

## Strengthening the Movement at the Grassroots: A Review of Community Forestry across the Globe

Conservation and sustainability are of growing concern to people of every nation and every culture around the world. Efforts to improve living standards, to alleviate poverty, and to open new avenues for economic opportunity have been growing and new policies and practices are beginning to emerge in direct support of sustainable development goals. These emerging policies provide a useful framework for conservation, but it is often the action of local communities and citizens that make significant differences and achieve tangible, long-term results.

As awareness in conservation and sustainability issues rises globally, the importance of linking theoretical trends and solutions to real-life practices is imperative. Recent initiatives at both national and international levels have highlighted the advances of community-led efforts in conservation. However, various challenges remain, particularly in certain regions of the world. Some of these challenges include: increased poverty, environmental degradation, antiquated or improper management practices, cultural insensitivities, and social injustice. As these challenges become apparent, the promotion of a broader learning circle among environmental practitioners becomes self-evident, for it is through the direct

application of lessons that innovation emerges.

All around the world, small groups of thoughtful, committed people in communities are experimenting with new ways of addressing environmental and economic challenges, often in partnership with government, industry, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The sharing of success stories, obstacles, and innovation can lead to new insights and actions that accelerate our collective progress toward conservation and sustainability goals, in concert with improvements in social infrastructure, governance, and economic well-being.

To directly address the needs outlined above, the Pinchot Institute recently cooperated with the National Network of Forest Practitioners (NNFP) to organize and convene a series of field-based workshops for community forestry practitioners from Africa, Asia, Central and South America, and North America. The goal of these workshops were to:

- ✿ *Strengthen the capacity of practitioners* by tapping into existing knowledge and expertise,
- ✿ Provide opportunities for practitioners to *teach and learn within a peer setting*,
- ✿ *Strengthen communication networks* among practitioners,
- ✿ Lay the groundwork for an *ongoing exchange of information and technical assistance* in support of community-based forest management,
- ✿ Introduce US land management



Workshop participants visit a stewardship contracting pilot project on NFS land managed by a native tribe (Maidu)

agencies and organization to *innovative approaches* tested elsewhere around the world, and

- ✿ To *contribute to the global development of policies and practices* that support community-based approaches to sustainable resource management.

The initial workshop sessions (subsequent events are planned for 2006 and 2008) took place in September 2004, and were held sequentially in Alabama and California. These workshops featured a mix of discussion sessions and field tours for approximately 40 practitioners (including 14 international participants from China, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Nepal, the Philippines, and Vietnam). Our goal was to introduce different community-based management scenarios for our visiting guests (e.g., private land management vs. public land management) and showcase specific social issues within a geographic setting (e.g., minority landowner rights, application of indigenous knowledge, etc.).

The workshops' aim was to spur dialogue using expertise from different parts of the world, especially where public involvement in forestry



Workshop participants visit an agroforestry site outside Montgomery, AL



**Francisco Hernandez, from Guatemala, explains how his community manages its watershed**

(community forestry) has been practiced for a longer time. Specific questions focused on several themes related to policy /governance, including: land tenure, rural poverty, social justice, indigenous peoples, income generation, agro-forestry, non-timber

forest products, and gender sensitivity. Workshop participants were afforded opportunity to make formal presentations on how specific issues are managed/handled within their given country, and encouraged to engage in lengthy break-out discussions to identify tested solutions to on-going challenges. These peer-exchanges proved extremely valuable, as cultural and language barriers began to dissolve and common-ground was achieved—even between developed and less-developed countries.

The workshops helped cast incredible light on the challenges faced globally by communities and families to promote better livelihoods and healthier environments. Despite differences in government, culture, language and religion, the common denominator among participants was care and concern over their natural resources and a recognition that sus-



**Entire workshop in Kings Beach, CA**

tainability hinges upon a deeper understanding of connections and threats. Participants arrived in the United States as representatives of their host country and left as members of a much larger family dedicated towards the joint-pursuit of innovative solutions for sustainable resource management.

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