

RURAL DEVELOPMENT FORESTRY NETWORK

PARTICIPATORY FORESTRY IN SRI LANKA:
WHY SO LIMITED?
CHANGE ON THE HORIZON

Jane Carter, Stephen Connelly and Nikky Wilson

Jane Carter is a Research Fellow on the Rural Development Forestry Network based at the ODI in London. She worked in Sri Lanka as a member of the Forest Department from 1984-1986.

Stephen Connelly and ***Nikky Wilson*** have worked in Sri Lankan forestry for over three years, most recently as consultants to a joint Government of Sri Lanka – Netherlands rural development project. They may be contacted c/o PMHE project, PO Box 154, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

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INTRODUCTION

Although there have been attempts to launch social forestry in Sri Lanka, forest management on a truly participatory basis has not taken place. By this we mean that local people have not become actively involved in tree or forest management in partnership with the Forest Department, rather than subordinate to it. This paper outlines past and present activities and policies in social forestry, and then provides an analysis of the factors that have prevented such programmes from contributing significantly to rural development. It is argued that institutional constraints within both the Forest Department and many NGOs hinder the development of participatory approaches to forest management. Furthermore, given the nature of Sinhalese society, models of social or community forestry applied in other countries are not appropriate. Until recently, the State has lent only nominal support to the concept of participatory forestry. However, a major revision in forest policy is now being debated, raising the possibility of real change. Furthermore, the recent general elections (in August 1994) have placed a new government in power, which provides further impetus and opportunity for change. This paper is a foreigners' view of the Sri Lankan forestry situation, and we are thus inevitably limited in our perspective. However, our comments are based on experience of participatory forestry in a number of countries, as well as our work as professional foresters in Sri Lanka.

'PARTICIPATORY' FORESTRY INITIATIVES TO DATE IN SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka was once a heavily forested island, but over the present century its forest cover has declined markedly to 20.3%.¹ Historically, much of the loss may be attributed to the creation during colonial times of plantations of tea, rubber, coconut and other crops. In the last decade the greatest single cause of deforestation (responsible for 75% of the total) has been the accelerated Mahaweli Development Programme, a major irrigation scheme fed by a series of dams across Sri Lanka's largest river. Although not always publicly acknowledged, this resulted in the clearance of substantial areas of natural forest. However forest loss is or was explained, the 1980s saw widespread recognition of a need for reforestation and forest conservation measures in both government and donor circles. Although, as we later outline, some of this was based on false assumptions, there remains a widely accepted need for forest products to meet growing domestic demands, as well as a need to conserve forests of outstanding biodiversity value.

Many of the forestry initiatives of the 1980s called for a social or participatory approach. This appears to have been almost entirely in response to world trends in forestry development and donor interests; it did not arise from within Sri Lanka itself. Seneviratne (1982: 104) clearly acknowledged this when he wrote that,

¹ This figure refers to 'dense forest cover', as calculated in 1992 by the ODA supported Forestry and Land Use Mapping Project (FORLUMP). New, as yet unpublished, data suggests that tree cover may have slightly increased in recent years – a finding that, if validated, could have interesting ramifications.

"In recent years, new ideas regarding the purposes of Forestry and Forestry practices have been given wide publicity.... This new concept of mass participation of the people in the development of forests...is very much in vogue in countries like China, South Korea, India and Indonesia....In the light [of this]...the Government has decided to establish a Forestry Extension Service to promote Social Forestry...."

In 1980, Sri Lanka's National Forest Policy statements were expanded to specifically include social forestry, as follows:

"To involve the local community in the development of private woodlots and forestry farms through a programme of Social Forestry."

However, there was no revision in forest legislation at the time to support this statement. There was also no change in the structure of the Forest Department to bring into being a specific Social Forestry Section. Social objectives were covered under several sections – notably a new National Forestry Extension Programme, and the Silviculture section, whilst large donor-funded projects operated completely separately.

The national Forestry Extension Service was established in the early 1980s, although at a far more modest level than originally proposed by Seneviratne (op. cit.). As Deputy Conservator of Forests, Research, Education and Forestry Extension, he set out an ambitious hierarchical management structure. Extension was to be implemented through seven units attached to the Forest Divisions, with one Forester, one Ranger and two Forest Guards assigned to each of the 24 Districts. Initial activities focused on planting demonstration plots and producing seedlings in Departmental nurseries for distribution to schools and NGOs. The staffing levels envisaged by Seneviratne were never achieved. From 1985 onwards a second phase of activities was initiated and attempts made to set up Village Forest Societies (VFS). Training in seedling production was given to society members to provide them with the technical knowledge to act as motivators within their communities. They were then required to set up village nurseries and to carry out tree planting campaigns in public places. Information on the effectiveness of this programme is difficult to obtain, and perhaps this in itself is significant. The programme currently operating is largely defined at district level (by DFOs), although overall budgetary targets and headings are set by Head Office. Of the 18 forest divisions, only ten have full time Extension RFOs (in the others, territorial RFOs are assigned to extension duties).

The Forest Department's Silviculture section runs two schemes considered to have social objectives, notably taungya and rural reforestation. The former scheme has been described recently by McCall and Skutsch (1993), and will therefore not be elaborated upon here. Rural reforestation entails giving out contracts to small farmers (rather than the usual large contractors) to replant State land. It is seen as a means of providing employment and money in rural areas. In neither scheme are local people participating in any sense beyond the provision of labour (for which they are effectively paid).

Donor support for social forestry resulted in a variety of projects, the largest of which was the Community Forestry Project (CFP), which was launched in 1982 and ran for eight years. It has been followed in 1993 by the Participatory Forestry Project (PFP), both projects operating through the Forest Department with financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank

(ADB). Some form of social forestry has been supported by over six Integrated Rural Development Projects (IRDPs) in Sri Lanka (Skutsch, 1990), some of which have attempted approaches which border on participatory forestry as we have chosen to define it. However, amongst (and even within) the IRDPs a variety of approaches may be distinguished – and not all of them even operate through government line agencies. In the non-government sector, a variety of organisations such as Sarvodaya and the Nation Builders Association adopted social forestry programmes, to the extent that today,

"it is difficult to find a rural-orientated project in Sri Lanka which does not have some forestry component." (Stirrat, 1994).

Whilst the experience of all these initiatives cannot be reviewed in this paper, it is the CFP which has received most criticism and on which brief comment is necessary.

Covering Sri Lanka's hill country, the CFP attempted to establish farmers' woodlots, block fuelwood plantations, demonstration woodlots, and 'community woodlots', as well as having a substantial research and development component. It is now recognised to have been based on many false assumptions, chief of these being that there was a fuelwood shortage. Local people were to be mobilised to address this problem. Thus a then Deputy Chief Conservator wrote that,

"The State is not in a position to carry out fuelwood plantation programs for entire rural communities. Therefore, the Government decided to embark on Community Forestry programs, aiming to use local manpower resources of the Community to plant, manage and harvest fuelwood on State lands." (Bharathie, 1985: 403).

The clear implication is that community forestry was seen as a means of obtaining free labour, rather than facilitating true community participation in plantation establishment and management. Whether people in the project area themselves perceived fuelwood supply as a major problem was not addressed. In fact, they did not. There was no immediate fuelwood shortage; quite the opposite. The clearance of large areas of forest under the accelerated Mahaweli Development Programme meant that fuelwood was in plentiful local supply throughout the 1980s. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that private lands, particularly home gardens, provided (and still provide) adequate supplies of fuelwood to meet household needs (Stirrat, pers. comm.). As has been the experience in many countries (see, for example, Shepherd, 1990; Cernea, 1990), farmers were found to be more interested in planting trees for products such as poles and fruit than they were for fuel. Another important matter that hampered the establishment of farmers' woodlots was insecure land tenure. Farmers were allocated State land to plant trees under a lease agreement, but a delay in producing the official lease papers meant that they were expected to plant trees on the advice of Forest Department staff, without any legal assurance of tenure. This was not realistic, especially given the history of mistrust between local people and the Forest Department (discussed further later in this paper).

The CFP was essentially a product of expatriate advisers and funders with an entirely 'top-down' outlook. Designed without any real consultation with local people, problems were assumed, and goals and targets set accordingly. As a result (although other factors were also involved), it performed extremely badly. It is incorrect to judge a project solely on the achievement of targets, but it is nevertheless significant that a final assessment of the Project found that no community woodlots or demonstration plots had been successfully established, whilst only slightly more than

25% of the original number of farmer's woodlots had been planted (how many of these could be classified as successful is uncertain).

As a successor to the CFP and funded from the same source, the PFP commenced in 1993 in seven divisions, and is to extend to six more during this year – thus covering most of the country. It is extremely ambitious in its scale of operations, and DFOs are expected to spend upwards of 25% of their time on it. The project will focus particularly on homestead planting, agroforestry and fuelwood plots on leased land, and watershed protection. It also includes a substantial training component. One positive aspect of the PFP, absent from its predecessor, is a deliberate 'gender component'. The extent to which the PFP is truly participatory must be questioned, however, not least because incentives (in the form of food stamps) are provided to farmers who plant trees.² The lease agreements for the planting of agroforestry and fuelwood plots have not yet been issued, although it is reported that they have been drawn up and sent to the printers.

In summary, social forestry programmes within the Forest Department structure are viewed as separate from (and sometimes additional to) regular activities. The experience of projects has been mixed, but the largest (the CFP) performed poorly, by any standards. It is too early to judge whether the PFP will be more successful, but it must be noted that the whole project is based on a blueprint approach with targets, awareness raising, and traditional extension backed up by incentives. The nature of such a project design renders its implementation in a participatory manner extremely difficult, if not impossible (Eyben, 1991).

There are some clear lessons to be gained from project experience to date in Sri Lanka. However, we believe that there are some more fundamental issues which must be openly recognised and addressed before progress in any form of participatory forestry can be made in the country. These are examined below.

THE NATURE OF SRI LANKAN SOCIETY

Sri Lanka's population is ethnically and religiously diverse, but most of the country's people are either Sinhalese (the majority) or Tamil. The long-standing conflict between these two groups has deeply influenced the country's development, particularly over the last decade. The poor security situation in parts of the island (particularly the traditional Tamil stronghold of Jaffna in the north) has meant that virtually all social forestry initiatives have focused on the 70% Sinhalese majority in the rural areas of the centre and south of the island.

Most Sinhalese people are Buddhists³, and their culture is very different to that found in any part of their large and nearby neighbour, India – or, indeed, more distant neighbours such as Nepal. Although often not stated explicitly, many social forestry initiatives in Sri Lanka appear to have been based on the assumption that social/community approaches to forestry being developed in India and Nepal would work in Sri Lanka. We suggest that this is unlikely. This is not because there is any underlying antipathy to trees or forests amongst Sinhalese people. Indeed, the

² Since the issue of incentives is discussed in another paper in this issue, (Smith, 1994) we will not discuss it further here.

³ About nine percent are Christian (Stirrat, pers. comm.).

Sinhalese are known to have a long history of tree planting, and the recognition of the value of trees and forests is considered to lie deep in their Buddhist culture (Nanayakkara, 1987; Kuchelmeister, 1987). The Kandyan home gardens of spice and fruit trees intercropped with vegetable plants are well known today as a traditional form of agroforestry (Jacob and Alles, 1987), and appear to have been well developed during the time of the Kandyan kings. Nanayakkara (1987: 175) argues that the practice of tree planting in fact goes back over 25 centuries, with the ancient chronicles of Sri Lankan history referring to the planting of trees from the year 543 B.C.

What is significant about Sinhalese society is the strength of allegiance to household rather than to village or 'community' (however this is defined) – the former being the basic unit of rural society rather than the latter. Stirrat (1994:9) quoted Kirk on this subject as follows,

"Ideally, each household lives in a separate house, and each house is set in a separate compound or 'home garden', giving rise to a dispersed settlement pattern. In this way, 'social fragmentation' finds expression quite literally 'on the ground'."

Stirrat (1994:9) himself commented further,

"Villages are rarely if ever units of sustained collective action. In such situations, it is extremely difficult for local community organisations to function unless, like death donation societies, they have a very specific focus. Other village level organisations – farmers' societies, youth societies, village development societies – tend to exist in reaction to state or other outside incentives and are often under the control of local political leaders. Without such incentives it is doubtful that they would exist."

The extent to which the absence of a sense of 'community' in Sinhalese villages is a result of changing circumstances or simply a fact of Sinhalese culture may be debated. Kirk (1989) has argued that population pressure and the commercialisation of the rural economy has exacerbated the situation by reducing the range of common interests within the village.

Sinhalese society does not completely lack collectivities, but they occur at the level of particular kinship groupings and patron-client relationships, rather than the village. Thus rather than describing Sinhalese culture as individualistic, it is perhaps more appropriate to describe it as 'particularistic' (Stirrat, pers. comm.). Collective action is only likely to occur amongst particular individuals – a phenomenon well demonstrated by local politics. Strong competition for state resources may have fostered political influence and factional conflict, although Spencer (1990:12) has observed that,

"Politics did not necessarily create division, they often provided a means of expressing divisions that already existed."

Political spheres of influence are extremely wide. Projects have found, for example, that politics intervene over the selection of a forest watcher or the choice of nursery location, at the expense of technical or practical judgement. Trying to foster participatory decision-making processes in such a climate has obvious difficulties.

Politics apart, there is a general constraint to the flow of information and knowledge in Sri Lankan society, both within the government bureaucracy and in social interactions between those of higher and lower status (as determined by political influence, employment, education, etc). An example from the agricultural sector serves to illustrate this matter. In a discussion of the problems experienced in implementing the Training and Visit (T and V) System, researchers noted that,

"Feedback from the field is supposed to be what ensures the relevance and appropriateness of 'message transfer'. In the cultural norms of Sri Lankan bureaucracy however, "information can only come from someone with a higher status" (Blok and Seegers, 1988). Field workers do not, in general, attempt to feedback information from farmers, and researchers do not accept it from extension workers." (IAC, 1989: 14).

"Information" is perhaps too general a word to use, since there is not necessarily any block on the transfer of simple observed facts (unless they happen to be other than what is expected or desired). The block is in terms of giving credence to the ideas or thoughts of persons lower in status. Given such norms, there are clear difficulties in introducing an approach to forestry that emphasises the importance of learning from local people about their views, and working with them in a development partnership.

Urban Sri Lankans (of all ethnic groups, not only Sinhalese) have a considerable influence on forestry in their country, and on the prospects for participatory forest management. Sri Lanka has an exceptionally strong and vocal urban-based elite and middle class whose characteristics are described by Moore (1985:205-213) in some detail. Awareness of environmental and conservation issues is very high amongst these people, as manifested, for example, by a strong lobby for the planting of native tree species. Exotics such as pines are viewed with considerable antipathy, as in many cases is the Forest Department because it plants them. It is a commonly held view amongst the elite and middle classes that many forestry activities could be handled more effectively by NGOs, which are felt to be more sensitive towards conservation and indigenous values. Forest Department staff feel resentful at their 'bad press' in this regard, which is in many ways the product of factors beyond their control – as we outline in the following section.

THE FOREST DEPARTMENT: ATTITUDES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

As in many other countries, the historical development of the Sri Lankan Forest Department has strongly influenced its current operations and the outlook of its staff. Whereas in some countries, it is possible to distinguish a 'new' Forest Department outlook from the 'traditional' one, in Sri Lanka a thorough re-orientation of forestry personnel towards the ideas of true local participation in forestry development has yet to take place. The strong emphasis on forest protection and control over forest land that has guided departmental operations for so many years is one important reason for this. Others include the strongly hierarchical management structure of the department, the relatively small number of staff at its disposal, and the limited amount of training to which they have been exposed. All these difficulties are not exclusive to Sri Lanka's Forest Department, although they are more pronounced than in many other countries.

A policing function

From the time of its establishment, the Forest Department's remit to conserve and control the forests has clashed with local interests. Swidden agriculture (known locally as *chena* cultivation) was once widely practised in Sri Lanka, whilst the harvesting of forest products for subsistence needs is still important. *Chena* cultivation, in particular, has been viewed by the Department as a scourge and major cause of forest destruction (Seth, 1981:73). It was to control *chena* – and to establish forest plantations at the same time – that the taungya system was introduced. Although the official Forest Department view of taungya has been that it is of 'community benefit' (Nanayakkara, 1987), other writers (such as Seth, 1981) have argued that it is hugely exploitative. At best, taungya has fostered a paternalistic attitude amongst Forest Department staff towards farmers; at worst, it has in some cases engendered open hostility.

Since 1968, the Forest Department has not been responsible for logging, extraction, saw milling and sales of timber and fuelwood – all these matters being handled separately by the State Timber Corporation. Nanayakkara (1981) has argued that this allowed the Department to increase its activities in conservation and reforestation programmes. However, we suggest that a more significant effect has been to reinforce a protection mentality, since standing trees represent an end-product in themselves, rather than a marketable crop.

Forest Department staff see themselves in a constant battle of preserving the national forest resource from encroachers, as well as illicit fellers. The former (both cultivators and in some areas gem diggers) are responsible for more loss in forest cover than the latter, but those apprehended in court are rarely the true culprits. Political influence is often involved in the clearing of even small plots in forest areas; small cultivators perform the physical labour and may be gaoled or fined for their pains, but behind them are large *mudalali* (businessmen) who move in to take control of the cleared land. This is particularly true in the upland part of Sri Lanka, where vegetable growing is extremely profitable; in other places (notably the Ratnapura area) a similar pattern holds for gem-diggers.

Apprehending and prosecuting forest encroachers is a major part of the work of many Forest Department staff, and clearly a cause of continuing hostility between them and local people. It is not uncommon for Beat Forest Officers (BFOs), in particular, to be set upon and beaten, whilst some have lost their lives 'in the course of duty'. The most dangerous work, however, is considered to be in the 'flying squads', a paramilitary styled operation for arresting illicit fellers. Viewed as an elite force, these act in support of regular DFO activities. In addition, a new Special Mobile Investigation Unit has been established. This has received considerable publicity in the press for its successes in confiscating illegal timber. Amongst regular DFO staff, policing activities (particularly against forest encroachments) still demand a heavy input of time, and tend to be viewed as the more exciting aspect of their work. Foresters and RFOs commonly set aside at least one day a week for court duty, and other days are spent in site inspections and drawing up evidence. Officers are thus left hard pressed to conduct other duties. Given that stretched Departmental budgets are already insufficient to maintain a full complement of staff, this represents a virtually impossible burden.

Control over land

A major concern of the Forest Department is to maintain and extend its status and power base within the government structure. Control over land is crucial in this respect, and runs counter to what in other countries is seen as a major goal of participatory forestry: to devolve control over forest resources to local people. In their paper about taungya McCall and Skutsch (1993:14-15) effectively drew this conclusion when they stated that,

"Forests already planted...although of timber species, are not being utilised economically nor are there any plans for this. It appears that their major purpose may in fact be to keep **chena** farmers off..."

The grazing of livestock is a related matter in which local people and Forest Department staff often clash, especially when the Department takes the decision to plant up areas of degraded forest or grassland which have formerly been used for this purpose. Pine is the most usual choice of tree for such planting (since this is often silviculturally appropriate), but it is a tree that provides little benefit to local people, and is viewed by some as being positively detrimental to the environment. Both the loss of land formerly used for grazing, and the planting with unwanted trees, are resented and can provoke local people into setting fire to plantations. Forest fires are a common problem during the dry season. Often viewed within the Department as a largely technical problem requiring technical solutions, they may be more of a social problem, reflecting a struggle for control over land. It is possible that if such land was given or leased to farmers for planting, fires would be far less of a problem. However, a prerequisite for this is trust between local people and the Forest Department, backed by a firm legal agreement – which, as we noted, was lacking under the lease system adopted by the CFP.

A hierarchical management structure

Like other departments based on the colonial model, the Sri Lankan Forest Department has an extremely rigid, hierarchical structure. This reinforces the cultural tendency described above for information to flow only from those of high status to those of lower status. Thus those in positions of authority within the Department often know little about the experience and opinions of forest watchers and BFOs on the ground, who are expected simply to obey the orders they receive. They in turn do not expect to be consulted, and even if asked for an opinion would hesitate to voice any concerns or problems for fear of being blamed for them. As government workers, there is a tendency for Forest Department staff to view themselves as superior to village people (and they are indeed accorded this outward deference in their interactions with them). The departmental view of village people (as noted above) tends to be, at best, paternalistic. Villagers are seen as potential law-breakers who should be stopped from destroying the forest (by force if necessary), and taught the value of trees. Whilst the norm within the department itself remains highly top-down and non-participatory, it is difficult to envisage interactions between local people and the Forest Department changing.

Training

It follows from this discussion that if a paradigm shift towards a more participatory approach to forestry is to occur, an extensive training – or rather, re-orientation – programme for Forest Department staff is necessary. All forms of in-country forestry training were severely hampered

during the 1980s as a result of the closure of the department's Forest College at China Bay, Trincomalee due to the ethnic conflict. Figures on training levels are difficult to obtain; those quoted this year by a senior government official (the Secretary for the Ministry of Forestry, Irrigation and Mahaweli Development) were taken from a 1979 review. This review, conducted by the World Bank, found that "60% of the Forest Departments 800 strong staff had not received any type of training" (Daily News, 26-5-1994). Undoubtedly the limited training possibilities have had a dispiriting impact on morale. Training needs have been widely recognised by donor agencies, who between them have sponsored virtually all senior Forest Department staff to attend a variety of overseas courses. However, training for lower level staff (particularly BFOs, watchers and nursery staff who rarely speak English) has been extremely limited. The new Sri Lanka Forestry Institute at Moon Plains, Nuwara Eliya⁴ should address basic forestry training needs, but early indications are that participatory approaches to forestry will not feature highly in the curriculum.

RFOs assigned to forestry extension duties have received training by the Agrarian Services Institute at Gannoruwa (Kandy).⁵ This places considerable emphasis on awareness raising and the preparation of extension materials, and in general fosters a teaching mentality, rather than an approach of mutual respect and learning. As far as specific training in participatory forestry is concerned, a number of Forest Department staff have been funded, particularly under the CFP, to attend overseas courses ranging from study tours to Masters programmes. However, 'one off' courses with little follow-up for selected individuals are wholly inadequate to effect a thorough re-orientation in the department's outlook. Members of staff at all levels need to be involved, and regular support is needed as staff begin to implement new ideas and slowly gain confidence in working with, rather than against, local people. Experience in countries where the general political and social climate is much more favourable towards community forestry has shown that this is a long and slow process (Gronow and Shrestha, 1991). In Sri Lanka a re-orientation of staff can only be envisaged through a long-term programme of training based within the country and tailored to local needs. This would need to be linked to careful placement of staff after training, to ensure that newly acquired skills are put to long-term use. A policy of frequent staff transfers has meant that trained staff have often been transferred to completely different duties within a short time of resuming their work.

In summary, the emphasis to date on policing activities and on training priorities has left the Sri Lankan Forest Department poorly placed to implement participatory forestry. Given this situation, many observers (for example, Kuchelmeister, 1987) have argued for a greater role for NGOs in forestry. We examine the case for this in the following section.

THE ROLE OF NGOs

Sri Lanka has an exceptionally large number of both locally and externally funded NGOs, fostered by the urban elite and middle classes whose prominence in society was mentioned previously. Indeed, the number that exist is beginning to be called into question, as indicated by

⁴ The Institute officially opened this year but has already been in operation for a number of years.

⁵ Technical training in homegarden development and agroforestry is also provided subsequently by the Department of Agriculture.

a cartoon in a recent newspaper which read "Save Sri Lanka from NGOs" (Sunday Observer, 17-4-94). Most NGOs involved in forestry conduct their activities in an *ad hoc* manner. The support of small-scale tree nurseries or community tree planting initiatives tends to arise as part of a general programme of rural development in a small geographical area. Two of the authors have recently visited a number of NGO forestry projects, three of which are described below. The names of the particular projects are omitted, as rather than placing a particular spotlight on them, we use them as fairly typical examples.

Case 1

This is a small NGO operating in the NW Province Dry Zone, conducting a wide range of rural development activities. It was initiated by certain local individuals with a strong, political commitment to the idea of people's participation, and places emphasis on techniques such as PRA. However, in their forestry activities a familiar set of attitudes and problems are revealed. As described by project staff, at one site the villagers were made aware of how wrong it was to cut natural forest, and were motivated by the organisation to plant several acres of open grazing land with slow growing indigenous timber and medicinal tree species. The objective was to recreate natural forest for its own sake: sustainable management in the future was not part of the plan.

The NGO shares the Forest Department's attitude that local people are ignorant of the importance of forests, and therefore places a heavy emphasis on awareness raising. In addition, they have very limited technical skills. Lack of silvicultural knowledge has led them to attempt the impossible task of establishing forest climax species in open ground. This is matched by their unfamiliarity with the social issues involved in tree planting and land use. The long term chances of success for an unfenced plot of slow growing trees (ebony) on previously grazed land in the middle of a village are minimal.

Case 2

This expatriate government funded forestry programme was on a much larger scale than case 1, and was implemented by a national level NGO in the mid 1980s. The main objective was environmental: reforesting 1,300 ha cleared during canal construction in order to reduce soil erosion and droughts (*sic*). It was hoped (*sic*) that natural regeneration would follow after initial tree establishment. Secondary aims of the programme were to raise environmental awareness among local villagers and school children, to provide employment for unemployed rural youth, and to give people experience and training in nursery work. The long term objective was to foster self reliance.

A wide range of native species were raised in an impressive nursery (visited by one of the authors), and planting targets were nearly fulfilled. However, long term survival rates were very low due to grazing, fire and drought. Under "negative factors associated with project implementation", the final report states:

"... overlooking such requirements as pasture lands, fuelwood and timber needs of the villagers adjacent to the subject area has been identified as an omission."

The assumption was that by planting indigenous species for environmental conservation, local people would automatically benefit – but they needed to be made aware of this. No consideration was given to the need to involve them in planning and decision making.

Case 3

This is a programme run by a large and prominent local NGO which was initially entirely Sri Lankan funded, although it now receives international donations. It was initiated as a self-help (*shramadana*) approach, designed around individual and community development. Following the creation of the Womens Movement within the organisation some five years ago, a group of programmes were designed to assist poor rural women. These ranged from subjects such as Skills Development and Management Training to Nutrition and Health, and included an agroforestry and environmental programme. Three areas for this programme were selected as particularly poor locations in the dry zone, where there is often a lack of government support.

The objective of the programme is to encourage rural women and village communities to participate in forest and environmental conservation by involving them in forestry activities in their homesteads. An awareness raising campaign is being conducted by trained extension workers, all women, and by the end of the five year programme it is intended that 100 villages in the three districts will have been contacted. Activities include the raising of seedlings in central nurseries, establishing small village nurseries, planting agroforestry and soil/water conservation demonstration plots in each village, and training village level workers. Income generation for women and the introduction of fuel-saving stoves are also supported.

Whilst this would seem to be a 'participatory' approach, on closer inspection it also suffers from a 'top-down' mentality based on the assumption that the programme managers know best. Pre-defined problems are addressed by specific targets and goals. It appears that the programme began not from a 'grass roots' concern amongst village people, but had externally determined objectives.

In summary, many NGOs have shown a sad lack of the social skills and silvicultural skills required for participatory forestry programmes. Furthermore, most NGO initiatives of this kind are in fact driven by the concerns of their managers, supporters and funders. They therefore strongly reflect the views of the elite and middle classes of Sri Lanka, as well as various expatriate development organisations. Based on current performance, the argument in favour of NGOs having a greater role in participatory forestry is not a strong one. Just as much as in the Forest Department, there is a need amongst NGOs working in forestry for appropriate training. Such a major re-orientation within Sri Lankan forestry will only be possible, however, with substantial State backing.

THE ROLE OF THE STATE

The institutional structure

We begin by brief comment on the institutional structure of government bodies concerned with forestry in Sri Lanka. During the 1980s all were located within one ministry – that of Lands, Irrigation and Mahaweli Development. This controlled such diverse bodies as the Forest Department, the Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka, and the State Timber Corporation. Lands was then split into a separate ministry, and more recently Mahaweli Development became a ministry distinct from Forestry and Irrigation. An early move of the new government has been to reduce the number of ministries, with the result that there is now a new ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Forestry. This background of frequent bureaucratic change and shifting responsibilities has not been beneficial to Sri Lankan forestry, but its precise effect is difficult to quantify.

A changing attitude?

Until recently, it seemed that forest protection by force was viewed in government circles as the main and most effective means of forest conservation. Thus a newspaper article two years ago reported that,

"The illicit felling of trees, particularly in reservoir catchment areas, has become so serious that emergency regulations will be enforced empowering the armed forces and police to shoot at sight anyone found engaging in such offenses." (Daily News, 30-3-1992)

It added that,

"Emergency powers will also be used to introduce an independent supervisory mechanism over forest officials – to check suspected connivance with timber racketeers.....Those found wanting or defaulting will be dealt with in terms of the emergency regulations as well as the administrative and disciplinary rules."

Despite the above, there are now signs of change in a more positive direction. Briefly, the background to this is as follows.

A Master Plan for Sri Lankan forestry was devised with Finnish assistance and approved by the government in 1986, but was heavily criticised. Almost immediately on ratification there were complaints over its management/production orientation, and lack of environmental/social content. In 1989, a Forest Sector Development Project (FSDP) was set up to implement the plan, and various additions were made to incorporate environmental concerns. An Environmental Management Unit was established within the Forest Department with IUCN support. The only social forestry component as such within the FSDP was a small and experimental one which the ODA agreed to support. It was recognised that the Master Plan would need to be revised under the FSDP, but what is now taking place is essentially the production of an entirely new plan. A major reform of forest policy is under way, as recently made clear by the Joint Team Leader – Forestry Master Plan Adviser who noted that,

"At present, there is no explicit, accepted forest policy in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the formulation of the forest policy and preparation of the new Forestry Master Plan are closely intertwined; in fact they are part of the same process." (Katila, 1994).

Forest Department 'policy' has until now been represented by five very broad statements, four of which were drawn up in 1953 (the fifth, which mentioned social forestry, was added in 1980). Current forest legislation is the last in a series of revisions to an Act of 1908. Considerable legislative reform in support of the new forest policy is anticipated.

In contrast to past procedure, the approach adopted for the new Forestry Master Plan has been consultative, with a range of interested parties participating. According to the Deputy Director of the Forestry Planning Unit (FPU) (Kumaradasa, 1994),

"If the people who are going to be affected by the plan are not fully involved in its creation, the plan is doomed to failure."

A Forestry Master Plan workshop on *Review of Forest Policy and Legislation* was held in early January this year, which was open to all interest groups and the general public. It was attended not only by senior representatives from all the ministries in the natural resource sector and the Department of National Planning, but also representatives from conservation and policy oriented NGOs, universities involved in forestry education, and scientists from national and international research institutions (editorial, Forestry Master Plan Newsletter 2, 1994). Subsequent workshops have now been held, and a consultative document (which is at this stage unquotable) produced for all parties to comment upon.

The changes being debated at present include the following.

- ! Raising the contribution of the forestry sector to national development. Part of this involves recognising the very substantial contribution made by farmers to the country's timber production.
- ! A move towards privatisation, and redefining the role of the Forest Department. 'Private sector' agencies, from commercial organisations to farmers, will be given responsibility for forest management. Regulations over forest use will be relaxed to facilitate local control.
- ! Emphasising the need for people to play a greater role in planning, decision making and management in order to achieve sustainable management.

Clearly suggestions such as these, being put forward by Sri Lankan policy makers in an open debate, represent a new form of thinking within the forestry sector. However, it remains to be seen whether and how proposed changes are written into new forest policy and legislation.

CONCLUSION

We have described how past attempts at 'people-oriented' forestry in Sri Lanka have fallen short of participatory forestry, at least in the sense that we define it. The various reasons that we suggest for this are deep-rooted, at both an institutional and cultural level. Community forestry models successfully employed in other countries do not seem appropriate for Sri Lanka. However, there remains a role for a form of people-oriented forestry tailored to the Sri Lankan situation, and the possibility that this can be developed. We suggest that this focuses on individual farmers or small, cohesive groups of farmers, rather than on villages and 'community' organisations. There appears to be considerable potential within Sri Lanka for tree cultivation by farmers, both on private land (as already demonstrated in many areas), and on former State land if security of tenure was provided (either on a lease, or even more permanent basis). This will require concerted support from the State, in the form of appropriate forestry policy and legislation, and from the Forest Department and relevant NGOs. It can only occur if the Forest Department is willing to adopt a new outlook, where appropriate working with local people to facilitate forestry operations, rather than implementing them directly. A reorientation of staff to such working practices will require a comprehensive, long term training programme based within Sri Lanka (with regular refresher/support meetings built in). Staff of appropriate NGOs might also be invited to participate in such training, with the aim that their future activities complement those of the Forest Department rather than serving as an effective competitor for funds and local people's affiliations. These suggestions will be far from easy to implement. However, with the current drive for forest

policy and legislative reform, and a new government in place, there seems to be no better time to instigate change.

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ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BFO	Beat Forest Officer
CFP	Community Forestry Project (now completed; funded with ADB support)
DFO	Divisional Forest Office
FPU	Forestry Planning Unit
FSDP	Forest Sector Development Project
IRDP	Integrated Rural Development Project
NGO	Non Government Organisation
PFP	Participatory Forestry Project (the successor to the CFP; funded with ADB support)
ODA	Overseas Development Administration (of the British Government)
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RFO	Range Forest Officer

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