

**PEOPLE PARTICIPATION THROUGH DECENTRALIZED
FOREST MANAGEMENT TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE
FORESTRY DEVELOPMENT
- A RETROSPECTIVE REVIEW -**

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ABSTRACT

In order to promote people participation in the forestry sector, the decentralization process is being applied into the forest management in Myanmar. It is found that two types of decentralization are applied through the implementation of Taungya forestry and Community forestry programs. However, Myanmar is still at an early stage in the process of developing and introducing forms of decentralized forest management appropriate to its situations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Forest resources have been dwindling to a certain extent although Myanmar has been richly endowed with vast area of forests in the past. Myanmar is now becoming one of the important deforesting countries within Southeast Asia region. Rural population is composed of 72 percent of the whole population of Myanmar, and dependency on forests for the needs such as food, shelter and fuel is extremely high. Due to the impact of deforestation, the environmental degradation is serious in some regions of Myanmar and the local people of these regions are facing the scarcity of forest resources.

The major causes of deforestation in Myanmar are (i) short-fallow shifting cultivation practice in hilly regions, (ii) expansion of permanent agriculture into the forest lands particularly in dense populated regions, (iii) cutting of fuelwood and making of charcoal for daily cooking, (iv) illegal logging and trading of timber, and (v) infrastructure development and urbanization.

From these factors, it can be realized that the deforestation in Myanmar is more of socioeconomic problem than a technical one. Due to the uncertainty of conventional forestry to be sustainable forestry development while satisfying the socioeconomic needs of local people, Myanmar has started to change its forestry sector towards the involvement of local communities in forest management since the mid of 1990s.

2. THE CHANGES OF FOREST POLICY TREND

Before the days of colonial period, forests were still plentiful in Myanmar. However, at certain time, even though Myanmar was forested to about 90% of the total country land area, forest produce was not a 'free gift of nature' in populated and settled areas (Furnivall, 1909). During Myanmar monarchial period, teak (*Tectona grandis*) trees were declared as royal property and royalties were levied for teak extraction (Brandis, 1896).

With the growing British interest in Myanmar's teak forests, Taninthayi and Rakhine regions were firstly annexed into British colonies after the first Anglo-Myanmar war (1824-6). Between 1829 and 1857, private firms were essentially free to extract Taninthayi's teak forests as they wished. Although there were few forest

rules, they were ineffectual because of absence of a forest service or department entrusted with their enforcement. Raymond L. Bryant (1997) referred to this state of affairs as *laissez-faire* forestry. This *laissez-faire* forestry led extensive over-harvesting and resulted in depletion of Taninthayi's teak forests. Not only unfettered private extraction, but shifting cultivation was also blamed for the depletion of Taninthayi's teak forests.

After the second Anglo-Myanmar war (1852), Mottama, Bago, Yangon, Pyay and Ayeyarwady delta regions fell into the hand of the British. With the annexation of these regions, rules and plans were promulgated and formulated to protect the forests in lower Myanmar. Between 1852 and 1855, the British government introduced preliminary measures to regulate Bago's teak forests. On 26 September 1853, the British government declared the forests as state property and prohibited unauthorized teak extraction in keeping with Myanmar monarchical precedent. Shifting cultivation was also subject to special control through fine or imprisonment for shifting cultivators. From the experiences of *laissez-faire* forestry, which caused the depletion of Taninthayi's teak forests, the government officials argued that the forest department was required to manage the forest resources on a long-term basis. In 1856, the Myanmar Forest Department was created under the direction of Dietrich Brandis, a German botanist-turned forester. The Forest Department was given extensive powers to regulate forest use.

After establishing Forest Department, the system of private timber extraction was also changed by initiating a contract system in which Myanmar contractors extracted timber on the Forest Department's behalf. Instead of direct access to Bago's forests, European timber traders could only purchase teak at government auction in Yangon. European timber traders felt unlikely this contract system, and they tried to end this system by various means. In February 1861, the government ordered to open the Bago's teak forests to European timber traders. While the government offered twelve-year leases, including permission to girdle trees, in a large area of less important forests, it offered leases only for three or six years in more valuable forests, and forest official retained responsibility for tree selection and girdling. Following the return of teak extraction by European timber traders, teak production climbed from 20,462 tons in 1858-9 to 31,545 tons in 1866-7. However, this private enterprise system on teak extraction began to end when it was found that

leaseholders illegally felled teak trees. The government ordered the end of the permit system in August 1874, and on expiry of the last lease in 1877 almost all of British Myanmar was once more under the contract system.

While attempting to control unfettered private timber extraction, the Forest Department used various means to restrict shifting cultivation. In Myanmar monarchical times, shifting cultivators paid annual imposts to specially appointed local governors. The British also continued these imposts in the form of capitation and Taungya (shifting cultivation) taxes, and collected them with greater efficiency. However, this system did not control effectively shifting cultivation, and cultivators continued clearing forests for cultivation without regarding the rules. In order to reduce these conflicts between the Forest Department and shifting cultivators, a reforestation technique known as Taungya forestry was implemented in 1856. This scheme was based on the idea that, if cultivators planted teak with their rice and cotton crops, the Forest Department would be left with young teak plantations once these cultivators had moved to new fields. Taungya forestry was extensively implemented in British Myanmar and India, and was later introduced elsewhere in colonial world. However, the experiences highlighted the short-term possibilities but long-term difficulties associated with socioeconomic conditions of Taungya farmers.

The first forest legislation applied to Myanmar was the India Forest Act of 1865, which was replaced by the Burma Forest Act, 1881. This Forest Act strengthened the state property of teak trees and laid down the procedure for reservation of forests. Shifting cultivation and unauthorized encroachment were strictly prohibited within reserved forests. On the other hand, this Act included the provision for constitution of village-forests to provide village-communities with fuelwood, timber, other forest produce and pasture. However, no specific provision for the right and forest access of local communities was described in this Act. With little emphasis on local communities, this Act mainly aimed at reservation of forests to protect for long-term commercial exploitation of timber.

The British continued the annexation of upper Myanmar by creating third Anglo-Myanmar war (1885). After this annexation, all of Myanmar fell under British rule. The rules and regulations that were applied in lower Myanmar were also extended to manage the forests of upper Myanmar. The forests were also declared as the State property again. The first forest policy guided principles for Myanmar was

derived from the India forest policy of 1894. In order to manage the forests, according to this policy, forest areas were classified into four main classes: Protection Forests (to protect watersheds and deter soil erosion); Commercial Forests (to supply valuable timber for commercial purposes); Local Supply Forests (to supply local population with fuelwood, building materials and non-wood forest products); and Nature Reserves. The Burma Forest Act of 1881 was also re-enacted in 1902. Although this Act made a few alterations, it mainly aimed at reservation of forests for long-term commercial exploitation of timber and the right and forest access of local communities were not a primary concern. By 1880, 5,284 km² of forest areas had been reserved. This was increased to 77,373 km² (11.8% of total country land) in 1920, which went up to 95,490 km² (13.04% of total country land) during the period 1920-30. The government contract system of teak extraction was also turned again to opening of forests to private enterprise.

On 4 January 1948, Myanmar gained independence from the British colonial rule. The village-communities and forest dwellers, though they were awarded limited forest access through village-forests and local supply forests, were not a primary concern and long-term commercial exploitation of forests was a major goal in colonial government's forest policies. During the colonial period, the European timber firms exploited the large extent of Myanmar's forests, and the forest cover reduced from 90% of total country land before the colonial period to 60% of total country land around 1950s. After Myanmar was independent, the forest policies of British colonial government were continued to be adopted, and State property and control of forests were also maintained. In Constitution Law of 1947, just before independence, Section 30 stipulated that the State was the sole owner of all lands. Next, Section 18 of the reformulated Constitution Law of 1974 reaffirmed that the State was the sole owner of all natural resources including lands regardless of their locations. Private enterprises also continued to exploit Myanmar's forests until 1963. However, private sector involvement in the timber trade was ended after 1 October 1963, and the State Timber Board (Myanmar Timber Enterprise) took responsibility for extracting, milling and marketing all kinds of timber.

With State's control on timber trade, Myanmar Timber Enterprise exploited the forests to earn foreign exchange, and the forestry sector, at certain time, played the main role for the economic development of country. With the initial adoption of

market economy, it was announced in September 1988, harvesting and export of hardwood other than teak were permitted to the private sector in 1989. However, due to indiscriminate cuttings and failure to follow the procedures of the system, logging and log export by the private sector was banned in 1993. The deforestation since the colonial period also continued in Myanmar, the forest cover next reduced from 60% of total country area just around Independence to 52.3% in 2000.

During the colonial period, the deforestation was mainly caused due to commercial timber extraction of European firms. However, the deforestation after Independence is linked not only with commercial timber extraction, but also with increasing population needs on forest resources. As Myanmar is a developing country, local people's dependence on forest resources is extremely high, and forests in Myanmar are providing local people for post, poles, fuelwood, fodder and food. Since the colonial period, local people were awarded limited forest access by following three different ways.

- (1) Local supply forests were designated with the fringes of the reserved forests to supply the needs of local people for forest products.
- (2) Dry fuelwood and bamboo were allowed to be collected with ticket system from reserved forests designated for commercial production of timber.
- (3) Under the old Forest Rule 25 (Burma Forest Manual, 1902), tree species other than reserved species were allowed for personal use from Public Forests, which were located within 20 miles from the vicinity of the village.

In the past, these ways could satisfy the required needs of local people. However, the population of Myanmar is now growing rapidly, and these ways are impossible to meet the increasing demands of local people's needs.

Up to 1999, Myanmar's population had reached about 45 millions and it is increasing at a rate of 1.2%. The increasing population is accompanied by increasing needs for food and other agricultural products. In order to meet these needs, it is necessary either to increase the output of lands currently under cultivation, or to increase the cultivated area. However, it is difficult to increase the output of lands because of high costly inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation. For this reason, more forest lands are cleared to change the agricultural lands particularly in the form of permanent cultivation in thickly populated area and shifting cultivation in hilly region. Shifting cultivation, the practice of upland people in Myanmar, leads

to deforestation of many forest areas. Recently, 28% of total country land area was the forest area affected by shifting cultivation.

The impact of population growth has direct effect not only on foods and other agricultural products, but also on fuelwood consumption. In Myanmar, 72% of the whole population live in rural areas, and they are partially or entirely dependent on fuelwood for daily cooking. Fuelwood from forest for household energy was 18 millions cubic meters in 1994-95 and it is growing at a rate of 1.1% every year. Exploitation for fuelwood is generally beyond the carrying capacity of forests. It is also leading towards extensive deforestation of Myanmar's forests.

With the rapid population growth, the deforestation is becoming at alarming rate in Myanmar. Nowadays, local people in some regions are suffering from the effect of deforestation. The agriculture lands in dry zone region (central part of Myanmar), where it is densely populated and rainfall is very low, are facing degradation and desertification due to effect of deforestation. As in dry zone region, Ayeyarwady delta region is also facing the effect of deforestation. Mangrove forests in this region were depleted due to fuelwood and charcoal production. The cut over mangrove forest areas were then transformed to cultivated lands for agricultural purposes even in the reserved forest. Forest Law could not over-rule the social and economic needs of local people of this region (Ohn, U, Undated). As a result, these cultivated lands are becoming unproductive because of having high content of salinity in the soil. Moreover, local people in both regions are now faced with scarcity of forest resources particularly fuelwood for their daily use.

From these situations, the government and forest officials recognized the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions of local people and the importance of people's participation in forestry development activities to ensure a sustainable relationship between people and the forest resource base.

A new Forest Law was enacted in November 1992 to replace the 1902 Forest Act. Although the new law replicates much that is in the old colonial law, it emphasizes forest protection, environmental and biodiversity conservation. It also encourages community participatory approach in managing the forest resources, particularly to satisfy the basic needs of the local people (Forest Department, 2000). According to Section 14 and 15 of this law, villages or communities can establish fuelwood plantations and they have the right to use the products of these plantations

for their benefits. Moreover, 1995 Myanmar Forest Policy highlights the importance of people's participation in the conservation and utilization of forest resources and public awareness of the vital role of forests in socioeconomic development of the country as policy imperatives.

In 1995, the Director General of Forest Department issued "Community Forestry Instructions (CFIs)" for the purpose of supporting economic development of the country, regaining environmental stability and addressing the basic needs of local communities. This issuance is a significant breakthrough in forestry sector of Myanmar, and it is a major shift from the old concept of reservation, revenue generation and restriction to community-based forestry.

3. PEOPLE-ORIENTED FORESTRY AND COMMUNITY-BASED FORESTRY PROGRAMS

3.1. Taungya Forestry Program

Taungya forestry programs, the first people-oriented forestry programs of Myanmar, were launched since Myanmar was under British rules. Taungya system, a combination of agriculture and silviculture practiced on the same land, is used for reforestation purposes under these programs. Taungya is actually a Myanmar term for shifting cultivation. The word 'taung' in Myanmar means hill and 'ya' means cultivation; taungya signifies 'cultivation of crops on the hill'.

Around 1856, shifting cultivation was widespread and there were several court cases against the villagers for encroaching into the forest reserves. Brandis realized the detrimental effect of shifting cultivation on the management of timber resources and encouraged the practice of regeneration of teak with the assistance of Taungya (Blanford, 1925). Two decades later, it proved that teak plantations could be established successfully with taungya system.

After this successful establishment of teak plantations with taungya system, it was adopted for reforestation purposes, and taungya forestry programs had been launched with the primary aim of arresting the rapid advance of shifting cultivation since 1920. Under these programs, taungya farmers are allowed to participate in government's reforestation scheme and they have the right to cultivate food crops in early stages of plantation while promoting reforestation by sowing seeds or planting seedlings. As taungya forestry program involves local people in government's

reforestation scheme, it could be said as the fore runner program of community forestry of today.

3.1.1. Implementation of Taungya forestry programs

Under taungya forestry program, commercial forestry plantations such as Teak (*Tectona grandis*), Pyinkado (*Xylia dolabriformis*), and Padauk (*Pterocarpus macrocarpus*) plantations are primarily established. In Myanmar, commercial plantations are more than half of the total forestry plantations.

Before the beginning of taungya forestry programs, it is needed to make an agreement between the taungya farmers and the Forest Department. According to this agreement, the taungya farmers have responsibility to tend and protect the forestry seedlings, and the Forest Department will allow the farmers to cultivate the annual agricultural crops along with the forestry seedling during the early years of the forestry plantations. This agreement usually lasts two or three years.

Under taungya forestry program, the selected area for establishment of plantations is divided and allotted to the taungya farmers with about 1 to 2 hectares for a family. Firstly, taungya farmers clear the allotted area which it is heavily cut over. After clear felling the allotted area, the debris is left to dry for about two or three months. When the debris is ready to burn easily, burning is carried out before the first light shower. After the allotted area has been properly burnt, the taungya farmers plant tree seedlings at a spacing of 2.6 meter and their agricultural crops are also planted between the tree seedlings. A variety of agricultural crops such as rice, maize, groundnut, sesame, etc., are commonly grown in taungya forestry programs.

3.1.2. Experiences from Taungya forestry programs

Taungya system firstly introduced in Myanmar was later adopted elsewhere in Southeast Asia and in parts of Latin America and Africa as well. In Myanmar, Taungya forestry programs have extensively been launched since 1920. Under taungya forestry programs, there are some benefits for both taungya farmers and the Forest Department.

Taungya farmers are allowed not only to cultivate agricultural crops, but also to collect the fuelwood from clear felling of allotted area. And, they earn income by selling surplus agricultural crops and fuelwood. Moreover, taungya farmers can earn

more from wages, paid by the Forest Department for the forestry operations of reforestation as the additional works like tree planting, weeding, fire protection, etc.

From the implementation of taungya forestry programs, the Forest Department could take reforestation works inexpensively and solve the problem of labor scarcity. As taungya system is a mixed pattern of agricultural crops and forestry seedlings, the system is an acceptable form of agroforestry for soil conservation. And, it is also found that plantations established with taungya system are more effective and successful than other plantations by the use of hired laborers.

Although the taungya forestry programs provided some benefits for both taungya farmers and the Forest Department, the experiences highlighted the short-term possibilities with long-term difficulties associated with socioeconomic conditions of taungya farmers.

With the primary aim to control shifting cultivation, the programs were based on the idea that, if the cultivators planted forestry seedlings with their agricultural crops, the Forest Department would be left with young forestry plantations once these cultivators had moved to new sites. Under these programs, taungya farmers were seen as cheap laborers for reforestation works, and these programs could not guarantee the improvement of their livelihoods.

Taungya farmers have no right to harvest the forestry trees for their benefits from forestry plantations that they established, and their income mostly depends on agricultural production. Their agricultural production is obtained only from the reforestation scheme which lasts for two or three years. Under taungya forestry programs, the agricultural production is not allowed for a term more than three years and it is questionable what to do for taungya farmers after the program.

3.2. Community Forestry Program

With the issuance of the Community Forestry Instructions (CFIs) by the Director General of Forest Department, the community forestry programs have been launched in Myanmar since 1995. The primary aims of these programs are to fulfill people's basic needs for fuelwood, small timbers and non-wood forest products (NWFPs), to protect natural forests, and to rehabilitate degraded forests.

3.2.1. Implementation of community forestry programs

Under the community forestry programs, households which desire to participate in the programs firstly form the user groups. With consensus of all members, a management committee is created within the user groups. This management committee consists of a chairman, a secretary and three members.

On behalf of the user group, the committee applies to the District Forest Officer through the Township Forest Officer for the establishment of community forest. When the user groups receive the permission for the establishment of community forest, they have to draw a management plan according to the form prescribed by the Forest Department and forward it to the District Forest Officer for confirmation. Responsible forest officers provide them with advices in the preparation of management plan. After confirmation of the management plan, the District Forest Officer issues the Certificates for the establishment of Community Forests for user groups. This Certificate is attached with relevant forest law, rules and regulations to be followed by the user's groups in the practice of community forestry.

The District Forest Officer determines the size of the land to be allocated to each user's group, and it is determined according to the climate, type of soil, species to be planted and the degree of planting, tending and conservation that would be accorded. After allotment of land, user groups establish community forestry plantations. The fast-growing tree species are planted, and the rotation for these plantations is designated depending on tree species. The areas permitted for establishment of community forestry plantations are mostly degraded forest areas, and most of these plantations are aimed at the production of fuelwood. In order to earn more income, the user groups use taungya or other agroforestry system in the establishment of community forestry plantations.

The Forest Department provides seeds and seedlings for the first rotation free of charge. The user groups are also given some technical assistances and expertise necessary for the establishment, cultural operations, management and utilization of these plantations.

After the plantations are established, the user groups manage these plantations in accordance with their management plan already confirmed by the Forest Department.

3.2.2. Land and tree tenure

According to the 1974 Constitutional Law, the State is the sole owner of all types of lands. Under the community forestry programs, the user groups are provided with 30-year land leases to establish the community forests. The user groups have no right to claim the title of land ownership, but they have user's rights for these lands. Apart from inheritance, the property rights of user groups cannot be sold or rented. The duration of land leases can be extended, depending on the performance and the desire of the user groups.

User groups can exploit the forest products from their community forests in accordance with the prescriptions of the management plan. Taxation shall be exempted from their use and the sale of forest products within the village. But, they need to pay tax for the transfer and marketing of the products in areas outside the village.

3.2.3. Experiences from community forestry programs

In Myanmar, community forestry programs have been implemented recently, and only for about a decade. Although the period of implementation of community forestry programs is short, various lessons have been learned from these programs. Up to the March of 2003, 27,872 hectares of community forests have been established under the community forestry programs.

In the implementation of community forestry programs, the user groups need funds or capital for the establishment and management of community forestry plantations. Under the currently implemented programs, the user groups establish the plantations by their own funds or capital. Except providing seeds and seedlings necessary for the first rotation, the Forest Department or the Government did not provide any credit or loan for community forestry plantations establishment. With the lack of government's credits or loans, the user groups face the difficulties to establish community forestry plantations.

The community forestry programs implemented in Myanmar are found to be of two types. One is the program implemented by the Forest Department alone, while the other is jointly implemented by the Forest Department and some international organizations. In order to earn income before the user groups can benefit from their community forestry plantations, other income-generating activities

are conducted for the user groups in the jointly implemented programs. However, these income-generating activities could not be conducted in the Forest Department's programs. Due to such difference between the two types of programs, the participation of local communities in the Forest Department and international organizations jointly implemented programs is more satisfactory than that in the programs solely implemented by Forest Department.

Under the community forestry programs, local communities are allowed to establish only fuelwood plantations. In the past, Myanmar was richly endowed with forest resources, and the rural communities could easily get the fuelwood for their daily use. Until recent years, establishing fuelwood plantations was not a practice for rural communities. Moreover, they believe that they cannot benefit from establishing fuelwood plantations. Some communities have expressed their interest in the establishment of commercial plantations, for example, teak plantations.

For the success of community forestry programs, the role of foresters working to implement community forestry in the field is very important. They should have high motivation, broad expertise, and strong coordinative ability to obtain local people's participation in the community forestry programs. The responsible foresters in the field for the implementation of community forestry technically know how to manage the forests and work on the forest plantation aspect, but they are unfamiliar with such tasks as community organizing and socioeconomic analysis.

4. A DECADE OF COMMUNITY FORESTRY

Since the mid 1990s, the forestry sector in Myanmar began to change from the trend based on long-term commercial exploitation, towards local community participatory approach in managing the forest resources. The main reasons of change in the forestry sector are the alarming deforestation rate and the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions of rural communities.

In 1995, the Ministry of Forestry, with the approval of the Cabinet, issued the Forest Policy Statement. This policy includes the provisions to "create an awareness of community forestry and significance of the problem it seeks to address" and to "demonstrate the cost/benefit of community development programs as also the mechanism for distribution of benefits to facilitate adoption of the program by the people".

These provisions are elaborated in the Community Forestry Instructions (CFIs) issued by the Director General of the Forest Department in December 1995. The issuance of CFIs is the major shift in the forestry sector of Myanmar, and the forestry sector is now changing towards local community-based forestry.

Taungya forestry programs, the first local people-involved forestry programs, have been implemented with the primary aim to minimize shifting cultivation. Under taungya forestry programs, the needs of local people were not the primary concern and local people were seen as inexpensive laborers in the government's reforestation scheme. From the experiences of taungya forestry programs, it would be possible to gain short-term benefits followed by long-term difficulties associated with socioeconomic conditions of local people.

With the issuance of CFIs, the community forestry programs have been implemented in Myanmar since 1995. Under the community forestry programs, the local communities are provided the forest land access through the issuance of 30 years land lease. Unlike the taungya forestry programs, local communities have the right to exploit the forest products for their benefits in the community forestry programs. Taxation would be exempted for their own use and sale of the products within their villages, but they need to pay tax for the sales outside the areas of their villages. From the implemented community forestry programs, it is apparent that the forest access for local communities is now becoming more decentralized to some extent.

In the taungya forestry programs, the minimizing of shifting cultivation is the primary aim while involving local people as low-cost laborers in the reforestation scheme. However, the improvement of socioeconomic conditions of local communities and sustainable forestry development are the main objectives in the implementation of community forestry programs.

The decentralization of forest management has begun to be applied in the community forestry programs. Under the community forestry programs, the District Forest Officer concerned is given the authority for the issuance of the community forest establishment certificates, determination of land allotment and extension of duration of land lease. The NGOs and academics are also involved in the implementation of community forestry programs.

In order to promote the public awareness about the vital role of the forests in the well-being and socioeconomic development of the country, the Forestry Extension Division was established within the Forest Department in 1995. Public media such as radio and television are also used for extension purposes to promote community forestry development.

A new institution, 'the Dry Zone Greening Department (DZGD)', was created under the Ministry of Forestry on 22 July 1997. The DZGD is now implementing the community forestry programs in central dry zone region with the major tasks: (i) to establish forest plantations for local supply and greening; (ii) to protect and conserve the existing degraded natural forests; (iii) to promote fuelwood substitution; and (iv) to develop water resources.

With the aim of training employees of the Forest Department and rural people theoretically and practically for the conservation of forests and the development of rural people, the Forest Department and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) jointly established the Central Forestry Development Training Center (CFDTC) in 1990. 'Community Forestry Training and Extension Project (COMFORT)' is now being implemented in dry zone with the financial and technical assistance from the Government of Japan through JICA. Under this project, the sub-centre of CFDTC is established and it is now conducting various types of trainings including community development and methods of promoting Community Forestry and Participatory Forest Management among staff of the Forest Department and rural people.

Through the implementation of community forestry programs, the current forestry sector in Myanmar extended broadly into the contents of :

- i. liberalization of forest access for local people;
- ii. initiation of decentralization process in managing forest resources;
- iii. development of participatory techniques through various training programs;
- iv. raising public awareness about the vital role of forest resources from various extension activities; and
- v. emphasis on improvement of socioeconomic conditions of local people and environmental conservation.

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1. The Process of the Community Forestry Policy Development in Myanmar

The forest policy of Myanmar was originated with the colonial government. After independence, this forest policy was adopted to be perpetuated. The main goal of this policy was to generate sustainable forest-based state revenue. Forest-dependent communities were marginalized in their use of and access to forest resources through the policy instruments like prosecution, resettlement, and promotion of permanent agriculture.

However, it became apparent that these policy instruments were not effective to halt deforestation and for economic growth. Firstly, Taungya forestry programs as policy instrument were implemented to seek alternative approaches to deal with forest dwellers and their resource management practices. It was found that this policy instrument could address two salient problems: rural poverty (i.e., by increasing local income while involving local people as laborers in government's reforestation activities) and forest degradation (i.e., through tree planting while minimizing shifting cultivation). Although the policy goals remained the same (i.e., long-term commercial timber exploitation and minimizing deforestation), the distribution of benefits to local people was also included as a new dimension. This policy instrument was initial policy developments of today community forestry. Through implementing these programs, the relationship between the government and local people was gradually changed from prosecutors-criminals towards employer-laborers.

Since the past decade, the development of community forestry has been accelerated in Myanmar. Community-based forestry systems are recognized as a key element to forest management rather than simply being at the project and program level. The major driving factor to change the forestry sector with the favor of community-based forestry is that the conventional forestry became impossible to address the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions of local people and serious environmental degradation. Community forestry programs have been implemented as policy instruments with the provision of land use arrangements and property regimes for local communities. During this decade, the sustainable development view is shaped in national forest policy while broadening policy goals into new

dimensions of social justice and decentralized resource management. The relationship between the local people and government also improved towards partnership.

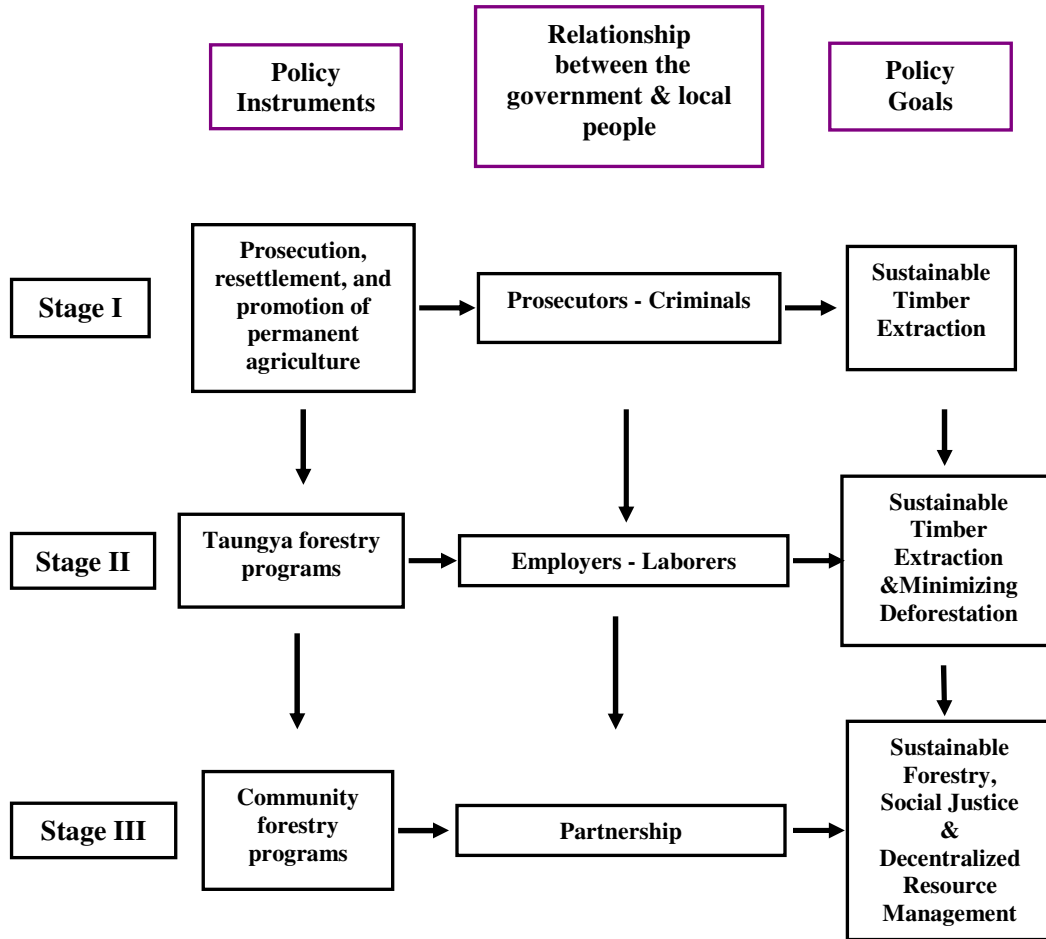


Fig (1). The Development Process of Community Forestry in Myanmar

5.2. Role of Decentralization in Community Forestry

In the conventional forestry of Myanmar, centralization is the main concept for the forest management. It is now apparent that this conventional forestry was not sufficient for socioeconomic development of local people, and for control of the environmental degradation. For this reason, Myanmar is now changing the forestry sector towards community-based forestry, in which the participation of local communities in managing forest resources is the key to sustainable forestry development. To promote the participation of local communities, the decentralization and devolution process is applied in the implementation of people-oriented and community-based forestry programs while assuming that local communities are likely to participate in forestry activities if they gain a fair share in resource use and decision making authority.

It is found that two types of decentralization are applied in various people-oriented or community-based forestry programs of Myanmar. In the first type, the individuals participate in government's reforestation programs, they are granted responsibilities and some benefits, but they are given little or no authority. It is essentially decentralization without devolution. This pattern of decentralization could be seen in Taungya Forestry Programs.

The other type involves the decentralization of forest management roles from central government to local government, but not local communities. This pattern of decentralization is applied in Community Forestry Program of Myanmar. Under these programs, the local government unit or local forest department is given responsibilities and authority. This type involves decentralization, with a degree of devolution in some instances.

In Myanmar, the decentralization and devolution process has not reached the stage of handing over of a significant amount of control to local communities or individuals. Although it is not yet clear whether devolution is desirable, it would be impossible to achieve the goals of community forestry without some extent of decentralization process in forest management.

6. CONCLUSION

From the increasing population pressure on forest resources and alarming deforestation rate, the development of community forestry will play an important role in Myanmar for the sustainable development of forestry and socioeconomic improvement of rural people who are mostly dependent on forests.

For the success of implementation of community forestry programs, it is necessary to build the trust between the local communities and the Forest Department. In order to promote the trust between the local communities and the Forest Department, the decentralization and devolution process is being applied into forest management of Myanmar through the implementation of community forestry programs. The current community forestry programs are implemented under CFIs. It is the issuance of the Director General of Forest Department. Myanmar is still at an early stage in the process of developing and introducing forms of decentralization and devolution process appropriate to its situations.

If the proper legislation is enacted to legally provide the current decentralization and devolution process of forest management, the trust of local communities on the Forest Department will improve and more achievements of community forestry could be seen in the future.

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