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Thinking Politically about Community Forestry and Biodiversity: Insider-driven initiatives in Scotland

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Summary

Community forestry initiatives in Scotland are among the most exciting new developments in forest management in North-West Europe. They are significant not only for their political and social achievements in contesting existing patterns of land tenure, legislation and power relations, but also for their implications for biodiversity conservation. This paper examines the significance of insider-driven initiatives, and whether they represent a win-win situation for both social and environmental agendas.

Part one examines the wider environmental, social and policy contexts of community forestry in Scotland, and demonstrates that community involvement in forest management in the North is faced with many of the same obstacles experienced in the South. Despite these obstacles, communities are challenging the prevailing patterns with some success, and stand to benefit from local forestry initiatives. Part two briefly examines three examples of community forestry initiatives in Scotland: Crofting forestry in North-West Scotland (**Crofters**); the Laggan forestry initiative (**Laggan**) and the Borders community woodland (**Borders**). We argue that they represent insider-driven, rather than outsider-driven processes for sustainable forest management. Part three looks at a range of other key actors involved in the initiatives, revealing a variety of motives driving, supporting and resisting their evolution. Part four analyses some of the key features of insider-driven initiatives. The Scottish context offers fresh perspectives on issues of a wider relevance to the international debate on community forestry and biodiversity conservation, notably regarding motivations for local initiatives; the role of local leaders; different notions of 'community'; thinking beyond PRA; political processes, empowerment and alliances; community support for insider-driven schemes; the role of incentives; implications for biodiversity conservation;

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and implications for policy makers and donor agencies.

We conclude that alliances between pro-grassroots groups and environmental NGOs represent a 'marriage of convenience', but one which helps create political space for both economically and politically marginalised groups and for the objectives of environmental organisations. The success of biodiversity conservation in the 21st century will depend on moving away from conservation's elitist past to support and integrate local needs and aspirations.

The Wider Context of Community Forestry in Scotland

Introduction: transition to community forest management?

The recently established IUCN 'Working Group on Community Involvement in Forest Management' claims that there is strong evidence for a global transition in forest management (Poffenberger, 1996). It is recognised that an increasing number of nations in both South and North are developing policies and operational mechanisms to provide much more active roles for local communities and Indigenous Peoples in promoting sustainable forest management. Poffenberger suggests that this transition is unfolding in different ways and is at different stages of development in each nation.

While we support the orientation of this transition, we argue that its inevitability is by no means certain. Although the first signs of this apparent transition are in place in Scotland, there is powerful resistance, and it will require committed public pressure and sustained financial support to evolve. We illustrate the dynamics of this process, emphasising the role of insider-driven initiatives and pro-grassroots coalitions in challenging the prevailing context of forest management, and indicating its implications for biodiversity conservation.

Environmental context: the demise of Scotland's native woodland

At the end of the last Ice Age, native trees such as Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*), aspen (*Populus tremula*), and downy birch (*Betula pubescens*) flourished over most of Scotland, along with its associated fauna, including wolves, bears, and wild boar. At their zenith these forests covered 80% of the Scottish landscape (WWF, 1993). However, settled agriculture and increasingly intensive land-use gradually led to the demise of Scotland's native

woods. This was exacerbated during the 19th century when people were ruthlessly driven from their traditional holdings and replaced with sheep which, from the landlords' perspective, were more lucrative than people. While landlords perceived this as 'improvement', the Highlanders call it *na Faudaichean* or the Highland Clearances.

With the coming of huge numbers of sheep and the artificially high stocking of deer to meet the requirements of the sporting estates, most of the remnants of the wildwood are reported to have been drastically reduced (WWF, 1993). In addition to the influence of grazing animals, some 40% of native coppice woodland has been transformed into conifer plantations over the last 40 years. For example, the Forestry Commission (FC) frequently replaced native woodlands with exotic conifers and techniques such as deep ploughing and site drainage were used indiscriminately, causing the loss of many key habitats. Today, as a consequence, Scotland has less than 2% of its original native forest cover surviving. These remnants are scattered mainly throughout the Highlands and Islands in inaccessible river valleys, gulleys and gorges where even sheep and deer cannot reach (*ibid*).

However, perhaps at last the tide has turned. A recent report by MacKenzie and Callander (1995) suggests that the loss of genuinely native woodlands appears to have been largely stopped and, while most are still recorded as in poor condition, there has also been a major increase in the natural regeneration and planting of native woodlands in the Highlands during the last five years.

Conserving and re-establishing native woodlands is considered particularly important for biodiversity conservation because native tree species generally support a much greater diversity of wildlife than forests of introduced species. The woodland activities of local people thus have a potentially important impact on biodiversity.

Social context: land tenure – who owns the trees?

So why until very recently have so few trees been planted by local people? One important reason is that the principal legal basis for landownership in Scotland is feudal tenure, which owes its origins to a political and social system designed to exercise power in 11th century Scotland (Wightman, 1996). In effect this adds a vertical dimension to property rights whereby more than one person may enjoy property rights over the same area of land. Feudal rights are normally held by three groups of people: the *Crown*; *Superiors* (having direct ownership) who can

maintain mineral and other rights on land, and impose obligations on their feudal land; and *Vassals* (having usufruct ownership) who are constrained by the rights in their title deeds. Beneath them are tenants, whose rights are derived from the vassal and today are usually governed by legislation.

Based on Wightman's data, in 1995 some 1,560 private estates owned between them approaching 60% of Scotland's land; with a further 12% being publicly owned land where the owner is accountable to the electorate. In Inverness-shire (the county of **Laggan** and several **Crofter** examples) 179 private proprietors own almost 74% of the county; with a further 21% owned by the public sector. This leaves a mere 5% of the land to the rest of the county's inhabitants.

So, what have been the implications of this system for community forestry? Simply put, there has been no incentive for tenants to plant trees on their land, as any trees planted automatically became the property of the landlord. As Wightman (1996) puts it,

> 'a tenant who plants a tree and a turnip can harvest and eat the turnip but the tree belongs to the landowner'.

In addition to feudal tenure, the Scottish landscape is further dominated by the effects of the forced eviction of thousands of families during the Highland Clearances – when an estimated half a million people were driven from their traditional lands (Prebble, 1963). For those who remained behind, it was a time of desolation and poverty.

Dispelling the wilderness myth

Most people visiting Scotland for the first time are impressed by the wildness and grandeur of its landscapes. The virtues of the bare hills covered with purple heather, sheep and deer have been extolled by countless poets and writers who, often in ignorance, have created and perpetuated the myth that this is how Scotland has always looked. One cannot deny the beauty of the hills but the truth is very different. The Highlands have been described by several Scots writers and ecologists as variously, 'a wet desert' or 'a devastated countryside' (Hunter, 1995). Alongside the demise of native woodlands, almost all of northern Scotland has evidence of past human settlement. Some now deserted localities were once widely populated, but populations were forcibly expelled. Crofters still aspire to win back these lands (Hunter, 1995).

Economic and political marginalisation

The feudal system exacerbated by the Highland Clearances has created basic inequalities in land tenure, with an associated political and economic marginalisation of many rural Scottish people. Recent research has revealed pockets of high rural deprivation particularly in Cumnock and Doon, Wigtown, Skye and Lockalsh and Lochaber. At present, 29% of the Scottish population lives in rural areas (Scottish Office, 1996a). However, this is set to increase as population growth continues in most parts of rural Scotland, mainly as a result of in-migration. In rural Scotland prices tend to be higher and wages lower than in urban areas, and there are shortages of affordable housing both for rent and purchase, as well as a greater number of dwellings below a generally acceptable habitable standard. The service sector is currently the biggest employer, providing over two-thirds of all jobs. By comparison, agriculture, forestry and fishing together account for only 8% of the workforce, indicating a weak rural economy. The unemployment rate in rural Scotland in 1994 was 8.4% which, although lower than in urban areas, is marked by considerable inter-district variation. The worst affected areas are in the South West and the Highlands and Islands (*ibid*).

Scotland is still governed by a centralised Parliament based in London, and Scottish affairs are often treated as marginal to mainstream 'English' politics. Both Wightman (1996) and Hunter (1995) argue that land reform in Scotland is long overdue, and that it is no coincidence that Scotland should be the last outpost of feudal land law and the country with the most land in the fewest hands in Europe. Scotland is one of a handful of countries that has its own legal system but no legislature to enact and amend its laws. In Wightman's (1996) opinion, if Scotland is to build a modern legal system of property rights and introduce a meaningful programme of land reform, then it must have its own sovereign parliament.

Forest policy context: Turning over a new leaf?

UK forest policy has moved away from its traditional preoccupation with timber production through a succession of changes to the legislation since 1919. Although policy has been successful in doubling forest cover since the first world war to 10.4%, its evolution towards the more holistic aims of sustainable forestry has been laggardly, and there is much that could be done to modernise current forestry policy, particularly in relation to social issues (Callander, 1995; Tickell, 1996). While national forest policy does include rural objectives, employment opportunities in rural areas within the forest sector have collapsed, and many argue that its social objectives are interpreted by the FC to mean 'recreation and amenity',

which effectively gives precedence to urban interests over rural needs (Callander 1995:8; Inglis, pers. comm.). However, **Laggan** has recently challenged the FC's interpretation of 'community forestry', and forced changes to the FC's policy on forest disposals.

In 1981, under the Conservative Government's policy of privatisation, the FC initiated a disposals programme, involving the sale of FC land to the private sector. According to Wightman (1996) this has been one of the most significant features in the changing pattern of land ownership in Scotland in the 1980s and 1990s. Government policy has not sought to encourage commercially-oriented community forestry or forest cooperatives common in other northern European countries, and their disposals programme has effectively privileged the interests of business and financial companies.

There is growing recognition that rural communities in the UK derive a far wider range of benefits from forests than has previously been acknowledged, and that local forest management can make a critical difference to the socio-economic sustainability of rural populations in some locations. Indeed, a question increasingly asked is whether forestry in the UK needs to be dominated by a single actor with narrow interests such as the FC. Other northern European countries, such as Norway, demonstrate that extensive forest cover can be combined with a high level of local management, delivering both local and national benefits (Callander, 1995). The same author concludes that a higher profile should be given to the opportunities for rural community involvement in forestry, and encouragement and support to locally based initiatives. It is to this end that we explore some of the dimensions of insider-driven initiatives for forest management in Scotland.

International forestry agreements and Agenda 21 provide a macro-policy environment which promotes fuller community participation in forest management. For example, the Statement of Forestry Principles from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, and the Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Forests from the Ministerial Conference on European Forests in Helsinki in 1993, integrate concerns for social, economic and biodiversity issues. These provide a general direction for the reorientation of national forest policies. International policies are often cited in support of local forestry initiatives, and for lobbying for changes in national forestry policies. For example, the Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme (SRDFP) appeals to 'international best practice', including the use of participatory

rural appraisal (PRA) in the planning and management of Scottish forests, which although known internationally is relatively new in Scotland.

Pressure at the international level has recently been undertaken by an international 'Working Group on Community Involvement in Forest Management' which has been extremely active in lobbying for changes in the Intergovernmental Panel for Forests (IPF) discussions in Geneva, September 1996. According to Poffenberger (pers.comm.) this group, along with the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples, have managed to change the tone and orientation of the IPF discussions towards the role of communities and indigenous people, security of tenure, decentralised and participatory planning in forest management.

Economic context: The role of subsidies and incentives

Subsidies, grants and incentives, within the context of Government and EU policies, are key factors determining farmer decision-making and land-use patterns in Scotland. The introduction of and withdrawal of support are shown to have a significant influence on land-use patterns (SCU and RSPB, 1992). Some studies reveal that in areas with poorer resources, the values of agricultural subsidies are approximately equal to the net farm income (Kayes, Arden-Clarke, Taylor, 1990), indicating their critical role in sustaining rural people in some locations.

The most controversial subsidy is the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) incentive for sheep farming in marginal areas, which is aimed at food production and maintaining farmers' income in efforts to keep them in farming. Livestock numbers have been influenced by increasing headage payments over the years, which have encouraged farmers to keep more ewes for longer periods, resulting in unsustainable levels of grazing. Wider national and EU agricultural policies clearly constrain the development of alternative and sustainable land-use practices, and new woodland and conservation schemes have to compete with the existing financial incentives which orient people to unsustainable agricultural practices.

However, the UK has a growing number of financial incentives for woodland establishment and management, which are increasingly attractive to both individuals and communities. There are three different bodies which make awards for forestry in Scotland: the Forest Authority (FA, part of the FC); the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department (SOAEFD), and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Between them they offer a range of grants, most of which pay higher rates for broadleaf species and Scots Pine than other conifers

– giving a clear incentive to establish and manage native woodlands.

In addition to the woodland grants, the Millennium Forest for Scotland (MFS) also makes financial contributions to woodland establishment and management. The UK Millennium Commission was set up to distribute funds from the National Lottery to mark the year 2000, and the MFS was created to organise and administer projects aimed at restoring forests in Scotland. The vision of the MFS is,

> 'not simply to restore the forest, but to re-establish the link between the people of Scotland and their local woods' (MFS, undated).

It hopes to encourage local people to become more involved in the management of their woods, and to create a sense of local ownership. It aims to achieve a 100,000 hectare expansion of native woodlands, and to improve the quality of a further 50,000 hectares. The Millennium Commission is expected to provide up to £50 million (sterling) to the MFS to support up to 500 projects. These will be concerned with woodland establishment and restoration; community woodlands; conservation and wildlife; urban woods; tourism; etc.

We now turn to our three case studies: Crofters, Laggan and Borders.

Case Study 1: Crofter Forestry in the North-West Highlands

Background

Crofter Forestry is a new community forestry initiative dating from 1991. Recent changes in crofting legislation have affected the seven crofting counties of the North-West Highlands (Argyll, Inverness, Ross and Cromarty, Sutherland, Caithness, Orkney and Shetland), giving crofters the rights to manage existing woodlands and create new ones on their common grazings.

Crofting is small-scale part-time traditional land use found in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Crofting dates from around 1800, and the beginning of the Highland Clearances. Displaced farmers who did not emigrate were confined to smallholdings, known as crofts, usually in coastal townships on the worst land. The crofting population was originally intended to provide a workforce for the kelp (seaweed) industry, involved in the manufacture of industrial alkali in the nineteenth century. Crofts were deliberately laid out to make it impossible for occupiers to earn a full time income from farming. Crofting has thus been

extremely vulnerable and economically marginal ever since (SCU and RSPB, 1992). Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, out-migration from crofting communities was significant. Approximately one quarter to one third of younger crofters left the area between the 1920s and 1950s, creating a marked distortion in demographic patterns. Older age groups, until recently, have been disproportionately represented. Many have believed that crofting is economically untenable. However, crofting is currently undergoing a renaissance due to in-migration and the economic benefits of tourism. The Scottish Crofters Union (SCU) was established in the 1980s and has become an effective voice in the political and economic affairs of crofting communities. It has tackled problems related to absentee landlords, housing conditions, farming improvements, and pushed for legal changes allowing crofters to benefit from forestry. Although the Highlands of Scotland are some of the most sparsely populated areas in Europe, the pattern of crofting land-use results in some of the highest concentrations of rural population outside south-east England. The GDP of the area is significantly lower than the UK and EU average (SCU and RSPB, 1995).

The term croft does not refer to the house but rather to plots of arable and grazing land. Crofters may be tenants of more than one croft, and according to the SCU there are currently some 9,000 active crofters in the NW Highlands on over 17,000 registered crofts (SCU and RSPB, 1992:43). Crofts consist of *in-bye* land, between two to ten acres (one to four hectares) of prime agricultural land usually near the houses, and a share of common grazing, often a hillside of 200-300 acres (100-120 hectares). Crofters' grazing share or *souming* (the number and proportion of their stock) is determined by the carrying capacity of the common pasture. The majority of crofters live in crofting 'townships', consisting of a collection of families making their living, in part, from croft land. Crofters manage their crofts and stock as individuals, but members of a township are required by law to appoint a grazing committee and clerk to administer the common grazing, and to maintain and improve grazings and equipment.

Crofter Forestry (Scotland) Act 1991

The new Crofter Forestry Act allows crofters to benefit directly from forestry opportunities for the first time. The Act extends the power of grazings committees, or any individual or group of crofters, to use any part of the common grazings as woodland on the approval of the Crofter's Commission (CC) and on the written consent of the landlord. It prohibits the landlord from resuming common grazing,

whilst the land is used as woodlands. It makes the grazings committees eligible to apply for grants for forestry purposes and farm woodlands, and it extends the power to make common grazings regulations cover its use for forestry purposes. The law allows half the common grazing to be used for forestry. Full woodland grants are available for up to one hundred hectares.

The new Act was the result of several years of hard lobbying by the Crofter's Union to ensure that current and future generations of crofters can derive the same benefits from trees as private individuals.

New forestry schemes

As of April 1996, some 23 new woodland schemes have been initiated and approved on crofters' common grazing land, representing nearly 1,500 hectares. Over 230 applications have been made for tree planting on *in-bye* land, and many more woodland schemes are in the pipeline (Marsh, 1996). The woodlands are usually established or protected as small scale plantations, of 6-100 hectares. The woodlands represent a mixture of new bare-land planting, and the promotion of natural regeneration. All the woodland schemes have been financed with grant-aid administered through the Forestry Commission. The largest concentration of schemes to date has been on the Isle of Lewis (*ibid*).

Management objectives

Most crofters see the woodland schemes as a way of supporting and diversifying their agricultural systems, and they are established with a variety of objectives for local benefits.

Many crofters initially perceive the benefit of shelter provided by woodland for crops and livestock on exposed land. While conifers are vulnerable to windblow, broadleaf species provide effective protection from wind. Forestry grants also cover the costs of fencing which not only protect young woodlands but also serve to demarcate boundaries – a critical factor in stock management and control. Indeed, a more sceptical view is to see woodland schemes as a way of obtaining fencing for sheep management and of disposing of the poorer grazings to forestry.

There is a growing general awareness of crofters' increasing dependence on sheep subsidies, coupled with a recognition that the CAP is changing and that sheep subsidies will not necessarily last. Furthermore, of late many crofters' *soumings*

have not been utilised, and common grazings under-utilised, reflecting a declining interest in sheep husbandry as people depend more on employment outside the crofts. Many crofters feel compelled to diversify to stabilise their incomes and way of life. Forestry is seen as a means of income diversification, as a vehicle for other rural development activities, and as providing a route towards a more sustainable future (Nicolson A, pers. comm.).

For example, a large woodland scheme of 100 hectares in Assynt is linking the grazings of a number of townships. This project's scale is aimed at generating future employment and local commercial activities from the woodlands. According to Ritchie (1994) they want,

> 'to use the money that comes in on the back of the grant schemes for woodlands to try and retain the money locally and not allow it to leak out to contractors'.

In other areas, individuals have been happy to reduce their livestock numbers, and find that money from woodland grants and the sale of wood products compensates for the removal of sheep (Nicolson W, 1994).

In addition to livestock shelter, some woodland blocks are managed to provide: fencing grade timber and fuelwood (Borve, Skye); income from thinnings as firewood (Camusluinie, Lochalsh); income through the sale of local crafts on Lewis; community amenity and a recreation site (Penifiler, Skye); to enhance landscape and conservation and provide a renewable source of timber and fuelwood (Assynt); to provide partial employment (Scallasaig, Lochalsh); Christmas trees (Tong and Aird, Lewis); and environmental improvement (Upper Coll, Lewis) (Marsh, 1996).

According to Marsh (1996), twice as many broadleaf species have been planted as conifers, reflecting not only the financial incentives for broadleaf species offered through the woodland grants, but also a local preference for native species. Commonly planted trees are: common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), birches (*Betula* spp.), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), willows (*Salix* spp.), whitebeams (*Sorbus* spp), cherries (*Prunus* spp.), hazel (*Corylus avellana*), oaks (*Quercus* spp.), Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), and larch (*Larix* spp.). Many of these saplings have been raised from seed of local provenances in local tree nurseries, such as the Hebridean Woodlands Nursery at Dunvegan on Skye, which have an interest in ecological restoration. This is clearly a positive benefit to biodiversity conservation in the area.

Community involvement

The idea for woodland schemes is usually put forward by members of a grazing committee, and then followed up with discussions with landlords and outside authorities such as the CC and the FC. In addition to permission from the landlord to plant trees, crofters have to agree a management plan before they are eligible for the woodland grants. In most crofting communities decision-making about woodland on common land has been the responsibility of the traditional grazings committee, headed by a grazings clerk. These committees decide how much, and which sections of the common grazing will be allocated for forestry. Grazing committees require a forest account to administer the grant (often previously established accounts set up for sheep husbandry purposes). All members who participate in the woodland scheme (shareholders) are entitled to their share of the grant.

The new tree planting programmes have had a significant impact on local communities. In some cases, such as in Kylerhea on Skye, the fight to obtain grazings from the landlord for forestry has actually helped to reinstate the work of a lapsed grazings committee and revitalised community institutions. The last traditional grazings committee was held in 1890. According to Gerrard, (pers. comm.) the forestry programme has 'encouraged people to start talking to each other again', and the reinstated grazings committee now meets several times a year. Some committed members, who work outside (eg. in Edinburgh and Paris) travel to Skye especially to attend the meetings.

In other cases forestry programmes have inspired the creation of new community institutions. For example, Borve and Annishadder on Skye have established a company limited by guarantee open to all crofters, residents and organisations resident in the township. At present it has 19 members and the company is run by five elected directors, all of whom are active crofters. The company has enabled the grazing committee to undertake a woodland project, and they are applying for a further forestry scheme (Scottish Office, 1996b).

In Assynt, crofters established the Assynt Crofter's Trust in 1992, with some 130 members from a collection of 13 townships. They raised the money to purchase the former North Lochinver Estate by public subscription, grants and loans from public bodies. Members elect directors to the Trust's Board on a township basis, which is run by an Executive Company Chairman and various officers. They are promoting

a number of projects to develop the estate's potential including a native woodlands programme (Scottish Office, 1996b).

Not all crofters have been sympathetic to the forestry schemes. In fact, in Borve, three crofters who had previously worked for the FC refused to participate in their first forestry scheme. Some crofters are worried that forestry will take the prime grazing land, and that woodland will harbour predators such as foxes. Some townships have found it difficult to reach democratic decisions because of suspicions about loss of grazing land. In the case of a planting scheme near Orbost on Skye, designed to establish woodland on half the common grazing, (where at the time there was only one crofter still sheep farming), neighbouring farmers set fire to the planting site and brought in sheep to re-establish the grazing rights.

Landlord response

There has been considerable resistance from landlords (many of whom are absentee) to the woodland schemes. During the lobbying for changes to the legislation a compromise was negotiated whereby crofters have to obtain permission and a written signature from the landlord before they are allowed to plant trees.

Crofters have had various experiences with landlords. For example, the Kylerhea Township on the Isle of Skye has had a three year battle with their London-based landlord for the right to plant trees on their common grazing. He initially wanted to use all the common grazing for his own woodland scheme. He rejected the community's plans, disagreeing with their choice of species, planting configuration, etc. After a long battle, the CC finally persuaded him to sign an agreement (Gerrard, pers. comm.). Resistance from landlords has both economic and ideological dimensions (see section on actors, below).

On the other hand, after developing a proposal to plant trees on their common ground the grazing committee of the Borve Township persuaded their landlord to sell his land. After initial resistance he was happy to do this as he wanted to escape from the burden of administering the township, and believed that crofters should be responsible for their own affairs (Birley, Watson, and Reid, 1996). Nineteen crofting families raised £20,000 (sterling) to buy 1,800 hectares of common grazing. They have formed a company to manage the land for a sustainable future.

Many crofters have been unwilling to challenge the status quo of land-tenure institutions, which has given them a reputation for being cautious. However, a younger generation of crofters are growing more prepared to challenge the establishment. When questioned on whether there was a backlash from landowners to the crofter forestry initiatives and land purchase, Nicolson, A (pers. comm.) expressed the opinion that:

> 'They've had their day, it's too late for them now, all they can do is enter into cooperative agreements'.

Case Study 2: The Laggan Forestry Initiative

Laggan is a small community of approximately 300 people on the Upper Spey in Inverness-shire. It is the first locality in the United Kingdom to be granted (potential) community control of a State owned plantation for rural development purposes. It thus represents a bold Government land reform initiative, and a significant pilot project for commercially-orientated community forestry in Scotland.

Strathmashie Forest consists of 1,400 hectares of mature spruce and pine plantations, with some blocks of broadleaf species. A recent district valuation gave its estimated value as £1.7 million (sterling). It thus represents a considerable commercial asset. The Laggan community began lobbying for local control of Strathmashie Forest in 1992. The forest had not been identified by the Forestry Commission for disposal, and the local initiative was thus entirely proactive in its attempt to secure the forest for the community. Locals believe that creating local employment opportunities is the only way to halt the decline in population and services and to revitalise the community. The neglected Strathmashie Forest was considered a potential source of employment for local people.

The Laggan Forestry Initiative (LFI), which was formally established in 1995, was the inspiration of Dr Ian Richardson and a group of committed individuals, including Davey Campbell (an ex FC employee) and Roy Tylden-Wright, owner of the 11,000 acre Cluny Estate. Richardson (1996) claims that the takeover of the forest will secure the future of the village,

> 'We will have no future unless we use our assets carefully – and our greatest asset is the forest'.

Formerly employing between 30 and 40 people, the FC had run the labour force down to nil. The community appealed to the Secretary of State for Scotland (Michael Forsyth) for the right to bid for the forest. He was impressed by their vision of a community-run asset, and ordered the FC to enter negotiations. The LFI has encountered considerable resistance from both the FC and some landowners. As Richardson (*ibid*) commented,

> 'At first they dismissed us as Bottom the weaver and Smug the joiner,
> but now they have to take us seriously'.

Sponsorship amendment

Laggan has been instrumental in changing the FC's sponsorship policy for local purchase of forest. After four years of active lobbying, Forsyth announced in November 1995 that 'Laggan was to have its forest'. Disposals of FC plantations are usually sold on the open market following advertising. However, bodies with recreational, conservation and amenity interests are given preferential opportunities to acquire properties at the district valuers price, without having to bid on the open market. However, communities with socio-economic objectives were not given such preferential treatment. For example, the Rogart township's bid to acquire its forest in 1991 failed because of its economic objectives. The new regulations which came into effect in April 1996 have changed these restrictions, and **Laggan** has been given the opportunity to buy woodlands at the district valuation price.

In February 1996, Forsyth presented the Laggan Community with seven options for the involvement of the community in a pilot forest project, ranging from full community ownership of land and timber, to partnership agreements. At the time of writing the community is considering the various options, with a preference for full community ownership of land and timber – for as Campbell (pers. comm.) claims, 'otherwise we won't get the top jobs, we'll just be the slaves'. It appears however, that the most likely outcome will be a partnership agreement with the FC (Grant, pers. comm.).

Management objectives

Local residents are currently working on a management plan for Strathmashie Forest. Its major objective is to provide sustainable employment for present and future generations based on the commercial management of the forest. It is estimated that the forest will need to produce some six thousand tonnes of wood per annum to sustain five jobs in the forest. One part time job has already been created

helping to coordinate the initiative, which is the first job created in Laggan in ten years. The LFI anticipates that the community will benefit both directly through the provision of employment in the forest; and indirectly through the benefits of local value-added wood processing industries and tourism.

Other objectives include the enhancement of the forest's conservation and amenity features. The villagers hope to encourage its tourist potential, through providing access to its Pictish Fort, and river sites, and developing mountain biking, mountain walking and deer stalking facilities. There is also potential for some croft re-establishment. The LFI also recognises its role as a catalyst for other community projects, and in helping to revitalise other communities similar to itself.

Case Study 3: The Border's Community Woodland

Wooplaw Wood was bought as a community resource in 1987, and is reputedly Scotland's 'oldest' amenity community wood. It is located in Selkirkshire some 35 km south of Edinburgh near Galashiels. It is approximately 40 hectares in size. The 'Border's Community Woodland' is a registered charity set up to administer Wooplaw Wood, and membership is open to anyone whether living near or far. The woodland was originally the inspiration of wood sculptor Tim Stead who lives in the nearby village of Blainslie.

According to Stead (pers. comm.) the idea of the Border's community wood is to 'involve people, give them access and give them pleasure'. It is for people who care about woods, and a place where the diverse aspirations of a community may be realised. In the early eighties Stead increasingly felt the need to replace the native elm (*Ulmus* spp.), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and oak (*Quercus* spp.) that he had been using in his work. In 1986 he initiated a fund-raising programme to raise money to buy land on which to grow the native trees whose timber he was using in his work. He raised an initial sum of £3,500 (sterling) for his woodland idea from the sale of unique hardwood axeheads.

During the fund-raising project, Stead met Alan Drever and Donald McPhillimy, who have both been influential in Scotland's community woodland movement. Stead acknowledges that he was guided by their ideas. He believes that people from surrounding areas should be able to drive, walk or cycle to the wood and get

involved in various activities including the planting of trees and maintenance operations, as well as picnicking, walking and simply enjoying their surroundings.

When Wooplaw Wood came on the market in 1987, the fund-raising team had only six weeks to raise the asking price of £33,000 (sterling). There was considerable grassroots support in the form of donations and loans from the local community. Some 300 people joined the charity 'Borders Community Woodland', paying a membership fee of five pounds. A substantial contribution was also made by WWF in Scotland, and the Countryside Commission for Scotland came up with matching funds.

Management objectives

In addition to providing access to local communities, the objectives of the woodland are to enhance wildlife habitats, and re-establish areas of native woodland. A further objective is to manage the area for timber extraction, creating revenue which can be channelled back to enhance the woodland (Sutherland, 1993:77). Decision-making is guided by a silvicultural committee of three, and eighteen community-woodland wardens. Day-to-day management of the woodland has been assisted by a woodland coordinator, Willie McGhee, who has been in post since 1995. He also acts as a point of reference and liaison for community groups.

Since 1988 over 18 hectares of bare land have been planted with native broadleaf species. Tree planting has been conducted by local volunteers and members of the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT). The various planting schemes have received over £14,000 (sterling) in grants.

The management challenge is to reconcile the evolving, and sometimes conflicting aspirations of the community, within the overarching objectives of continuous-cover forestry, native broadleaf species and ecological restoration. For example, some local ecologists advocate the eradication of the grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), which is believed to out-compete and cause the decline of the native red squirrel (*S. vulgaris*). However, others find the idea of eradication within the wood unacceptable. A similar dilemma centres on whether to remove sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). Sycamore, a continental European species which is now naturalised throughout most of Britain, is often viewed as a weed because it out-competes native species such as ash on some sites. These, and similar issues, are frequently reviewed.

Community involvement

In the early days the wood was not used as much by the local community as was originally anticipated, even though it is situated only a few miles away from a number of villages and towns. Stead claimed that,

> '..it's an idea ahead of its time. We thought we'd get more people coming out to work in the wood and to enjoy themselves. In fact, very few people are interested in that' (cited in Sutherland, 1993:79).

However, since the mid nineties the management of the wood has become the focus of numerous training, cultural and artistic events. According to McGhee (pers. comm.), the woodland is now in high demand from various organisations to practice woodland and conservation skills, and between three and four hundred people are involved in such activities during the year. Much of the work to date has been carried out in partnership with the SWT, who use the wood for teaching tree felling, chainsaw work, fence construction, drystone dyking, path-making etc. Artistic events, barbecues and *ceilidhs* (traditional music and dancing) also attract many people into the woods. The woodland also provides casual employment and income for two or three local people during felling and pruning activities. Some woodland income is obtained from thinnings and prunings which go for charcoal making. The potential for small scale wood processing industries in the future is recognised, and is being addressed by a 'Wood School' initiative of the Borders Forest Trust (see below). Since the wood also attracts wildlife such as great spotted woodpeckers (*Dendrocopos major*), tree creepers (*Certhia familiaris*), woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*), roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) and badgers (*Meles taxus*), it is used by wildlife enthusiasts, local RSPB activities and for school educational excursions. While local people are given free access and considerable freedom to use the wood as they wish, the potential dilemma of any one individual or group dominating the resource at the expense of others has never arisen.

A recent spin-off of the Borders Community Woodland is the creation of the 'Borders Forest Trust', a body which aims to link communities to the diverse benefits of woodlands throughout the Borders area. It has two umbrella projects: 'Living with Trees' and 'Working with Trees'. The former is largely concerned with promoting community woodlands, biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration throughout the Border's region; while the latter is concerned with training in woodworking, product design and marketing (a Wood School), and the demonstration of sustainable woodland management. So far the Borders Forest

Trust has helped coordinate projects from the Borders as part of The Millennium Forest for Scotland.

Having presented the three case studies, the following section briefly examines some of the other key actors involved in them.

Actors

An actor-analysis helps tease out the different interests, perceptions and motives of various groups, and how they interact in supporting or resisting the initiatives. It thus provides a basis for understanding the political dimensions of insider-driven forestry initiatives.

Government ministers

The current Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, has demonstrated considerable support for community initiatives at both a policy level and grassroots level (see Scottish White Paper on Rural Policy, 1995). As **Laggan** demonstrates, he has lent top-level support to their community forestry initiative.

Some commentators argue that Forsyth's approbation of the community-led schemes marks a radical political shift, with Scots Tories[1] abandoning their unquestioning support for large landowners. It is widely recognised that as an urban Tory, Forsyth is less sympathetic to the interests of Tory landowners. For example, Hunter (1996) argues,

> 'In the past, Tory politicians have tended to side with landowners and landowning bodies because, frankly, they themselves were landowners. But Forsyth is different. He comes from an ordinary background and is far less patrician. His moves so far have been almost revolutionary'.

It is widely known that Forsyth has come under pressure from Tory landlords, and has had to persuade the Earl of Lindsay of benefits of the Laggan initiative. Lindsay, the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment, and also a landlord, is the prime target for pressure from other landlords.

[1]Members of the British Conservative Party.

While Forsyth's interest in local capacity building may be genuine, there are also political motives for his support. Rather than revolutionary, we would argue that this is a further example of 'populist' Tory policy. With one eye on votes, Forsyth may be hoping that the general public will find this brand of real devolution to real communities more attractive than the opposition Labour party's plans for legislative devolution with a Scottish parliament in Edinburgh (Arlidge, 1996).

Civil servants: The Scottish Office

The Scottish Office was set up in 1885 to decentralise the administration of Scottish affairs. It is regarded by many as London controlled and oriented, and a poor substitute for a Scottish parliament (Blair, 1996:34). However, many civil servants within the Scottish Office clearly have the welfare of Scottish rural communities at heart. Their Rural Focus Group, which made a significant contribution to the thinking underlying the White Paper, is a keen advocate of devolving power from central structures to local groups, and building on processes for involving communities in rural development (Scottish Office, 1996c).

The Scottish Office has lent critical ideological and financial support to community forestry initiatives. For example, it has helped finance the SRDFP, which is concerned with participatory approaches and community involvement in forestry. With the FC, they commissioned a report on 'The Scope for Community Participation in Forest Management' from researchers at the University of Aberdeen (Slee, Clark and Snowdon, 1996). Perhaps more importantly, their direct access to Government Ministers, gives them power to lobby for community initiatives from 'within'.

Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission (FC) is an actor with multiple identities, resulting in ambiguous attitudes towards the development of community forestry. Despite changes in its policy and administration, the FC is still the largest public landowner in Scotland – owning 8.7% of the country, and maintaining centralised control over nearly half of its forests (Wightman 1996). In all but six of Scotland's 33 counties, the FC is by far the largest public landowner. It thus has a significant impact on land-use patterns and social relations in rural areas.

The FC has been widely critiqued for its socially and environmentally damaging policies since the war, and attempts these days to adopt a more sensitive image and

role. It now helps support biodiversity conservation and local control of woodlands through providing woodland establishment and management grants, and grants for community forests. For example, Crofter forestry has received substantial support from the FC through their *Coille an Iar* (The Forest of the West) initiative. This was set up in partnership with Skye and Lockalsh, and Western Isles Local Enterprise Companies, and has a number of laudable social and environmental aims. They are to:

- realise the economic and environmental benefits of woodlands for the people of the region;
- improve present land management and create new, permanent sources of income and employment; and
- to create richer, more varied and sheltered landscapes.

Crofters have certainly benefited from the FC's woodland grant schemes and support, and **Borders** from their community woodland grants.

However, the FC's actions in other areas provide a legitimate basis for questioning the quality of its social and rural objectives in general. For example, local employment opportunities in the public forest sector have been sporadic at best, and often favoured outside contractors and part-timers rather than providing secure jobs for local people.

To date the FC has chosen to interpret 'community forestry' as providing better public access and recreational opportunities rather than engaging in collaborative management with local people, which effectively gives precedence to urban over rural interests. For example, to date its community forest grants are for recreational purposes, not for rural livelihoods.

In the past the FC's disposals policy has effectively favoured the interests of business and financial companies, and it has never encouraged commercially-oriented community forestry for livelihood objectives. In **Laggan** the FC argued that the benefits from forests, established with tax payers' money as a public investment, should accrue to the nation as a whole and not to one small Scottish community. The FC wanted Strathmashie Forest to be sold to the highest bidder and not to the community at the district valuer's price. The **Laggan** community claim that they have struggled to make their voice heard, and that they have been obstructed by the FC. This has furthered the FC's reputation of being 'anti local

people'. As one sceptical commentator put it,

> 'The Forestry Commission are more interested in negotiating their forest disposals over lunch with industry, than in doing deals with locals over tea'.

However, with the support of the Secretary of State, the **Laggan** case has now forced changes to the FC's policy on forest disposals.

The FC's woodland grant schemes as a whole may disproportionately favour larger landowners (see 'role of incentives'). Moreover, as a member of the large landowners 'club' the FC appears to have little sensibility of its own role in the demise of forest culture, or its responsibility for furthering the Scottish rural economy.

Private landlords

There are very clear material and ideological reasons why some larger landowners would like to see the community forestry initiatives fail. Firstly, land 'reclaimed' through community forestry schemes is an obvious threat to a landlord's source of income. Not only do they lose direct benefits from rents, and the commercial use of the land such as deer stalking or forestry, but they also stand to lose future rights to minerals and the use of the land as security in trade. The resistance of landlords to some of the Crofting woodland schemes (such as Kylerhea on Skye) reveals some of these economic tensions.

At a deeper level, the community initiatives also challenge social power relations. As Lynch and Alcorn (1994) suggest,

> 'Tenure is often misunderstood as defining relationships between people and property; in fact, tenure defines social relations between people. Those with tenurial rights have a certain social status vis-à-vis natural resources in comparison to those without tenurial rights to those resources'.

Thus the prestige of estate-ownership in Scotland is based largely on its meaning and implications for social relationships. The landlord-tenant relationship is a social institution, with sets of formal and informal rules shaping people's behaviour, which confers superior powers to the former. These social advantages also allow access to other powerful and aristocratic groups and lucrative business deals. The motivation for retaining and reproducing this social institution is clearly as much for social prestige as for material benefits. We suggest that community initiatives may be resisted because they threaten to undermine this power relationship.

However, it would be misleading to cast all landowners in the same light. For example, the landlord of the Cluny Estate at **Laggan** is very supportive of and active within the community-forestry initiative, and is committed to reviving the economic health of the rural community. Some landlords are not opposed to negotiating deals with their tenants. For example, in **Crofters** the landlord at Borve sold his land at a fair price, and was content to be free of the management burden of land, where the crofting rents did not even cover the administrative costs of the land.

Environmental and nature conservation organisations

There is a wide network of NGO and government environmental and conservation organisations operating within Scotland, several with particular woodland and ecological restoration objectives. For example, the Native Woodlands Policy Forum is a network of WWF-Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH); the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB); Highland Birchwoods (HB) and others, established to develop common policies for native woodlands in Scotland.

Many environmental organisations are increasingly recognising the benefits of linking environmental and social objectives. For example, the Forum (mentioned above) states that,

> 'Native Woodlands make a fundamental contribution to fulfilling the main social aims of forest policy of conserving cultural heritage, supporting rural communities, providing opportunities for recreation, and promoting public understanding and participation. It therefore appears that sustainable forestry will require that native woodlands occupy a central role in delivering social policies' (Worell & Callander, 1996:14).

According to Maclennan (pers. comm.) rural development and environmental issues are also currently at the top of the RSPB agenda. They have realised that they cannot conserve birds through reserves alone, and have to work with local communities. Several conservation organisations have given financial support to community forestry initiatives, for example, WWF-Scotland has provided financial support to both **Borders** and **Crofters**, and is currently examining the possibility of giving support to **Laggan**.

According to some commentators, this has not always been the case. One claims,

> 'The environmental movement has found it much harder to accept the

> need for diversity in the cultural sphere than in the biological one. That is why environmentalists acquiesced so readily in – indeed even advocated – the exclusion of the Shoshone from Yellowstone and the Masai from Ngorongoro. That is why relations between environmentalists and whole human populations – in Asia, the Americas, Africa, and for that matter, the Scottish Highlands – have so often been extremely bad.' (Hunter, 1995:165).

The principal motive for supporting community initiatives is usually to achieve environmental objectives. As one senior international conservationist put it, 'We work with people for the purpose of biodiversity conservation'. In other words, social agendas are somewhat incidental to conservation objectives, and people tend to be viewed as a 'resource' for the environment. WWF-Scotland recognises that there is an 'element of risk' involved in working with communities, but they feel confident that any agreements with local people are underwritten by clear guidelines and environmental obligations. However, they do maintain a 'hands-off' approach, giving financial support, but believing that the communities themselves should develop their own projects.

Outside observers have suggested that conservation organisations, despite their people-friendly rhetoric, are too closely associated with, and compromised by large landowners (Wightman, 1996:184); or that they fail to understand or support the political grassroots processes which are essential to the success of community initiatives. These and similar reservations may lead some to believe that conservation remains an elitist preoccupation. Despite their different motives and objectives, it is clear that conservation organisations and communities are beginning to work together. Although this may be a 'marriage of convenience', entailing negotiated compromises, we believe it will have important implications for both social and environmental agendas, and help to break down the barriers between isolated policy domains.

NGOs, researchers and activists

There is a wide variety of pro-grass roots environmental and development NGOs and individuals concerned with the social context and forestry issues in Scotland. We argue that they have been widely influential in awareness raising; facilitating community initiatives and lobbying for policy change.

For example, the Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme (SRDFP) aims to work with local people and other organisations, to examine current rural forestry situations and to identify locally based rural development forestry initiatives (SRDFP, 1996). It is a partnership between three Scottish NGOs: the Highlands and Islands Forum, Reforesting Scotland, and Rural Forum. It has been involved in PRA events, seminars, workshops and training in Scotland, and is recognised by other pro-grassroots groups at international level. The SRDFP works closely with the journal 'Reforesting Scotland'. This is the popular mouthpiece in Scotland for those concerned with issues of land degradation, rural depopulation, land reform, local democracy, woodland management and ecological restoration, etc. It has a wide circulation.

In addition, there are a number of influential independent and university based researchers, such as the Centre for Human Ecology at Edinburgh, the CADISPA Programme based at Strathclyde University and various research units at the University of Aberdeen.

Several of these groups are involved in extensive networking, both nationally and internationally. As suggested in the section on Political Processes, they have played a critical role in creating the ideological and political space necessary for the evolution of community forestry initiatives.

Insider-driven Initiatives: some characteristics

We suggest that the three case-studies reflect insider- rather than outsider-led processes for community forestry. By this we mean that they are self-mobilised initiatives, where motivation and organisation are rooted within the community and not orchestrated by outsiders. In this section we briefly examine some of their key features, and their implications for policy makers and donor agencies.

The differences between insider- or outsider-led initiatives for community forestry roughly correspond to Seymour's (1994) distinction between 'design' and 'discovered' projects. The design mode refers to externally catalysed initiatives where individuals from outside the community take the initiative in organising a response to a problem which was also identified by an outsider. The 'discovery' mode refers to activities initiated by the communities themselves. This mode also corresponds to Pimbert and Pretty's (1995) 'self-mobilisation' category of

participation. However, as Seymour rightly points out, in reality the distinction between the two is often blurred, depending on which feature of the initiative, and at which time one is referring to. Even 'discovered', 'insider-led' or 'self-mobilised' initiatives reflect joint products of locals and outsiders, and outsiders may play an important facilitating role in their evolution.

Receptive social context

A key factor in the cases described above is chronic local dissatisfaction with State policy, legislation, land tenure institutions, and a prevailing sense of economic and political marginalisation. Like many experiences in the South, the Scottish initiatives have also been prompted by coping with resource scarcities, declining services, the constricting effects of policy, and a belief in the efficacy of local action to improve the quality of life.

The cases indicate that supportive national policies, while clearly advantageous, are not a necessary prerequisite for insider-driven initiatives. In fact, it is largely community lobbying in alliance with sympathetic pro-grassroots bodies that has helped challenge policy and legislation. Indeed, as experience elsewhere suggests (eg. the Maasai in Kenya; the Saami in Sweden) communities are strategically using macro-policies, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and Agenda 21, to lend legitimacy to their case, and to lobby for changes in national level polices. This shared sense of injustice or dissatisfaction creates fertile social conditions for collective action, particularly when coupled with the belief that local action can make a difference. As Wightman (pers. comm.) suggests, communities are beginning to wake up to their situation, and there is a rebirth of confidence at grassroots.

Motivations for initiatives

The principal motives prompting local forestry initiatives have been social and economic needs, rather than environmental concerns *per se*. However, while livelihoods and social needs are clearly pressing, it would be entirely misleading to exclude local interest in the environment. In fact, we suggest that one of the features of insider-driven initiatives is the close integration of social, political and environmental objectives. It is more often outside institutions who promote either narrow environmental or social interests, whereas community initiatives express a combination of values. For example, **Crofters** demonstrates an active interest in ecological restoration, preferring native to exotic species. Although some believe

that it is the human species that are the most endangered in the Highlands, they concede that they have 'almost stolen the environmentalists' agenda' (Marsh, pers. comm.).

Perhaps a deeper significance of insider-driven forestry schemes is their expression of embedded political aspirations. While they cannot be regarded as a radical assault on land-tenure institutions, the political and symbolic value of 'reclaiming the land' is widely present. Aspirations to reclaim and revitalise the land are driven as much by the desire to remould social and power relations, as it is to care for nature. For example, according to Nicolson A, (pers. comm.), it was the oldest crofters (those who remember the hardships resulting from the Highland Clearances) who came up with the money first to purchase the common grazings of the Borve Township on the Isle of Skye. Owning the land implies a new relationship with it. As Ritchie (1994) of Assynt puts it: 'Now we own the land we can think big and long'.

Insider-driven forestry initiatives clearly provide opportunities for environmentalists to work with communities for the benefit of biodiversity conservation outside protected area programmes. However, it is clear that donors and communities may share intersecting interests, but not necessarily the same final goal. As Marsh (pers. comm.) of the SCU suggests, 'We need the money; they need to get their ideas through; there must be a middle way here'.

The role of incentives

Financial incentives have played a key role in motivating and shaping behaviour in the study areas. For example, crofters carefully assess the potential income and compensation from woodland grants, indicating their central role in sustaining livelihoods. Recognising their importance, WWF-Scotland has been influential in pushing for changes in woodland grants, increasing the incentives for broadleaf native species over exotic conifers, with positive results for biodiversity conservation.

Despite the obvious economic and environmental advantages of woodland grants and funds, some observers point to their social weaknesses. For example, Community Woodland grants are offered for amenity and recreational benefits only, and do not support the livelihood or employment opportunities which could be generated from community woodlands. Wightman (1996) indicates that woodland

grants may be benefiting the richer landowners at the expense of tenant farmers and crofters. He shows that the top 20 grant recipients for 1993 are trusts, large investors, industrial interests, the aristocracy and large estates. Moreover, since the grants are paid after the completion of the work, and are staggered over several years, many smaller farmers experience cash flow problems at the start of the programme, which may be inhibiting some woodland projects (Parrott, 1995). On the other hand, it is a common practice to undertake the work oneself, and benefit directly from the grants, revealing clear financial motives for individual and community participation in forest management. Application procedures and accounting specifications for the current Millennium Forest Funds are viewed as an administrative burden by small initiatives, having the effect of excluding some community forestry programmes from financial support.

The role of local leader(s)

Each of the case studies demonstrates the key role of local leaders in the initiatives. They provide or articulate the initial 'vision' and have been influential in raising local awareness. They attract and help organise sympathetic and committed community members, and act as a focal point for a wider group. The leaders have also played a key role in advocacy and networking with outsiders.

Although the leadership role is significant at all times, the case studies indicate that awareness raising, advocacy and diplomacy skills are particularly important in early stages. As initiatives mature other leadership roles become prominent, such as forest management and technical skills. In each of the case studies, the importance of a mix of leaders with different skills is acknowledged (Seymour, 1994).

One of the advantages of community initiatives is that leadership is already embedded in a local institution, making them potentially more sustainable and legitimate than projects designed by outsiders (*ibid*). However, this does not necessarily make community schemes egalitarian in purpose or effect.

Different notions of 'community'

The notion of 'community' needs to be treated with caution. When used in policy and project documents it can reflect the constructions of policy makers and donors, containing many assumptions about local management of resources. For example, Anderson (1983) refers to 'imagined communities' which fulfil policy needs and objectives. In reality 'communities' are often highly differentiated, along the lines

of gender, age and wealth, etc; and their 'boundaries' are highly fluid in time and space. The international debate on 'community-involvement' in forest management is often dominated by notions of community as forest dwellers, indigenous peoples, or user-groups. However, the Scottish context invites us to rethink and expand these concepts.

Highland Clearances in NW Scotland resulted in depopulation and the widespread out-migration of its original inhabitants. These days rural Scottish communities consist of a mixture of locals *and* 'incomers'. For example, the Penifiler Township on the Isle of Skye has Dutch, French and Scottish families helping to establish a community woodland. Many incomers, such as those in Glenelg and Kylerhea, are purposely seeking more sustainable lifestyles, and local forestry schemes are very attractive to them (Sutherland, pers.comm; Gerrard, pers.comm.). In **Borders**, the notion of community forestry extends even further, to include any member of the public, whether living far or near.

Moreover, some communities have developed a number of sophisticated institutions for dealing with the forestry initiatives. In **Crofters**, decision-making about woodland on common land is usually the responsibility of the traditional grazings committee, but in other cases, proposals to plant trees have catalysed the formation of entirely new institutions, such as limited companies or Trusts.

Examples from Scotland also challenge the comforting assumption of consensus in unproblematic 'communities'. As one **Laggan** villager remarked of the LFI: 'It's jobs for the boys', reflecting some local perceptions that the LFI is being set up to benefit the local leaders and their families.

Although Scottish experiences are widely different to those in many developing countries, we suggest that a common feature is the economic and political marginalisation of communities, which motivates people to establish and manage woodland for local needs, often in the face of resistance.

Beyond Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)

In 1994 two of the case studies, **Laggan** and **Crofters** (Borve), were involved in participatory appraisal events organised by the Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme (SRDFP), (see Inglis and Guy, 1996). In contrast to PRA in some 'participatory projects', PRA in self-mobilised initiatives suggests 'demand-led' rather than 'supply-driven' participatory processes. These promise to

be more sustainable in the long term. However, despite their interesting implications, in this section we use insights from the case studies to look outside the role of PRA itself to other political realities of rural social change. In conceptualising 'beyond' PRA we briefly examine three issues: the current international emphasis on PRA 'tools'; the role of largely informal political processes operating behind the scenes; and various dimensions of 'empowerment'.

Firstly, we question the current preoccupation of some international development and environmental organisations with PRA 'tools' and training. For example, a reading of recent PRA literature reveals an almost exclusive preoccupation with 'tool kits', manuals and exercises (eg. Narayan and Srinivasan, 1994; Pretty *et al*, 1996). While methods for appraisals are undeniably important, we suggest that undue emphasis on the tools themselves can divert attention away from analysis of other social and political processes. For example, in the evolution of **Laggan** an extensive range of political and economic activities are considered crucial for the success of their initiative alongside PRA, such as obtaining the support of the Secretary of State for Scotland; lobbying to change the FC's forest disposals policy; securing funds for their forest office; networking with supportive groups etc. All the case studies raise important questions concerning the critical role of agency in other key domains, which appear to be undervalued by some PRA practitioners.

Secondly, and elaborating the above point further, we suggest that emphasising formal events can obscure our understanding of the role of informal political processes operating behind the scenes, which are so influential in securing social change. In Scotland, the SRDFP and other groups actively lobby for change in many settings, thus providing sustained support for community initiatives. In contrast to 'consultancy' PRA, a significant feature of PRA in Scotland is that its practitioners live there, interacting with various actors and lobbying for change on a daily basis. Without these 'hidden' political processes there is a danger that PRA can be just fleeting events in the lives of communities, which raise expectations but may not bring about long-term social change. Perhaps an enduring value of PRA is not so much its 'tools' per se, but the longer term effects of the alliances they generate, which help create political space and financial support for community initiatives. International preoccupation with methodologies for appraisals leaves the role of informal alliances and coalitions in social change largely under-researched.

Thirdly, some PRA literature tends to make implicit (if not explicit) links between PRA and 'empowerment', which is popularly conceptualised as 'influencing decision-making'. PRA can provide a crucial first step in facilitating processes in which a wide range of voices can be heard. However, recent critiques examining the politics of discourse reveal how public social events can reflect and actually strengthen dominant ideologies and cultural norms. Most theories of power challenge the overly simplistic conceptualisations of 'empowerment' by revealing its complex layered dimensions (Lukes, 1972). To Foucault (1980) power is not what some possess and others do not, but a tactical and resourceful 'narrative'. He reveals how the 'micro-physics' of power moulds everyone involved in its exercise. Power processes are embedded, expressed, and reproduced in a myriad of everyday encounters, in both private and public settings. It is increasingly recognised that 'empowerment' extends beyond PRA itself, involving deeper institutional re-orientation and transformation (Scoones and Thompson, 1994; Thompson, 1996). PRA can provide an important step in challenging prevailing power structures, but alone cannot 'correct' the subtle and widespread social processes of disempowerment. For many grassroots groups, 'empowerment means more than influencing decision-making: empowerment means skills' (Stead, pers. comm.), a view also shared by more progressive PRA practitioners. Local people reveal their perception of empowerment through their repeated requests for financial, technical and political support. Without the material means and the political space, local empowerment may be blocked and never fully actualised beyond the realm of ideas. In Scotland, this wider support has, on the whole, been forthcoming, but it is not easy to obtain, and is an issue which SRDFP recognises as a major challenge (Inglis, pers. comm.).

The above views should not be taken as a critique on the role of PRA in Scotland but more as a caveat to the uncritical promotion of participatory conservation and development in general. The **Laggan** PRA event has been evaluated, and was recently presented at an international conference on 'PRA and Policy Change' (Guy and Inglis, forthcoming). PRA in Scotland is considered to represent some of the most exciting applications of participatory learning and action in a northern context (Pimbert, pers. comm.), combining PRA events themselves with active lobbying and advocacy.

Insider-driven initiatives and political processes

We suggest that the long-term success of these initiatives will largely be determined

by three key political processes: local level empowerment, alliances between local and pro-grassroots groups, and the support of political elites. Political analysis of community forestry initiatives in other parts of the world demonstrate similar characteristics (Silva, 1994).

Each of the three initiatives has been proactive in seeking material or political support from NGOs or state agencies, revealing a high degree of political confidence at the grassroots. These initiatives are not 'projects' imposed by rural development or environmental agencies, although they may later be appropriated as such. Local-level political empowerment has occurred in spite of national legislation and regulations, reflecting a strong local motivation for sustainable forestry. However, this political confidence will need to be complemented by investments in real material benefits. Skills training, capacity building, the provision of employment, etc, are essential to sustain the local-level empowerment process.

The fact that communities have been impelled to seek support suggests the important role of outside assistance for their long-term survival. More importantly, we claim that the political coalitions between local and pro-grassroots organisations play a critical role in creating the political and ideological space required for the growth of these initiatives. Outsiders spread the 'stories' in different fora, helping to raise public awareness and stimulating financial support from donor agencies. The evidence suggests that these alliances could be more strategically cultivated for even greater benefits.

A further important political feature is the positive support of political elites. Despite resistance from landlords and the FC, the local initiatives have received political support from the Secretary of State for Scotland, who has pushed through legislation in favour of community forestry initiatives. Without this high level support, insider-driven initiatives for sustainable forestry would undoubtedly have a longer and harder political struggle.

Wider community support for insider-driven initiatives

It is generally agreed that community involvement in forestry has not yet reached the status of a widespread social movement in Scotland, although there are clearly the first signs of a renaissance of interest (Wightman, pers. comm.; Inglis, pers. comm.). The debate about community involvement in forestry is more informed; there is heightened public interest, with local people beginning to take control over

their environment, and political pressure building up. The data from the case studies suggest mixed reactions to the local forestry initiatives.

There is a common perception in the Highlands that the hills are for sheep rearing, because in recent memory sheep farming has been the predominant land use. In **Crofters**, while the SCU itself has been forceful in promoting new legislation, there is widespread feeling that the crofters themselves are often very conservative. This has encouraged the SCU to think more proactively about promoting sustainable forestry. The conservative attitude is attributed to the fact that Highlanders have experienced generations of suppression, and a hard struggle to win security of tenure. As a result they are often suspicious of changes in land use and reluctant to challenge the *status quo*. As one farmer near Orbost commented: 'If you want to plant trees, there's a traffic island down the road; that's the place for trees'. Similarly, a **Laggan** shepherd was of the opinion that 'there are too many trees round here, trees knacker [spoil] the land'.

Despite these reservations we believe that these insider-driven initiatives could be the spearhead for an era of greater community involvement in forest management. They themselves do not necessarily represent a widespread social movement. However, when linked to outside political and financial support, they can act as a catalyst for a proliferation of similar schemes.

Insider-driven initiatives and biodiversity: a negotiated process

What are the benefits and implications of these insider-driven initiatives for biodiversity conservation? Increasingly, conservationists recognise the value of supporting and building on indigenous knowledge, resource management institutions and promoting participation for biodiversity conservation (Pimbert and Pretty, 1995). The case studies above demonstrate that conservation at the local level is a socially negotiated process involving a range of inside and outside stakeholders, supporting the thesis that nature and biodiversity can, in one sense, be regarded as social constructs (Evernden, 1992; Blaikie and Jeanrenaud, 1996; Guyer and Richards, 1996).

In relation to indigenous knowledge and forest management, Hunter (1995) argues that the Gaels (indigenous Highlanders) had a strong environmental awareness, as expressed in their poetry and the *Tuath* laws governing woodland management. There is evidence to suggest that until relatively recently, especially in crofting

communities, traditional management systems provided a whole range of benefits in terms of biodiversity conservation (SCU and RSPB 1992, 1995). The less intensive crofting practices helped to create and maintain a mosaic of habitats beneficial to wildlife. The value of these traditional systems is now recognised by an increasing number of environmental NGOs. The RSPB for instance, pays compensation to crofters who farm using less damaging methods that help maintain or restore key habitats for the corncrake (*Crex crex*) and other endangered species. However, it can also be argued that the modern Highlander despite his/her 'green' ancestry is now so far removed from the land that there is a real need to rediscover ecological approaches to land management.

There is an assumption that devolving power to the local level and promoting wider community participation in decision-making will result in considerable gains for biodiversity conservation – notably through the planting of a diverse range of native species, and managing them for multiple products. In contrast, the FC as a single actor with narrow production objectives was largely responsible for the widespread planting of the uplands with monoculture plantations of Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) and other exotic species, often at the expense of native woodlands. The case studies reveal complex motives for community interest in native species, which cannot be explained by their environmental values alone. For example, the FC's 'flagship' species, the Sitka spruce, has been viewed as a symbol of oppression. Conversely, native species such as the Scots pine are nationalist symbols that are planted with pride. Similarly, local interest in ecological restoration has some political undercurrents. Communities express the idea that tree planting is an empowering political act, a symbolic reclaiming of the land from the colonial power. However, as **Borders** demonstrates, even where communities are the decision-makers, dilemmas continue to exist from the standpoint of conservation because their motives are not strictly conservation-orientated.

In short, we suggest that a win-win outcome, which has positive benefits for both social and environmental agendas, is not the inevitable outcome of insider-driven forestry initiatives. The ecological specifications for biological conservation may be too restrictive given community objectives. The case studies suggest that outcomes are dynamic and the product of 'negotiated' compromises. However, we contend that these recent insider-driven initiatives with support from environmental NGOs could represent a 'marriage of convenience' that has potential benefits for both people and nature. When woodlands are managed locally for a diverse range of interests, there is a better chance of accommodating greater cultural- as well as

biodiversity.

Some implications for policy makers and donor agencies

Insider-driven initiatives have potentially important implications for policy makers and donor agencies in the field of sustainable forestry and biodiversity conservation.

Firstly it is widely acknowledged that classic models of top-down rural development and biodiversity conservation, including the exclusionary Protected Areas systems, are often not only socially inappropriate, but may also be failing to achieve their conservation objectives (West and Brechin, 1991; Pimbert and Pretty 1995; Fairhead and Leach, 1995).

Secondly there is growing recognition that a new generation of ICDPs (projects which attempt to integrate conservation and development objectives) are fraught with dilemmas, difficult to manage, and are also often failing to achieve their objectives (Brandon and Wells, 1992; Wells, 1995).

Thirdly, we suggest that the 'bottom-up' approach to project design, even with its emphasis on diagnostic and participatory approaches, may still reflect the weaknesses and limitations of outsider-driven projects. Indeed, an emerging critique of populist development and participatory 'projects' indicates a mixed success story at the grass roots (Thin, 1995; Blaikie and Jeanrenaud, 1996; Hobley, 1996).

On the other hand, insider-driven initiatives for sustainable forest management exhibit a number of compelling features, which have important implications for policy makers and donors. They promise to be highly motivated, often integrating complex objectives and values; to have local leadership; and represent a wider range of interests at the local level which has positive spin-offs for conservation. In short, the self-mobilised initiatives promise to be more sustainable and socially accountable in the long term.

A clear implication for policy makers and donor agencies is the need to think politically about community forestry and biodiversity conservation. The success of self-mobilised groups, and a wider transition to community involvement in forest management requires sustained and active support at many levels, from international to local. The alliances between pro-grassroots groups and

environmental NGOs may represent a 'marriage of convenience', but one which helps create political space for both economically and politically marginalised groups and the agendas of environmental organisations. There is a need to acknowledge that there are multiple interests involved which intersect with each other, but which may not share the same final goals. We conclude that the success of biodiversity conservation in the 21st century will depend on moving away from conservation's elitist past. Single objectives need to be transcended to support a wider range of needs and aspirations. This vision depends on recognising common ground, and strategically cultivating political alliances for mutual benefit.

Acronyms

CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CC	Crofters Commission
EU	European Union
FC	Forestry Commission The Forestry Commission has been divided into two bodies: the Forest Authority (FA) and Forest Enterprise (FE), with different remits. However, for the sake of clarity, we use the single term 'Forestry Commission' (FC) throughout the paper
IPF	Inter-Governmental Panel on Forests
MFS	Millennium Forest for Scotland
RSPB	The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SCU	The Scottish Crofters Union
SOAEFD	Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment, Fisheries Department
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SRDFP	The Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

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