUGs are legal entities, which are involved in constructing new management mechanisms, with a general assembly where all households of the community are represented.[4] This transformation was not immediate. It took 20 years for community forests to become mainstream. Furthermore, the formal process of legalisation was delayed by a 10-year counterinsurgency. The legal framework was developed and progressively put into place over time, and based on the experience gained at the local level. (Pandey & Paudyal, 2014, p.7)

In Mexico, there are three types of land tenure, land is either under public ownership, or under communal ownership, the latter category includes the land of indigenous communities and ejidos. It is on this land that we find 'community forests' which today are defined[5] as community undertakings or ejidos that manage forest areas using a management plan for production, diversification and processing, and agricultural and entrepreneurial skills.[6] Since the beginning of the 20th century, communities and ejidos have had leadership bodies, a general assembly, a governing board, and a supervisory board that are responsible for managing the community's property. The State continues to supervise community forests by authorising the exploitation of resources through a management plan. The Mexican state makes a distinction between the communities/ ejidos that do not hold permits to exploit their forests (50% of all community forest owners), from those that do hold a permit. Among those who do have a permit, some subcontract logging (23%), some extract timber and sell it without processing it (16%) and only the remaining 12% extract and process timber.

Since the 1940s, the state has wanted to control the availability of forest resources, regardless of the land tenure status, on the pretext of avoiding deforestation. In fact, timber was processed irrespective of the land, and only the Federal State could authorise its exploitation by granting forest concessions (1940 forest law), a model that would be abolished following the struggle of communities some 45 years later.

The 1980 and 1990 reforms then authorised community forest enterprises to function like commercial companies, with a view to making profit. However, the legal framework for forest logging has remained in Mexico based on the *prohibition by default* of the use of all resources. Permits are requested for any use of timber and non-timber products. Obtaining these permits is difficult due to very complex and costly bureaucratic

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4 The old system of governance that existed in the Nepalese kingdom had been modified through the nationalisation of private forests in 1957. Demographic growth, the disturbances caused by nationalisation and the State's inability to maintain real control led to a very rapid process of degradation spanning from 1951 to 1963. In the 1970s, the National Forest Plan and then studies carried out with the support of the FAO and the Swiss Cooperation made it possible to create a new legal framework allowing the management of these largely cleared 'public lands' (Panchayat Forests) or wooded spaces whose forests needed protecting (Panchayat Protected Forests) to be transferred to the communities. However, it was only in the 1990s that the number of community forests considerably increased. (Pandey & Paudyal, 2014, p.6-8)

5 The 2013 law on the sustainable development of forests (Herrera, 2014, p.4)

6 Since 1992, the individual plots within the ejidos can be privatised whereas community lands must remain the property of the entire community. (Herrera, 2014, p.5)

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procedures. This promotes corruption, and leads to the coexistence of legal activities and significant illegal activities.

In Guatemala, community forestry began to be recognised at the institutional level in the 1990s, with the support of the FAO's FFTP (Forest Trees and People) programme. There is no specific legal status for community forests. Upland community forests are managed by communities in accordance with customary laws. Most of them are communal forests, *parcialidades* forests (lineages), municipal forest, cooperative forests or associative enterprises. Rights to access and use resources and exclusion rights are exercised through local institutions and each community has its own way of organising itself (community assemblies, decision-making bodies, conflict resolution and observation). According to the forest law (1996), all forest owners, individuals or communities, must adhere to the national legal provisions and draft management plans in order to obtain logging permits. Often the practices and norms of the communities are not in line with the standards set by the state. The rates of deforestation are very low in these different types of community forests. However, the State does not always recognise communities' systems of governance or their rights. It seeks, in particular, to develop protected areas, agricultural 'investment' projects, dams or mining sites on their land. (Elias, 2014)

Furthermore, in the framework of the Maya Biosphere Reserve, the National Protected Areas Council (CONAP) attributed 25-year forest concessions for the commercial exploitation of various tree species and non-woody plants. Communities must adhere to the management plan approved by CONAP. This concession regime also benefits two private companies. Therefore, it is not a specific legal framework for communities.

In Cameroon, the legal procedures for legalising community forest concessions are long, complex and costly. The law has existed for 20 years, but few community forest concessions have been created (Vermeulen, 2014). In fact, the communities are treated like industrial companies when it comes to legal obligations, but not at all in the same way when assigning the number of hectares to each concession. Industrial concessions (or those recognised in the villages) are located in areas of almost pristine primary equatorial forests, in the permanent forest domain, which remains the 'property of the State'. However, community concessions are only possible in the *non permanent forest domain*, which is likely to be cleared and appropriated for private gain. In reality, in spite of appearances, Cameroonian law approved the non-recognition of forests managed by communities. Under this system, communities have a last resort that enables them to obtain a relative guarantee that the timber contained in the small areas that they succeed in having recognised as 'community forests' will not be allocated to other operators (Merlet & Fraticelli, 2014).

Economic aspects

The specificities of community forests that we have highlighted have implications on their economic functioning.

Community forests are a *common good* for all inhabitants of the community that manages them and must be preserved and passed down to future generations. They are also a source of income for these inhabitants. We cannot liken them to capitalist companies, whose objective is to maximise profit and return on investment. Once they have been created to manage community forests, *community companies* will look like ordinary companies and will often be subject to the same accounting rules as ordinary companies. However, their working logic may be radically different if they really respond to the interests of the community.

Community companies will therefore adhere to, and sometimes go against, the community and business logic. Some of their decisions will arise from the application of a public policy at a very local level. They will affect, for example, a sizeable part of their social investments. They will favour the creation of jobs that benefit the members of the community, rather than favouring profit making.

However, community forests live off natural resources that are part of the common goods of larger communities. As such, those who are lucky enough to live in forests with considerable amounts of trees with a high market value will have the possibility of receiving sizeable incomes, whereas those who only have forests that don't contain many species that can be exploited for economic gain will find it difficult to secure their own livelihoods. This is the issue with *forest income* that we mentioned earlier.

A redistribution of this income in the form of taxes and levies will often be the easiest way to remedy the extremely unequal appropriation of resources by different economic players.

Therefore, it will not be easy to assess whether community forests have been capable of developing by themselves or not. For this, it is essential to take into account the resources they were able to use, and to compare the evolution of companies and community forests that have had access to natural resources of an equal value. Their impact on the economic and social development of the community members will also have to be measured. It is not always easy because, within the same area, family units and individual commercial businesses coexist alongside the community enterprise. The distribution of tasks in the production, transportation and processing sectors that are linked to the use of forest resources can vary greatly from one place to another.

In these conditions, a simple financial analysis of the enterprise does not allow for an understanding of which activities are the most attractive for the community. Often, the financial results can be deceiving when compared to that of capitalist companies working in the same field. However, overall, at the local level the benefits for the population can be quite significant. We have to look at how the *added value* – meaning the wealth created – is distributed among the various stakeholders. This can be done in various ways. *Profits* can be weak, or even non-existent, but the proportion of *added value* that goes back to workers in the community or to the inhabitants, before accounts are settled, can be quite high. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to have results from the local authority's *point of view*: There are methods for doing this, which are known as *economic evaluation*.

Several factors will come into play or, on the contrary, make it impossible to generate income for the population and start a process of economic development. The phenomenon of *forest income*, and *incomes* of other types, is often misleading: we have the impression of being in an economic boom when in fact it is mining that is behind the 'development'. When resources are depleted, the situation often becomes worse than it was to begin with (see box # 4).

Box # 4. The community forest economy. Lessons learned from indigenous community enterprises in Oaxaca (Mexico)

The assessment of the initial phase of the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Forest Resources project in Mexico, implemented in the state of Oaxaca by the Mexican government and the World Bank in 2002, was an opportunity to analyse the business practices of a few indigenous community enterprises. Here we will take a look at the data from the analyses carried out in four of those businesses: two businesses that sold logs either on the outskirts of the plot, or to the sawmill, and two others that had set up their own sawmill with, in the case of community enterprise # 4, additional wood drying facilities.

Figure 1 shows some of the results from this analysis (see below).

1. **We can see very clearly the surface area of the forest and the quality of the forest in the logging company. It would be the same for capitalist companies. Often, what appears to be economic efficiency is in fact the seizure of a natural forest income. In the examples studied, this income can be more than 60% of what appears to be the total added value.**

2. **The disparity between forest land allocations per member of the community (*comunero*), is very high (2.6 ha to 62.2 ha) between forest communities.**

3. **Depending on whether we favour the financial profitability of each community enterprise, with or without deducting the forest rent, or the redistributed added value per *comunero*, the ranking of the 4 businesses according to their performance is totally different.**

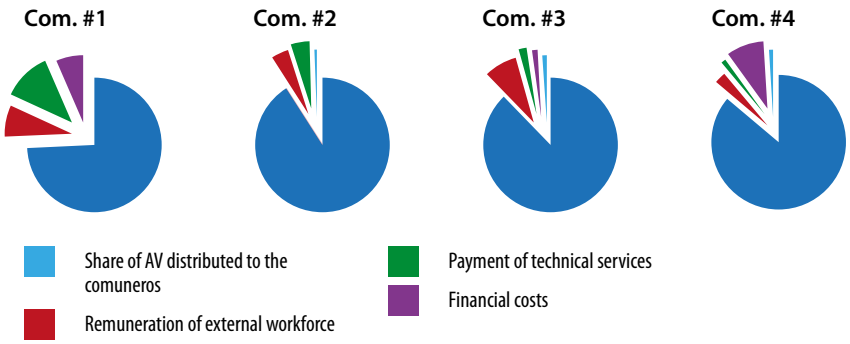
4. **Finally, the added value that goes to *comuneros* is in turn distributed between *individuals* and the entire *community*. Here again, there are significant differences from one forest to the next.**

Figure 1. A few figures to illustrate the complexity of an appropriate economic analysis of community forest enterprises

Table 1: Breakdown of added value (AV) per logging operation in 4 community enterprises in the state of Oaxaca. (Source: Merlet, Arguelles et all, 2003, p. 50-51)

	Com. #1	Com. #2	Com. #3	Com. #4
Community forests selling…	logs	logs	planks	planks
Surface area per comunero (in ha)	14.7	13.5	62.2	2.6
Added value per comunero (Mexican peso)	2598	5608	28,043	2854
Added value per ha of forest (Mexican peso)	176	415	451	1084
Forest rent per comunero	1451	2840	10,110	863
Forest rent in % of the total AV	64%	51%	36%	30%

Breakdown of the added value in each of the four logging companies



Breakdown of the added value returning to the comuneros split between individual and community

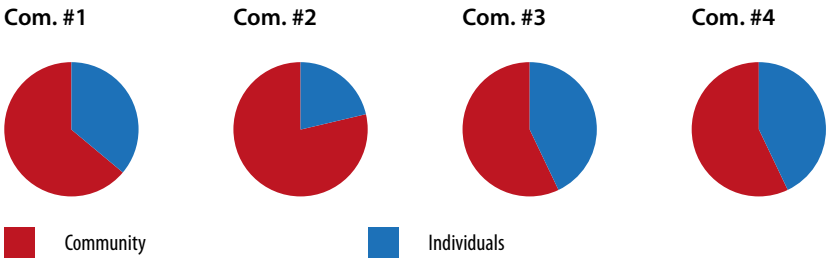


Table 2: Financial profitability of 4 community enterprises (Source: Merlet, Arguelles et all, 2003, p. 50-51)

	Com. #1	Com. #2	Com. #3	Com. #4
Return on the total capital invested before deduction of the forest rent	35%	106%	25%	-1%
Return on the total capital invested after deduction of the forest rent (estimate)	-5%	17%	-2%	4%

Photo: Antoinre Thibaud / Flickr.com / CC

Several factors play an essential role for the success of community forests. They are partly independent from the policies that seek to encourage their set-up. A country's trade policies, for example, will often have decisive consequences on the profitability of community enterprises. Access to responsible timber markets may mean a significant increase of forestry companies' income. Inversely, the massive importation of plantation timber could render the logging of native species non viable.

One of the keys of community forests' economic success is undoubtedly the community members' ability to organise themselves, to implement governance structures that are likely to make the necessary trade-offs between the members conflicting interests, to detect and correct management errors in a timely manner, to find a balance between satisfying the interests of members in the short term and in the long term. We will come back to this. We should note that it is always difficult: what works in one place at a given time may be disastrous in a different context!

Today, partnerships with 'private operators' are very often presented as the best option to avoid these difficulties. This rhetoric is often due to mystification. We have seen that a community forest, is already a type of link between the *individual* and the *collective*, and therefore a public/private partnership.[7] This is what makes it special. Very often, the 'private operators' that we are referring to are interested, above all, by the possibility of claiming the rents generated by the natural resources controlled by communities. Whilst at the beginning of the logging process you have to go through private service providers who have the necessary tractors and machinery, the communities' objective must be to take control of the entire extraction and processing process as quickly as possible, so as to avoid the added value being distributed along the value chain in a way that is unfavourable to them.

Communities have no interest in destroying the forest resources that they live off. Unlike capitalist businesses that can easily withdraw their capital and reinvest it elsewhere, and unlike illegal loggers and illegal pioneer farmers who can push further into the forest for as long as it exists, communities have increasing difficulty migrating and finding other community forests to settle in. Logically, it therefore seems completely possible to have community forests that preserve the forest whilst being productive.

However, it will be difficult to achieve the levels of profit that we often see for industrial logging companies, for mining companies or for agroindustrial companies that set up in forest areas. The 'economic' success, the level of return on investment that they achieve is generally a simple reflection of the pillaging of shared resources and the dispossession of forest dwellers.

7 interpreting these two words in their broadest sense, without making a distinction between public and collective.

Box # 5. The community forest economy in the countries studied

In **Nepal** where community forests had been promoted by the State for preservation and reforestation, extremely significant economic and social results have been achieved. The 1.7 million hectares managed by 18,000 user groups benefits 2.24 million households. 86% of communities have improved their forest areas, limited erosion, protected the watershed and increased their agricultural production. The most disadvanted groups, the Dalits, but also women have seen their income increase. The calculations made by the government show a significant increase in employment and household income, in particular for forests of more than 100 hectares. The State intends to control the distribution of this additional income by favouring community forest management and development, but the user groups want to be able to increase the share that goes to households. There are still a number of problems to iron out in terms of income distribution, and the potential for community forest development remains high. (Pandey & Paudyal, 2014, p.4-5). However, as of now, it seems clear that the development of community forests proves that this policy has made it possible to converge the interests of most of the inhabitants in the affected rural areas with that of the State. Originally, having control over eroded and degraded forest areas would only interest powerful economic groups. There was undoubtedly only minor competition between those groups and the communities for ownership of these resources. Through the work of their members, the communities reforested these areas, simultaneously strengthening their rights over the forests that they had brought back to life.

In **Mexico**, often implicit contradictions arise between the logic of communities / ejidos and business logic. The dominant discourse tends to reproach community forest enterprises for their lack of entrepreneurial vision, without always realising that the objective of such a community enterprise are not the same as that of a capitalist business. This is the position defended by the author of the case study presented at the seminar, who wants to see communities adopt a model that enables them to do business (business management model). It would seem that the economic progress of community forests in Mexico is not always fully appreciated.

The benefits of community forestry in Mexico are widely acknowledged. 80% of legal timber is produced by communities. They can receive payment for environmental services. (Fern, 2014).

In **Guatemala**, highland community forests have played a role historically and continue to have an essential role in the populations' economy, mainly in the poorest communities. They also contribute to the preservation of water tables and water reserves which are as essential for agriculture as they are for urban populations. Forest communities have gained growing recognition from the State, which today gives 20% of the subsidies from its PINOR (Programa de Incentivos Forestales) programme, initially aimed at large landowners, who are very powerful in Guatemala. Organisations linked to community forestry even managed to have a specific programme of subsides put in place for people who have small farming plots but who have no legalised property titles. These mechanisms have contributed to the proliferation of community forestry organisations. (Elias, 2014)

Whilst the model of community concessions in Petén originally created a lot of doubt

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among Guatemalan authorities who didn't think that the communities would be capable of ensuring sustainable forest management, twenty years later it has become a benchmark the world over. It proved its effectiveness, both in terms of preserving the forest canopy and generating income for the population. Community groups and associations have progressively taken control of the forest management processes, whilst training their members in the different tasks that require forest inventory, logging, the opening of logging roads, the transportation of logs and, in many case, sawing and timber processing. As such, they freed themselves of the need to call upon external service providers and kept most of the added value produced. They were able to do this through international cooperation. Communities then developed their own services company, FORESTCOM which also collectively manages FSC certification for all concessions. (Elias, 2014)

In Cameroon, community forest concessions have only been able to generate limited income. A sizeable part of that was recovered by a small number of people, those who were in contact with the city and those who could help to complete the necessary paperwork for forest legalisation. Most communities were not able to avoid the entrepreneurs who had the material required for logging and log extraction.

Political and institutional aspects

There are no 'commons' without more or less established 'communities' that manage them. In order to survive, 'community forests' need specific institutions in 'communities'. The nature and modes of operation of these institutions can vary significantly depending on the regions, history, and resource use practices. Communities of indigenous hunter-gatherers carry out a form of management of non-timber resources, game animal, and fish over vast surface areas, but these management methods cannot be used to manage the logging of large trees. This method is impossible with the resources that these populations have at their disposal.

The organisation of the communities and the forms that their institutions take can be perfectly adapted to a certain type of agroforestry systems, with a certain population density but not work at all if the population per unit area increases, if the production systems change or if new technical resources and tools allow for the use of new natural resources. Over time, when change is slow and progressive, institutions adapt, and the populations choose the forms of organisation and governance that are the most effective. However, when change is fast, as we have observed everywhere over the last few decades, adjustments no longer happen by themselves. It becomes necessary to speed up the process of institutional experimentation.

Some societies are able to evolve at a quicker rate than others, due to their history and the diversity of their components. In some cases, obstacles seem so important that individuals look for particular solutions to their personal problems, escaping the control of the community. For a development project based on community forest management to see the light of day, a part of the project has to come from the inhabitants. The bigger the changes to be made, the stronger the involvement of the project initiators must be. They must convince the other members from the inside solely based on its merits.

No community can escape the existence of internal contradiction among its members. It is often

in a context of crisis that the idea to develop new ideas arises. An inevitable consequence of this is the question of consolidation or, on the contrary, the calling into question of collective rights over resources. The crises may be material in nature: that is the case when there is not enough food to go around, for example. They can also be linked to the exploitation that the populations are victim to, or the loss of traditional religious or moral values. Long-standing regulation mechanisms no longer work, ritual practices no longer have the expected effects, etc.

With this in mind, the success of a community forest project appears to be a reaction to a political and institutional environment that has become ineffective. At the same time, in the short term, such a change requires one to have succeeded in overcoming several difficulties, step by step, little by little. The political and institutional environment has to be likely to enable such a change. Mistakes are inevitable so it is important to avoid irreversible damage being caused, so that the community can have the chance to learn from its mistakes.

Timing is everything. A certain level of internal governance, savoir-faire, and a certain degree of motivation should have been established, tried, tested and improved before community forest management can be implemented. This collective management of challenges and opportunities can jeopardize the community's cohesion, if the community is not ready to manage common goods with increasing value. Monitoring and control mechanisms will be essential, as well as the establishment of agile and credible dispute resolution bodies.

> Cameroon's first experience with community forest concessions demonstrated that it was not possible to build forest resource governance institutions when the financial challenges around the take-over of forest income were so great. In many cases, it is local strong figures and elites that misappropriated the profits expected from community forests. Local governance was weakened as a result. Instead of helping to build new viable institutions, such processes led to the community project's loss of credibility.

Power struggles in each community are generally very difficult when dealt with independently. So, the question is two-fold:

1. How do we build organisations that bring together several communities and that institutionalise a second-level of organisation that is likely to hold weight in national debates around development policies.

2. How do we forge alliances with other institutions, and other stakeholders at the national and international level?

These strategies have played an essential role in the success of community forests in several countries featured in the studies (see box # 6).

Box # 6. Institutions and the political construction of community forests in the countries studied

In **Nepal**, the project was boosted by the government both at the national and local level. However, whilst it was able to develop on such a large scale, the members of the community are the ones that managed to progressively build effective institutions at the local level, but also implement representation bodies capable of defending their project at the national level. These organisations also played a fundamental role in supporting the communities by capitalising on their negative or positive experience and by helping them train their middle managers. The Nepalese Federation of Forest Community Users (FECOFUN), created in 1995, is one of the biggest, but it is not the only one. We can also cite the Nepalese Network of Community Forest support (COFSUN Nepal), and HIMAWANTI, the women's association for the management of natural resources. These new structures are not limited to defending the interest of forest dwellers, they have also contributed to reforming Nepal's political system by implementing democratic decision-making processes and playing an active role in transforming the social relationships in campaigns. (Pandey & Paudyal, 2014, p.11-12)

In **Mexico**, building institutions that govern common goods has a long history. Since the Mexican revolution at the beginning of the 20th century, these institutions were transformed but overall, the country remains characterised by the existence of high levels of intermediary governance between the State and individuals, which is not a frequent situation in the world.

Mexico is a big country and has many different situations. We must therefore refrain from drawing quick conclusions based on improper generalisations. The functioning of community forests in Mexico, whether they are *ejidales* or *indigenous communities*, is often more complex and more sophisticated than what often transpired from the descriptions made of it. The availability of technical middle managers and forest managers within the communities/*ejidos* is often insufficient. The methods of democratic management and decision making in community forest enterprises can sometimes be in contradiction with business logic, particularly when the job rotation was strictly applied. However, overall, the advantages of such a 'social capital' largely outweigh the disadvantages of never having tried out genuine common goods management mechanisms.

In this context, alliances between community forestry organisations to influence public debate have been and remain fundamental. While the history of the Mexican state's involvement in campaigns, characterised for decades by an omnipresent paternalism and institutionalised political cronyism makes the phenomena of building local resource governance institutions difficult, the Mexican case remains a benchmark for the community forestry approach. The liberal evolutions of the last few decades, and the reductive discourse that goes along with them, often tend to make us forget about it.

In **Guatemala**, both in the highlands, where the manner of organising communities is similar to that in the south of Mexico, and in the lowlands of Petén, the creation of governance institutions at the local level across community territories was indispensable.

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These bodies evolved using customary mechanisms in the first instance or were created from scratch in the second. The organisation of several communities between them often made it possible to establish cross-checking and to limit the problems linked to the power of local caciques. (Merlet & Fraticelli, 2014)

The organisation of forest communities with different levels was fundamental to the development and recognition of community forestry. This organisation operated at the local level under various forms, formal or otherwise, but also at the level of second-level associations such as ACOFOP which brings together the community concession holders of Petén, and like the association of the 48 cantons of Totonicapán founded several centuries ago and which brings together customary organisations, such as Ut'z Ché, an association that was developed by the beneficiaries of state subsidies and which widely contributed to changing its practices. In Guatemala, a national alliance of forestry organisations was created. Several Guatemalan community forestry organisations actively take part in networks and international organisations. (Elias, 2014)

The coming together of the struggles and development processes of Guatemalan associations with international partners was fundamental. It made it possible to fund their projects, but it also largely contributed to their benefits being recognised by the dominant sectors of the economy and by the government of Guatemala. (Merlet & Fraticelli, 2014)

In both Mexico and Guatemala, the structure of the communities and the traditional obligation of working several days a year (faenas o tequios) on group tasks maintaining and monitoring common goods, as well as the practice of community governance that involves very precise rights and obligations have supported the setting up of new community forest management mechanisms. Even the communities in Petén – although this is a recent development – ensure fire prevention and carry out the permanent monitoring required to avoid the concessions that have been allocated to them falling victim to deforestation activities or illegal harvesting.

In Cameroon, unlike the different situations described above, very little effort has been made to build new local governance institutions. The structure of Bantu companies and populations originating from hunter-gatherers undoubtedly makes this structure more complex than in Mexico, the highlands of Guatemala or Nepal. It would seem that the community forestry concessions systems have had a disastrous effect by promoting the consolidation of the 'elites' and discrediting the mechanisms of local governance. Apart from a few exceptions, there has not been any strengthening of second-level organisations, or struggles likely to strengthen local communities defending their rights over the land they occupy.

Environmental aspects

Historically, the first peoples and indigenous populations were able to manage their natural resources without degrading them to the point of compromising their own survival. However, we also have historical examples of civilisations that disappeared because they were not able to survive.

Today, global environmental concerns are making the sustainable management of resource by populations an issue that extends beyond the local level. It is the basis of one of the strategic alliances that could contribute to the development of community forests.

Some people affirm that large 'private companies' (meaning capitalist businesses whose primary objective is to make profit), could manage the resources of local populations more effectively and sustainably if market mechanisms were established across most environmental resources. For the moment, we are observing quite the opposite, as Karl Polanyi very eloquently explained, for all goods that weren't produced to be sold. (Polanyi, 1944)

As we already mentioned, the common aspect of a forest is not limited to the members of the local community that manage it. Rules and norms must be able to guarantee the sustainability of the forests where the forest communities live. The conservation of biodiversity often requires much bigger spaces than the size of each forest.

Cultural aspects

The last aspect that we will discuss in this quick review of what community forest share is *culture*. Very often, the local cultures of the populations can help set up community forestry. Their concept of rights, their knowledge of the environment, their link with nature are often assets for adapting to the limitations and the potentialities of each biotope.

At the same time, the 'modern' concepts, the requirements of profitability and efficiency often enter into stark contradiction with local cultures. Hence the importance of developing analyses that highlight the interest of the *practices* used by the populations and which authorise improvements made on *farmer-led experimentations* as well as in *academic research*. The development of agroecology is leading the way. A similar evolution is advisable around sustainable forest management, a reappropriation by the stakeholders themselves.

Box # 7. Environmental issues and community forests in the countries studied

In **Nepal**, environmental issues are at the heart of the beginning of the process. The accelerated degradation of the environment endangered the survival of the populations, who welcomed the community forest proposals put forward. Today, the government is seeking to increase 'protected' surfaces, at the cost of possible expansions of land managed by the communities. Conditions have changed at the national level, and it is up to civil society organisations to succeed in convincing decision makers that even if the situation isn't as bad as it was in the 1970s, community forests are still the best option for the country's development as a whole and for the protection of forests in the long run. (Pandey & Paudyal, 2014, p.13)

In Mexico, the government is giving out subsidies for preservation, but not yet for promoting sustainable forest management. Payments for environmental services could be used to do this. (Fern, 2014)

The aerial images of the lowlands of northern **Guatemala** show very clearly that the community concessions have been much better preserved that the vast National Park located to the west of it. Despite its protected zone status, its has been subjected to extremely aggressive deforestation and fires paving the way for the installation of illegal breeding ranches that, it is believed, are often linked to money laundering activities. The forests of the Altiplano indigenous populations have also been very well preserved. Yet, grave threats hang over these community forests with creative projects on the land that they occupy due to large-scale tourist activities for which huge interests are at stake. (Elias 2014)

It seems that community concessions have not led **Cameroon** to improve forest conservation conditions. Sometimes, the process would have been exactly the opposite, with an incentive to develop illegal uses (Vermeulen, 2014). The legal system does not recognise, by any means, the communities' rights to use the land that they occupy.

Box # 8. Cultural issues and community forests in the countries studies

The Nepal case study dedicated very little to the cultural aspect. And yet, this country is a hot spot for Hinduism and Buddhism. It was also the theatre of a seditious struggle by Maoist groups, having finally accessed power through the ballot box. It seems evident that the changes that the country has experienced over the last few decades could not have occurred without a cultural reconstruction of the link between the society and its environment. Besides, the years of civil war have certainly impacted the evolution of rural societies. However, since these aspects were not mentioned in the presentation by the Nepalese representatives at the seminar, we will have to leave this question unanswered.

We have already discussed Mexico's difficulty taking input from the age-old cultures of the country's diverse populations in the 'modern' and liberal discourse over business, which is now dominant. A close observation of practices shows that these populations often continue to rely on world views that are very different to simply *'doing business'*.

In Guatemala, the symbolic and cultural dimension of nature in the world view of the Mayan people is clear. Mayan communities have managed to maintain their beliefs and value systems despite five centuries of colonial domination and submission to powerful Guatemalan land owners. Their notions of their relationship with land and trees differ depending on their ethnic groups, but they more often share the belief that they cannot be land owners and that, on the contrary, they are part of it. They are often very reserved about the effects of the transforming natural resources into merchandise, which is not just dangerous for their preservation, but also for maintaining good relations within the community. For indigenous communities, the inherent value of a forest goes beyond what one can hope to obtain from it by exploiting it commercially.

It is important to highlight a particular difficulty in Cameroon to rely on the views of indigenous peoples that are likely to promote a sustainable management of resources over the long term. The first peoples of Cameroonian forests, the Bakas and other peoples called 'Pygmies' by settlers, had (and for some still have) an extraordinarily in-depth knowledge of the forest. Their perception of this was not that all products could be transformed into merchandise. However, these peoples, dispersed over very vast stretches of land, have been forced to leave the forest to settle in roadside villages. Many were almost reduced to slavery by the Bantu farmers that colonise the forest little by little. For these farmers, the space is always open, it was always possible to create new villages further down on the agricultural frontier. These possibilities began to disappear just a few years ago, with the vast areas being earmarked for conservation, with the creation of industrial forest concessions and with the development of large agricultural sugar cane plantations, palm oil or mining operations.

How do we contribute to the success of community forests?

All of our earlier reflection seeks to give us the necessary elements to better answer this question.

We have seen that we have to refrain from the temptation of making hasty conclusions. The processes that we have begun to describe happened over long periods, with successive phases that alternated between successes and failures. They are found in totally different cultural, geographical and historical contexts. We have to remain prudent and circumspect!

> The colonial tradition of apartheid, the polarisation of agricultural structures and the extreme violence that have long characterised Guatemala did not prevent the country from creating one of the most interesting experiences of community forestry in the world.
>
> Nepal's tumultuous decline of the monarchy revisited by colonial domination has not jeopardised the possibility of developing the absolutely exemplary and large-scale management of forest resources by village communities.
>
> Just because the community concessions experience in Cameroon seems to have failed for the moment does not mean that forest communities cannot work in Africa in the future!

We must be wary of oversimplified theories! The 'resource curse' is a good example of this. Having an abundance of resources often leads to their inappropriate use, and attracts the greed of the powerful. However, not having any significant resources is not a curse, particularly if other stakeholders, with whom the first peoples are in competition have access to them.

The few examples that we have worked on demonstrate that there are no situations in which community forest management would be immediately excluded, where community forests would be hopelessly doomed to failure.

If we accept the universal nature of the contradictory coexistence of the individual and the collective, if we give in to the mystifying dogma of absolute private property, and if we challenge the rule that affirms that everything must be transformed into merchandise in order for it be redistributed by the market in an optimal way, we can take a very different view of community forests. They are an example, for a given resource, of a need that is becoming increasingly evident, that of recreating commonality and new community institutions that enable us to manage them in the most sustainable way possible to the broadest number of people.

The setting up of community forests then becomes one of the responses, one of the reactions to the appropriation of common resources, a way of strengthening the sustainability of ecological systems, economic systems, and social systems on different spatial scales.

The approach in terms of legal pluralism allows us to put the question of power struggles between the different stakeholders at the heart of our approach. From now on, the questions that we must ask ourselves are whether a particular action enables us, or not, to change these power struggles and if, as a result, it makes it possible to make changes that were impossible until now.

Each situation always being unique, it is not possible to define ex ante a strategy that would work in all cases. However, by learning from the diversity of situations that we observe, we see that certain methodological rules can help us find the best course.

1. We must base ourselves on the fact that the realities on which we wish to take action are constantly evolving. We have to understand their mechanisms as quickly as possible. We will take action to try and change these evolutions, in the hope that they will be sustained.

2. We must admit that we will not find better solutions immediately. We must not hesitate to claim a right to make mistakes. It isn't a weakness but a strength because our errors enable us to constantly improve our actions.

3. We are not referring to individual actions here but rather a permanent collective approach that will increase everyone's creativity and strengthen our projects. However, we must make sure we avoid making fatal errors! We need resilience, systems that are likely to adapt constantly.

4. It will therefore be necessary to ban any large-scale changes that we see as being clearly irreversible on a human scale.

5. We must become aware of the importance of levels and scales. Today, it is not possible to work solely on the local level, or solely on the global level when there are close links and interactions that exist between these different levels.

6. Moreover, we must keep in mind that the 'time scales' are not the same for the various evolutions that we observe or that we wish to promote. Whilst new capital markets work on fractions of a second and are capable of profoundly changing the material reality of millions of people using virtual exchanges, we still need decades to make necessary institutional changes to put into place the new governance methods that we need.

The examples that we have worked on make it possible to highlight the importance of building intermediate level governance structures, between the level of national sovereignty and that of the household or the individual. One of these intermediary levels is that of the regions, with the challenge of building community institutions to be able to manage these regions. Community forestry is a good example of this, as it the management of fish resources in fishing zones or hydric resources in the water shed.

Advocacy

We have seen that the changes that enabled progress in terms of the control of forest resources by inhabitants did not occur instantly, and are often not the result of isolated struggles of forest peoples. Only when all of society realises that it is in all of our interests to support these new management methods, will we be able to make progress. The reasons for this may be multiple. It may be to rebuild the country, to encourage less exclusive development, to protect natural resources, to maximise the production of wealth and food without destroying the environment and in a sustainable manner, etc..

This is why advocacy is essential, but also because, in general, the media inundates us with counter truths that we accept due to a lack of alternative interpretations. We have to work to denounce the confusion between rent capture and the hoarding of wealth and economic efficiency. We have to look far ahead and ask ourselves what will occur when large industrial logging operations leave – once they have depleted all of the one-hundred-year-old trees and are no longer able to make the profit they seek – leaving behind forests skimmed of all the most valuable trees, gutted by logging roads, and without any local management institutions for these areas having been created. We must ask ourselves about the true nature of the investments to develop agribusiness which is often only developed after an initial phase of forest resources being used for mining.

It is realistic, both at the political level and technically speaking, to defend the economic interests of forest communities. For that, it is necessary to return to processes of evaluation that take into account the interests of the entire society, which are concerned about change in the medium and long term, and what we will leave for future generations. It is a huge endeavour but it is becoming increasingly essential not to leave the economy in the hands of capitalists alone. The economy of the future is based on joint management.

If we want to change the dominant mechanisms, it will take time. The myth of the 'grand soir' has become totally obsolete. This is our way of reasoning, of thinking of the future and the social transformations that we have to review. The discussion about community forests is part of this process and this perspective. This is what we have tried to demonstrate but the readers of this brief text will certainly have several examples and further analyses to add to the arguments which could only be considered briefly here.

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