BASE-LINE TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR COMMUNITY FORESTRY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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SUMMARY

The introduction of a new forest policy in South Africa has led to a shift away from the traditional focus on commercial forestry and a narrow interpretation of conservation to an emphasis upon community forestry with the full participation of all stakeholders concerned with the utilisation of the nation's tree-based resources. This paper presents the results of a basic needs assessment designed to review existing types of community forestry training, identify the range of activities needing to be included and to make recommendations for how best to achieve a coherent training programme to support implementation of the new policy.

The report, completed in 1997, found that although formal education programmes were virtually absent, a large variety of training initiatives were encountered which could provide the basis for an improved programme. These were characterised by a non-formal structure and were sometimes only of marginal relevance, but they were invariably supported by a wealth of individual knowledge and always curtailed by lack of funds.

The range of activities that can be included under the umbrella of 'community forestry' was found to be very wide, reflecting the climatic, cultural and demographic heterogeneity of the country. To cater for the varied needs of both service providers and community interest groups, a modular system of training is recommended. The need to promote 'people skills' in particular is highlighted to ensure that community forestry activities are implemented in a participatory and sustainable manner.

INTRODUCTION

The South African elections of 1994 brought about sweeping changes in every walk of life. Division was replaced by unity and disparity with equality. In order to meet the new, comprehensive dispensation, institutions throughout the country found it necessary to realign their policies and structures in order to respond to new responsibilities and, in many cases, far broader horizons than previously envisaged.

As a part of this process, the Department of Water Affairs & Forestry (DWAF) held consultations with all the parties involved in forestry, both at national and local level. Contributions were sought from representatives of the state and commercial sector, educational institutions, non-government organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), pressure groups, private consultants and other interested parties. These initiatives were supported by local and international funding and led to the formulation of a new forest policy.

This new policy was presented as a White Paper in March 1996 entitled 'Sustainable forest development in South Africa – The Policy of the Government of National Unity'. The policy was conceived as an integral part of a broader overall political framework for rural development as embodied in the Reconstruction & Development Programme of the Government of National Unity (GNU). The White Paper outlines a new and more diverse role for forest policy, one that brings together the three strands of conservation, commercial forestry and community forestry. It stresses that the traditional understanding of forestry as the science of managing tree-covered land is no longer sufficient to meet the criteria set out under the new policy; rather there needs to be more emphasis on relationships between people and the resources provided by forests.

This was a paradigm shift away from the previous exclusive focus on commercial forestry and concern for the preservation and limited management of indigenous forests to an explicit concern to support all tree-based activities undertaken by the full range of stakeholders. As Atampugre (1991) put it, this was a move away from a restricted emphasis on "forests for the nation towards trees for people". Community forestry is defined very broadly in the policy as "forestry designed and applied to meet local social, household and environmental needs and to favour local economic development. It is implemented by communities or with the participation of communities ... rural people, as well as tree planting in urban and peri-urban areas."

Throughout the White Paper the government acknowledges the competence of the technical capacity in the country to educate and train in 'scientific forestry' and related activities but expresses deep concern regarding the ability of current curricula to meet the present and future needs of the new dispensation. In particular it emphasises that the new policy must embrace community-driven initiatives and that community forestry must therefore become a process of facilitation. Existing forestry training will therefore need to be adapted to provide the people-skills required to promote the envisaged 'facilitatory environment'.

In 1996, the DWAF obtained funding from the Danish government to undertake a basic needs assessment (BNA) of the community forestry training (CFT) requirements for the implementation of the new forest policy (Underwood, 1997). The BNA's objectives were:

- to review the capacity in South Africa to provide suitable CFT;
- to establish the needs of extensionists for CFT;
- to determine the approaches to and needs of interest groups;
- to outline the delivery methods to support the goals of a training programme;
- to make provisional recommendations on strategies that support the implementation of a CFT programme for all those institutions involved in the initiative.

The initiative was designed to meet several demands from the state forest services as well as from international donors who were establishing regionally-based community forestry projects. In addition it provided background information for education and training institutes which where realigning their curricula to meet the demands of a new forest industry. The BNA survey collected information through semi-structured interviews with 67 respondents in 57 organisations across all the provinces, representing a wide variety of interest groups including commercial forestry, formal education, academia, foreign donors, NGOs, CBOs, forestry and agricultural extension, community leaders, women's groups, consultants and parastatals.

TRAINING CAPACITY

Formal education and training

A number of faculties and departments at institutions of higher and tertiary learning were identified during the BNA as having the potential to provide CFT. However, their perception of the scope and content of a community forestry curriculum was disappointing. They were restricted in large part by the underlying assumption, albeit a tacit one, that commercial foresters and forestry institutions were best positioned to undertake community forestry initiatives. Such assumptions belied the results of the BNA which indicated that a broad range of technical as well as people skills were expected from CFT graduates by employers as diverse as the state forestry services, the commercial sector and international donors supporting aid programmes.

This apparent discrepancy reflected not so much a lack of commitment on behalf of the formal institutes of learning but the difficulties of realigning their resources to meet the new demands imposed by CFT. A major problem was that not only did new syllabi have to be developed, but provision also had to be made for practical work in communities with interest groups outside the normal domain of the training institutes. Courses based around the traditional disciplines such as commercial forestry suddenly had to include sociology, geography, ecology and development theory, embrace experiences from change-agents outside the norms of academia, and integrate contributions from interest groups into course programmes.

In cases where initiatives had been established to address the issues of the resource-poor rural dweller, the courses proved to be only a modification of existing agriculture and forestry syllabi. Their aim was to upgrade the technical skills of employees from established agribusinesses, or to foster more 'progressive' stakeholders from the communities, who were usually the more affluent and better educated. The expected impact of such training was based in part upon the premise that 'students' returning to their communities would act as catalysts for development. Although the BNA did encounter cases where knowledge was handed on in this way, the impact was not as universal or as beneficial as originally expected, not even when supported by Visits & Training (V&T) schemes. These observations were paralleled elsewhere (Antholt, 1994) and use of V&T has now declined in South Africa in favour of a more participatory approach to CFT, one which is less expensive and more effective due to community involvement in the total process.

Non-formal education and training

Similar problems to those experienced under formal CFT programmes were encountered in the various *'in-house'* training schemes run by the larger forestry companies. These were primarily associated with community outreach woodlot schemes and contract outgrower programmes. The focus was on basic

silviculture and forest management with very little emphasis on community participation in the management of forests and woodlots. Small-scale eucalypt woodlots were considered to be the only type of farm forestry suitable for the rural poor. No heed was paid to the demand for fruit trees, nor were people provided with an opportunity to become involved in other more profitable forestry contracts associated with harvesting and extraction (Cairns, 1994).

In contrast, the NGO sector, which includes certain parastatals, university community research institutes, NGOs and CBOs, were found to be providing relevant, participatory courses and ongoing training in CFT for both the 'service providers' and 'interest group communities'. Their scale of operations is restricted by limited financial resources but they have a significant impact upon CFT due to their close community roots. Most of the CFT provided by this sector relates to environmental issues, alternative agriculture including trees (particularly fruit and indigenous species), general capacity-building activities, gender issues, and action research into new and better solutions for the implementation of community forestry.

Foreign exchanges

Finally, foreign aid supported some efforts to expose state forestry personnel, selected NGO members and academics to CFT abroad. However, the general opinion of those who attended these programmes was that they were too long, still developing, or had little value when applied to local conditions. In private, many of those who participated admitted to having enjoyed the exchanges as a holiday.

CURRENT COMMUNITY FORESTRY ACTIVITIES

Since the 1994 elections there has been a rapid move to privatise most of the state's industrial/ commercial forest assets, leaving community forestry as the major component of government forest policy. As revealed by the survey, however, instituting community forestry activities is not a simple option in a country with such a diversity of terrain, climate, history, social structure and culture. These make demands on any CFT programme to provide a variety of skills in order to meet a range of problems in different areas, under different situations.

Climate and ecology

Climate plays a key role in determining potential community forestry activities. In the wetter, eastern parts of the country there are more densely wooded areas than in the drier interior, parts of the western seaboard and the far north which, although not barren, have very sparse tree-cover. This difference in ecology has an important impact on the work of service providers, whether state, private or NGO.

Thus in the drier, less favourable regions, tree-growing activities and commercial afforestation are less well established and government forestry extension officers are able to devote more than 80% of their time to community programmes. Typical activities have included the establishment of woodlots to provide fuel, land reclamation projects and environmental awareness programmes. As in other countries, these initiatives have been beset by many problems. They have failed because of a narrow focus on species selection (primarily eucalypts), the higher value of timber for unplanned alternative uses such as poles in preference to fuelwood, and the difficulties in developing management systems for a newly established common resource.

Conversely, in the wetter, traditionally more productive afforested areas, extension officers are under pressure to assist water authorities in the processing of permits for afforestation, and to monitor burning and clearing operations for the commercial sector. Such activities leave little time for 'non-commercial', community-centred activities and engender the perception amongst communities that state organs are effectively synonymous with commercial forestry and do not represent the broader interests of all the stakeholders as defined in the new forest policy. Rightly or wrongly this affects the types of experiences that forestry extensionists gain to supplement their traditional training and puts across an image of disinterest to communities. These factors in turn increase the difficulties faced by overworked staff trying to launch schemes intended to embrace the interest groups in community forestry and CFT programmes.

Demographic patterns

Spatial factors can also affect the responses of communities to tree-growing activities. In particular, the changing demographic patterns of age and gender associated with daily or seasonal migrations will determine what is required and by whom. Rural communities are therefore more likely to embrace community forestry programmes where there are no alternatives sources of fuel, food, fodder and building materials. In areas where populations commute to nearby towns and are seasonally employed or far away in the mines, the demands of permanent residents differ from those who only return home in the evening, over the weekends or for the holidays.

In other instances, particularly in the former 'black homelands', communities which were subject to forced removals are often less receptive to fostering the development of areas for which they have little attachment. Conversely, neighbours who have roots in the area are generally less inclined to adopt such negative attitudes. Thus, where trees are common place, people have developed appropriate skills and utilise the resource through practices such as wood carving. These communities are therefore more receptive to new community forestry initiatives than those who have no such history of benefiting from tree-based activities.

Gender

The other major factor influencing the development of community forestry is gender. Rural women in South Africa suffer from an excessive work load and low status. They have little or no voice in the decision-making process, nor the wealth and empowerment available to men. However, by focusing on daily issues affecting the household and family, tree-based activities can lead to significant improvements in the welfare of women by providing fuel, food, shade for the work place and building materials. These initiatives not only resolve the demands emanating from the daily household routine, but also provide for longer-term solutions, helping with income generation and the establishment of better, healthier family diets.

In fulfilment of these demands, fruit trees have become a favourite choice amongst women (Underwood, 1995). Not only do they provide

sustenance and income for the family but they establish systems of land-use production that do not interfere with the traditional male-dominated practices of growing staple crops and herding cattle. In addition, unlike the densely planted eucalypt and pine woodlots, fruit trees are usually planted only a few at a time and at wider spacings. This is of considerable importance to women who fear that the closed stands associated with commercial woodlots provide cover for thieves and rapists.

Finally, even where women provide the dominant inputs in terms of work, they still receive a disproportionately small return for their endeavours. During the survey a variety of activities were found to be in place which are now the focus of the GNU forest policy. The most structured of these are the corporate commercially-orientated outgrower schemes. Here, although it is the women who provide much of the labour, they rarely receive the income from the final sale of the timber, which goes instead to their male partners as household heads and landowners. Women only receive basic training in planting and weeding and are ignored when it comes to learning how to tender for the lucrative timber harvesting and transport contracts.

Environmental awareness

Where conservation is an issue, community forestry activities can help to empower people through a greater appreciation of the environment in their daily lives. In addition to traditional school education and public participation in tree-planting schemes, a more holistic approach is emphasised. By focusing on improving health, education, social and personal dignity, the provision of environmental education can help communities to develop solutions such as clean water, more water, more greening, shade and improved soils.

Programmes are also being established to manage indigenous forests and woodlands in order to promote and conserve the national heritage. This is particularly true in areas where trees are, or have been, a focal element of the landscape and people's livelihoods. There they provide food in the form of fruit and nuts, beverages (palm wine), honey, income from crafts (carving and weaving) and most importantly, traditional medicine.

Urban forestry

Lastly, the most recent community forestry focus relates to urban communities. It is characterised by the demands for environmental enhancement/greening, beautification and conservation. Trees also have a strong secondary role in controlling soil conservation and flood damage where dense settlements are haphazardly sited on steep slopes and dangerously near rivers. In addition, they often provide a focus for school-based environmental awareness activities, greening and broader plans such as litter collection. An important consideration when addressing the problems of urban populations is the relatively higher disposable income available compared to that of their rural counterparts. This allows for a greater range of options such as electricity and fast-foods which, combined with often temporary periods of residence, may offset the long-term benefits of establishing trees.

TRAINING NEEDS

During the survey, extension staff and community facilitators argued that 'people skills' were the most difficult to acquire and yet the most important to ensure the sustainability of initiatives. Service providers with traditional scientific backgrounds felt that such people skills (derived from anthropology, economics, development studies, geography, planning and sociology) would help them to understand communities better and to decide when and how to apply purely technical solutions. Appropriate training can guide trainers and decision makers towards the realisation that, no matter how much value trees may have in the greater plan, their adoption by communities is not always considered a priority. It needs to be understood that there are far more critical issues for communities and interest groups than trees. Priorities include the provision of water, food, housing, good health, employment and education. Tree growing then is not a 'product' which is in foremost demand. Its promotion only becomes viable and of interest to communities when it is seen as a 'process' of empowerment, one which addresses the 'problems' of communities. For community forestry to be successful, it must contribute to such things as income generation, improved health/nutrition, time saving (when collecting fuel), greater comfort/shade in the fields and crop protection (e.g. from wind or flood damage).

To meet the many demands for CFT coming from decision makers, extension personnel and facilitators, the BNA proposed a flexible modular approach to training. In addition to a basic core programme, individuals could supplement their previous training and experience with a selection of specific community forestry modules including such topics as policy, capacity building, community dynamics, conflict resolution, environmental awareness, gender, horticulture, nutrition and nursery work. The aim of all these modules would be to ensure relevance to local conditions by utilising the existing experience and information available in South Africa on implementing community forestry.

Two main types of modules are recommended:

- *Core training workshops* focusing on the needs of service providers such as those from government, industry, NGOs and institutions of learning who are involved in decision making, training, facilitating or implementing community forestry. Modules could be taught in the form of five-day workshops combining classroom instruction and discussion with practical exercises in local communities for hands-on experience. Where possible, this initial phase would be complemented by follow-up assignments in the field and ideally they should be part of a progressive training programme carried out over several years.
- *Community training programmes* seeking to empower and uplift communities in their place of residence and operated in partnership with service providers. These modules would be scheduled around the seasons, including activities such as the acquisition of planting material, site preparation and planting, the establishment and management of water regimes, as well as less seasonal activities such as marketing strategies, capacity building, etc.

In addition to stressing technical considerations, all modules, particularly those for service providers, need to emphasise people skills. The BNA realised that, apart from the need for a more liberal academic base in CFT, cultural and social norms need to be acknowledged. In

particular, there is a need to understand group dynamics, to scrutinise personal conduct and the use of appropriate body language, and to evaluate dress, mode of transport, punctuality and reliability – all of which can be used as part of the process of communication.

Finally all modules need to include an introduction to gender awareness, the special concerns of women, the dynamics of gender groups, how they adapt to the stress of community living, their tenure rights and access to empowerment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are a number of important issues which need to be addressed in order to facilitate the implementation of a sustainable community forestry policy as envisaged in the government's White Paper.

Firstly, there has been contention over the definition of 'community forestry'. The term was formally introduced in the GNU White Paper although others could have been adopted. As Cellier (1994) notes, there is no universally accepted definition for such activities. Gregersen, Draper and Elz (1989) use a number of terms interchangeably including 'social forestry', 'farm forestry', 'community forestry' and 'forestry for local development', all loosely defined as "a broad group of tree- and forest-related activities that rural landowners and community groups (thus peri-urban people) undertake to provide products for their own use to generate local income". The stress is upon people and community involvement and this is a key distinction between community forestry and conventional commercial forestry and conservation practices. Still, perceptual changes are slow and currently DWAF is undertaking an in-house re-orientation programme to bring about change within the Department.

Secondly, education and training need to be defined and the differences and similarities understood. Although training was initially the prime objective of the BNA, there are very close links between the two. Gregersen, Draper and Elz (1989) consider education to be "the general knowledge that is needed to understand the various dimensions of social forestry (community forestry)" and training "a more narrow focus on teaching specific functions and skills to those who will be, or are already working in social forestry (community forestry) programmes." However, in the case of community forestry, it is often very difficult to separate education and training because of the strong community role in both activities.

Another issue to be resolved was how to control an over dependence by service providers on the premature analysis of problems and automatic production of quick, technical solutions to community forestry situations. More and more it is being realised that to provide 'answers' before gaining the full participation of the interest groups involved often results in the wrong 'questions' being asked. Increasingly, educators, researchers, extensionists and community facilitators are acknowledging the importance of 'common sense' and this has brought participatory practices on to the training agenda. At the same time, community forestry is being promoted by staff whose backgrounds are less exclusively formal and combine practical experience with academic ability. This has resulted in the incorporation of both donor-funded and local community forestry appointments in South Africa which are now bringing fresh insights into formal education and training.

Thus the challenges of the new order are slowly bringing about change in formal institutions of the state forestry services, the commercial sector and higher and tertiary education and training. Indeed, it is to the credit of the GNU that progress has been so swift. Through their constant promotion of community needs, internal departmental retraining and the bringing on-board of donor funding, much has been achieved. Since the completion of the BNA, when only one tertiary diploma programme in community forestry was on offer in South Africa, there are now two degree courses in place (one supported by the UK's Department for International Development), several colleges are initiating courses, and post-graduate studies are available at an additional university faculty of agriculture.

Furthermore, changes are also occurring in the commercial corporate forest sector. In order to facilitate better community initiatives, companies are increasingly looking for employees from non-forestry backgrounds and the previously disadvantaged race groups to provide support for community outgrower schemes. As they down-size, companies are also providing training and handing over the more profitable felling, extraction and transport elements to empower local communities. To further this end, accreditation is being sought from international certification bodies to demonstrate that forestry practices are based on sound social and environmental management.

However, there is still work to be done, particularly on the issue of gender. Although women are in the political limelight at policy level, participation at local level is still channelled through community institutions dominated by the male decision-making process. New ideas are needed on how to access women, e.g. through addressing them at sewing groups and maternity clinics, to enable them to participate more fully in the process of community forestry development.

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ACRONYMS

BNA	basic needs assessment
CBO	community-based organisation
CFT	community forestry training
DANCED	Danish Cooperation for Environment and Development
DWAF	Department of Water Affairs and Forestry
GNU	Government of National Unity
NGO	non-novernment organisation
V&T	Visits and Training

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