

COMMENT ON THE PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT IN THE ASIAN REGION

Bishnu Bhandari*

1. The authors rightly mentioned that state control of forests eventually discouraged the people's participation in the forest management.
2. Participation was undermined when responsibility was given to many stakeholders, as expressed in the saying, "Everybody's responsibility is nobody's responsibility".
3. It was easy to advocate "community participation" at the grassroots level but difficult to contemplate it concretely. In some countries, such as Vietnam and Lao, it is a novel idea. The different typology of participation presented by Mr. Nanang authenticates are how complex and ambivalent the term "community participation" and its concepts are in real-life application. Another point made was that the researchers should contact different agencies and organizations including different groups of people when they were in the field. A problem was mentioned that was even if a good policy of forest management exist, in reality, the situation is quite different at the grass-roots level.
4. In their paper, Hayama and Seiki wrote that "Forest conservation should be seen as an overall community development framework". Agreement with the authors was expressed, and it was emphasized that forest conservation can not be seen in isolation; rather a holistic approach is required to manage it.
5. The reports revealed that participation is not just coming together in a place but is also a sharing of authority, responsibility and benefits. It also means mutually understanding other's needs and capacity, and shouldering responsibility and failure.
6. The view was expressed that in the beginning, villagers often develop curiosity, fear and suspicions in their minds as outsiders enter their community and that this is common every where. In order to eliminate this notion, researchers are required to run confidence building exercises so that the local people could understand the objectives of programs clearly. It was always important to have a mutual understanding of situations (felt needs and interests) and expectation (of government, local communities and stakeholders). This would help resolve mistrust, suspicion, and feelings of discontent. This would also help understand the root cause of the problems and involve relevant parties before actions are taken.
7. Community management has been successful in areas where felt needs of villagers are taken into consideration and where the program falls within the range of villagers' priority.
8. A note of caution was made on methodology. Many people argue that PRA and RRA methods are good to secure people's participation. This may have been true to some extent. However, one must be cautious about participatory techniques as there is always a danger of adopting it superficially, without a thorough understanding and adequate training. Sometimes, it is seen as a replacement for

* Senior Researcher of Environment Education Project, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), Japan.

other forms of investigation and was biased towards the people who are around and are connected with researchers.

9. It was suggested in order to achieve the goal of community-based forest management that the following factors be taken into consideration at the time of planning.
 - 1) Forest ownership: Legally who owns the piece of forest in question? The ownership should include both *de facto* and *de jure* ownership.
 - 2) What kind of national policy frameworks exist? Are they centralized or decentralized? What are the roles, responsibilities and structure of other government agencies?
 - 3) Who has got the right to use (usufruct rights, social rights, tenure, duties and responsibilities)? Who are they? Does the community in question have the usufruct rights to use resources? Are the rights and responsibilities of users defined?
 - 4) Are there any legal frameworks or policies of resource management? What kind of controlling mechanism exists in the community?
 - 5) Many claim to be an expert on participatory management, which is not always true. Participatory management requires special skills and expertise. Accordingly, education and training of researchers on PRA and RRA should warrant the topmost priority. People should be the centerpiece of participatory forest management. It should always be borne in mind that the core of a good participatory exercise should include devolution, sharing of authorities and responsibilities, transparency and constant interaction.
 - 6) While focusing on participation based on equality, it is always necessary to know how authority and responsibilities are distributed and ensure each party understands the intentions of others.