

4. The Cambodian Context

Over recent years, forest management has focused on economic development through the allocation of large scale concessions, mainly to international investors. This approach was not successful as it displaced local people, and emphasised exploitation rather than sustainable forest management practices. The concession system was suspended at the beginning of 2001 pending the submission and approval of sustainable forest management plans, which has resulted in a lack of formal management within most of the forested areas, unclear rights, and a return to anarchic logging. The focus of forest policy is now moving towards conservation and rehabilitation, through multi-stakeholder participation. The recent restructuring of the forestry sector allows decentralisation of management and planning, and the placing of its staff at appropriate levels to collaborate with local stakeholders. Reorientation towards a 'people-centred' approach provides significant opportunities for the forestry sector to increase its role in achieving national development objectives, directly contributing to poverty reduction, socio-economic development and sustainable forest management.

4.1 Root Causes of Forest Loss and Degradation

The root causes of forest loss and degradation within Cambodia have been identified by ARD (1998a) as abject rural poverty, insufficient arable land, over-allocation of land use rights, inadequate development and administration funds, and limited institutional capacity, manifested through illegal logging, forest encroachment, agricultural expansion, fire, land grabbing and speculation. Careful consideration, therefore, clearly needs to be given to these issues in planning for reforestation and forest rehabilitation, in order to ensure successful tree planting.

In addition, large areas of forest are undergoing conversion, through the granting of economic concessions to industrial plantations, especially for the production of rubber, pulpwood and palm oil.

4.2 Experiences of Reforestation and Rehabilitation

There has been limited government investment in tree planting, totalling 11,125 hectares between 1985 and 2002, through the Forestry Administration (DFW, 2003). However, an unknown, but additional and increasing, amount was planted by communities, within 64,901 hectares of state forest currently under community management (DFW, 2003), and in areas of non-forest such as home gardens, around rice fields, and on public land. In support of these plantings, seedlings have been provided by the Forestry Administration, but more recently its capacity has been far surpassed by the private sector. This rather suggests that the private sector, small holders and communities may be better placed to participate in tree planting activities, whereas the government role would move towards one of facilitation for poverty reduction and livelihood improvements, and its obligations of tree planting for environmental benefits, for example, watershed protection and gene conservation. Issues for consideration include:

- policy, end-use objectives and mechanisms
 - changing focus towards conservation and rehabilitation, from international to domestic markets, and from large scale industrial plantation to smallholder/community mixed species plantations, with a clear contribution to poverty reduction
- available land
 - although large tracts of land may appear to be suitable for tree planting, the majority are thought to be under contested use/interest

- land-use rights, tenure of land and ownership of crops
 - participatory approaches in land use planning and forestry management decision making are crucial to the success of tree planting under different authoritative jurisdictions
- planning and budgeting
 - long term plans are required with secure budgets available for seed procurement and nursery establishment
- technical knowledge, research and extension
 - fundamental to successful tree planting is the selection of the right site, the right species, at the right time, and the use of quality seed
- development of market access for end products
 - changing focus from timber within the international market to a broader range of forest products within both domestic and international markets

4.3 Support for Tree Planting

The ongoing forest sector reforms emphasise an increase in tree planting activities by the Forestry Administration, Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, and local communities, through the implementation of the Forestry Law (RGC, 2003). An estimated 6 million hectares of degraded forestlands (almost 60% of the total forest area) are estimated to be in need of rehabilitation (DFW, 2001), although in reality, much of this area may already be occupied by communities, businesses, or people in positions of power. The Forestry Administration has identified three major objectives of tree planting as poverty alleviation, environmental protection, and economic development, which directly reflect the Statement of the Royal Government on National Forest Sector Policy (2002) that

“The Royal Government of Cambodia considers the ecologically, socially and economically viable conservation and management of forest resources as a major pillar of public welfare directly contributing to environmental protection, poverty reduction and socio-economic development”.

Specifically, the Forestry Administration will “promote the substitution of timber supply from natural forest stands by timber plantations through encouraging private investment and public participation” (DFW, 2002a). Long-term plans for tree planting activities have yet to be established, however, the central level of the Forestry Administration will be responsible for international co-operation and large scale reforestation, whilst local levels will encourage small scale plantations and local tree plantings.