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Extension Organisations: Lessons from the
CONSEFORH Project Experience in Farm
Forestry with Intermediary Agencies**

Torsten Mark Kowal and Edgardo Padilla

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Torsten Mark Kowal, a forester and environmental scientist, was assigned by the UK Department for International Development (formerly ODA) to work with the CONSEFORH project as Extension Liaison Specialist (1993-1998), and is now a consultant in rural development forestry and agroforestry. He may be contacted at: P.O. Box 189, Siguatepeque, Honduras, Tel: +504 7730686; Fax: + 504 7734863; Tel: U.K. +44 1491 579958. Email: tmkowal@bigfoot.com

Edgardo Padilla, a forester with CONSEFORH since 1990, has worked as station manager of the southern zone experimental site and as Coordinator of the project rural forestry promotion unit. He may be contacted at: CONSEFORH Project: Technician-in-charge, Santa Rosa Experimental Station, P.O. Box 314, Comayagua, Honduras. Tel: + 504 7721786. Email: conseforh@globalnet.hn

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COLLABORATIVE LINKS BETWEEN RESEARCH AND EXTENSION ORGANISATIONS: LESSONS FROM THE CONSEFORH PROJECT EXPERIENCE IN FARM FORESTRY WITH INTERMEDIARY AGENCIES

Torsten Mark Kowal and Edgardo Padilla

SUMMARY

The potential for developing participatory and pluralist models makes the theme of collaborative links among service/research organisations, local level development agencies and rural people one of growing interest, though it is increasingly recognised that well-founded strategies and practical tools are required to achieve satisfactory results. In this paper, comparative advantages of research organisations are described in relation to those of local-level extension agencies. Work carried out by CONSEFORH (Honduran Dry Forest Species Conservation and Silviculture Project) is described, in which a range of rural forestry promotion services have been directed at strengthening the technical and socio-economic capacities of three intermediary development agencies. Details of the selection process and the 'toolkit' used for coordination of activities are included, followed by results of the collaborative programme to date.

Differing patterns of collaboration can be attributed to the characteristics of the intermediary agencies, the limits on farm forestry implementation imposed by the type of beneficiary selected, and risks associated with soil degradation and drought. Key

attributes of the intermediary agency were their extension methodology and agility in accessing sources of financial incentives for farm forestry.

Lessons are described concerning the application of coordination tools in relation to a typology of the stages through which collaborative links tend to pass over time. A key conclusion is that employing a significant degree of formality limits dependence on specific individuals, and helps to ensure that mutual trust and commitment are maintained. Other conclusions were: (i) an annual activity cycle should be established to consolidate the collaboration; (ii) multiple communication lines should be kept open between the staff responsible; (iii) mechanisms must be developed to ensure the effective participation of farmer representatives; (iv) strategy development processes will contribute to convergence of the interests of the organisations even in the mature phase of collaboration.

The paper concludes that before investing resources in collaborative programmes, careful consideration should be given to the strategies and tools to be used, thus ensuring that collaboration yields reasonable returns in relation to resource and time investments and leads to sustainable field results.

INTRODUCTION: COLLABORATION BETWEEN EXTENSION AND SUPPORT AGENCIES – A CHALLENGE AND A NECESSITY

Rural areas in the developing world are increasingly served by a growing number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other types of organisations involved in sustainable agriculture extension. In many countries 'support agencies' of different types have developed, in part to strengthen the work carried out by extension agencies. Support agencies are diverse in character and include:

- Projects or foundations dedicated to research;
- Training and higher-level education centres;
- International or national NGOs with wide geographical coverage; and
- International research centres such as, in Latin America, the Tropical Agriculture Research and Training Centre (CATIE) and the Interamerican Institute for Agricultural Cooperation (IICA).

In general, support agencies aim to disseminate information and to facilitate sustainable agriculture technology development, often preferentially for poor farmers within marginal areas. Usually, however, they do not possess sufficient resources and funds to establish direct extension programmes and are obliged to work through dedicated extension organisations. Collaborative links can thus usefully be established to facilitate information flows and permit the provision of services that will benefit extensionists and farmer families.

The tendency to collaborate has been reinforced by the conditions imposed by funding agencies upon research organisations, which aim to ensure widespread information dissemination,

so overcoming the geographical and institutional isolation from which many research organisations tend to suffer. For at least two decades (Chambers, 1983) it has been recognised that the formulation of appropriate research agendas by external researchers, which more fully address the complex technology development issues facing the rural poor within marginal environments, demands more effective participation by farmer communities, and that these researcher-farmer links can often be effectively facilitated by NGOs or other organisational intermediaries (Biggs, 1989).

Additionally, collaborative links that seek to make the most of comparative institutional advantages fit into wider development trends, such as decentralisation of the agricultural and forestry extension functions of the State, increasing private sector implementation to fill the gap left by reduced public agencies, and enhanced farmer-family participation in extension and community development processes (McMahon and Nielson, 1998).

Collaboration among diverse organisations is a relatively recent phenomenon in rural development forestry, but is better established in agricultural development (Wellard et al., 1990), and can often be more frequently found in other fields such as rural health and education services. Increased interest has been noted in 'pluralist forestry development', in which diverse organisations seek a role in decision-making and to cooperate in rural forestry programmes (Anderson, 1997).

However, it is recognised that many collaborative programmes have not been successful. Case studies are useful to help shed

light on appropriate methodologies, and to fill knowledge gaps concerning collaboration strategies and tools (Alsop et al., 1996). This article presents an analysis of CONSEFORH's experience of collaboration, and seeks to address the following issues that commonly arise in such programmes:

- What partner selection procedures can be used to ensure a reasonable probability of success in inter-organisational relations?
- What degree of formality is necessary to enable the achievement of the objectives set for a collaborative programme, especially in relation to human resources development?
- What effects do the characteristics of the extension agencies have upon the development of collaborative links?
- What risks to these links can be anticipated?
- What general phases can be observed during the 'life cycle' of collaborative links?
- Which methods and tools can lead to effective, participatory, flexible and sustainable collaboration programmes?

Comparative institutional advantages as the context for collaborative programmes

Table 1 (overleaf) summarises some of the generalised institutional characteristics that lead to complementarity between support and extension agencies. In spite of the generalisations inherent in this type of table, a persuasive case can often be made for the existence of comparative advantages that can clearly enhance the impact of each of the two kinds of organisation. In brief, while support agencies are constrained by resource and methodology limitations in reaching rural populations, extension agencies have an interest in accessing information and staff training, thus improving the likelihood of

success in extension programmes, especially when working in technical areas that are new to them. Analyses by Farrington et al. (1996) and Alsop et al. (1996) have similarly based arguments for collaboration on the comparative advantages of differing types of organisations.

Background concepts: collaboration modes

Modes or levels of institutional interaction vary in their degree of formality and commitment:

- *Networks for information exchange and coordination*: set up to share information about the current topics of interest and the activities of the organisations involved. Membership of networks usually implies little additional investment in terms of personnel, funds and time, and is often effected through field days, occasional meetings and newsletters. Networks vary in their degree of formality from *ad hoc* to more formal networks of information-exchange, linking numerous organisations. Networks can operate in a restricted area of a country, at national or regional levels (i.e. involving several countries), or internationally – normally with a diminishing degree of formality as geographical scale increases.

- *Collaborative or partnership alliances*: these involve voluntary links between collaborator organisations and imply a variety of substantial resource investments from both sides, often with the principal objectives of sharing information and developing human resources. Formal agreements are common since they facilitate resource allocation and institutionalise interactions between the two partners, and serve as a framework for the development of a sense of joint responsibility for the achievement of specific aims.

Table 1 Generalised complementary characteristics of support organisations and extension agencies

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Support Agencies	<p>Understanding of relevant themes within a wide scientific context – long term and wide-scale research mandate.</p> <p>Sufficient resources to facilitate collaborative programmes.</p> <p>Information dissemination links with other networks and information sources at regional and international levels.</p> <p>Ability to carry out basic and applied research.</p> <p>Desire to economise service provision cost-effectively.</p>	<p>Lack of resources to carry out extension programmes effectively.</p> <p>Risk of ‘bias’ in regard to needs of rural populations and understanding key limitations to proposed technologies.</p> <p>Tendency to use technical personnel with limited rural development experience – limited ability to tackle social and extension issues.</p> <p>Reward structures may not favour attention to priorities of resource-poor farmers.</p> <p>May be shackled by hierarchical structures and inadequate budgets, especially when part of governmental organisations.</p> <p>Often geographically and institutionally isolated due to location on research sites.</p>
Extension Agencies	<p>Participatory and responsive approach to meeting rural client needs.</p> <p>Skilled in mobilisation and group formation.</p> <p>Commitment and supportive organisational/work ethic.</p> <p>Involved in a variety of complementary development activities.</p> <p>Located in marginal rural areas; capacity to match technologies with diverse users within heterogeneous environments.</p> <p>In some cases, experienced in on-farm research linked with extension processes.</p>	<p>High requirements for staff and farmer training in technical topics.</p> <p>High staff turnover.</p> <p>Frequently suffer a lack of financial and logistical resources.</p> <p>Impact only at local level – work programmes of limited duration.</p> <p>In some cases highly susceptible to donor requirements.</p> <p>Principal approach is ‘developmental’ – lesser interest in broader topics and limited mandate to tackle structural issues underlying rural poverty.</p>

However a combination of personal and institutional commitment is the key to making collaborative arrangements function to mutual benefit (Farrington, pers. comm.).

- *Contractual relationships*: a party (usually the extension agency) is taken on to carry out specified activities and receives financial support to meet contract objectives. This collaboration mode is used with increasing frequency for large-scale development projects with multiple co-executing extension agencies. The roles of the two parties contrast strongly, and institutional relations may rest only on a financial basis, with less emphasis on joint planning, local participation and human resource development. In this case collaboration can amount only to ‘functional off-loading’ in which one party contracts in another to perform specific services in a given area, a risk noted by Alsop et al. (1996).

In any of the three collaborative modes outlined, support agencies will require that staff possess experience in extension and institutional development to be able to establish successful programmes. Case studies shedding light on collaboration at each of these levels are important to derive lessons that might be applicable in the agricultural, rural development forestry and natural resources management sectors.

This paper describes an experience based on the second of the modes described above – collaborative or partnership alliances – in which substantial time and financial resources investments were made, both by CONSEFORH as the ‘support agency’ and by the ‘receptor’ collaborator organisations. Even though the experience described in this paper was

restricted to the intermediate mode of collaboration, some of the lessons learnt from the CONSEFORH experience may be relevant to programmes based on the other two modes.

CASE STUDY: THE RURAL FORESTRY PROMOTION PROGRAMME OF THE CONSEFORH PROJECT

Introduction

Extension agencies active in rural Honduras, especially in dry forest zones subjected to severe deforestation, recognise the growing concern of small farmer communities faced with serious forestry product and service scarcities. However, the majority of existing extension organisations are principally involved in sustainable agriculture extension, and have only a limited capacity in farm forestry and agroforestry.

CONSEFORH was a bilateral project between the Governments of Honduras (State Forestry Administration: AFE) and Great Britain (Department for International Development: DfID) that ran from 1987 to 1998. Set up as a forestry research project, it aimed to tackle genetic degradation issues and to improve seed supply of both exotic and indigenous species for use in the dry forest zone. At the end of 1998, when DFID support concluded, the project was incorporated as a component of the Forest Research and Statistics Centre (CIEF) within the Honduran State Forestry Administration.

Designed with an explicit research and conservation focus, the project lacked sufficient financial and human resources and had no remit to permit direct extension work with rural communities. From 1994 a rural forest promotion programme was set up, within a

wider reorientation of the project's research priorities. Systematic links were developed between CONSEFORH and extension agencies, with the target group defined as dry-zone small-farmers from the lower-middle socio-economic stratum with some access to land.

A 'menu' of services (Box 1) was defined by CONSEFORH directed at the intermediary extension agencies, in order to facilitate mutual exchange of information and institutional learning, both by CONSEFORH and by the collaborator agencies. It was expected that, through accessing these services, partner extension organisations would become effective in identifying forest product/service needs, competent in tasks related to the

silvicultural cycle and able to carry out community-level planning.

This menu of services, over time and through the interactions of its components, sought to enable the partner organisations to apply skills and knowledge to farm forestry development on a sustained basis. At the same time, the collaboration programme could not be 'top-down' but rather sought to facilitate a reorientation in CONSEFORH's role and knowledge base through in-depth contact with farmer communities, leading to wide-ranging adjustments in CONSEFORH research priorities and methodologies, priority species selection, and the preparation of appropriate training/information resources.

Box 1 Services offered by CONSEFORH to partner extension agencies

- Establishment of on-farm trials and seed orchards to generate information and demonstrate silvicultural establishment and management techniques.
- Courses, educational tours and training workshops on socio-economic and silvicultural topics for extensionist personnel.
- Workshops and educational tours to motivate and train farmers and community facilitators, using CONSEFORH trials and training facilities.
- Technical assistance, including socio-economic studies, to support field activities and resolve specific problems in seedling production and plantation management programmes.
- Generation and dissemination of the results of the research carried out by CONSEFORH, and provision of information appropriate to the successive stages of a farm forestry programme.
- Access to improved seeds produced by CONSEFORH through Honduran Seed Banks to boost the productivity of farm plantations.

Box 2 Summary of selection criteria used by CONSEFORH with candidate extension agencies

- Current and projected geographical coverage of the agency; number of communities and participating families; target group with available areas for plantations.
- Capacity of the agency to provide follow-up assistance to farming families; anticipated duration of the agency (or of secure finance); available personnel (motivation, experience, and the agency's average staff turnover); available physical resources (budget, vehicles and auxiliary support etc.).
- Use of participatory extension methodologies; use of 'farmer facilitators'; development of gender programmes and effective female participation.
- Local and international recognition; links with other agencies and the ability to work in co-operative networks.
- Clarity of objectives in forest development and agroforestry; development of appropriate technologies; record of effective use of external information and tree seed; achievements in agroforestry and forestry.

Selection of collaborator agencies

At the start-up of the programme, it was considered important to systematically identify potential collaborator agencies in target zones. Based on earlier consultancy work (Kowal, 1994), exploratory visits to about 12 development agencies working in the dry forest zone of Honduras were carried out over a two-month period, and staff were interviewed to gauge organisational attributes and perspectives regarding farm forestry (Box 2). A matrix format listing characteristics was used as a tool to consolidate relevant information obtained during field visits and meetings, and make possible a comparative evaluation of the potential of each agency to carry out farm forestry activities.

Collaboration toolkit

Following the completion of the selection process, four complementary tools were employed to establish and manage the collaborative links:

- *Formal memoranda of understanding*: These covered common objectives and divisions of responsibility and were considered necessary to obtain institutional commitment and define work strategies.
- *Action plans*: The annual collaboration activity cycle was specified in an action plan within a table defining the dates, responsibilities and costs associated with each activity.
- *Formal meetings*: These were held to plan and review activities jointly and to discuss any other related issues.

- *Monitoring system:* A system to monitor the joint activities was designed to cover three areas: formal record-keeping, participatory monitoring of field trials, and annual participatory evaluation events.

COLLABORATION RESULTS

Socio-Economic Development Initiatives Consultancy (CINDES)

Agency

CINDES is a Honduran NGO supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), assisting six medium-scale cashew-nut processing plants established in the late 1980s in the Departments of Choluteca and Valle. Each of these is now under owner-management by women's groups, and they are associated together as the regional Sureñita Cooperative mainly for marketing purposes. As part of an integrated extension approach, CINDES staff provide technical assistance in cashew nut production, sustainable agriculture and farm forestry to farmer groups who were beneficiaries of land reform (the 'reformed sector'), and on whose properties large-scale cashew plantations were established as part of a Honduran government regional programme in the 1970s and 1980s. Raw materials (cashews and fuelwood for processing) are often obtained from land assigned to individual farmers within the area under collective title, or from individually-titled land units. Commonly, male 'reformed sector' farmers are the spouses of the women working in the cashew processing plants, and the women have attained significant socio-economic status as well as a decision-making role unusual in rural Honduras.

Institutional context and zonal characteristics

The Southern zone, located on the Pacific coastal plain, is the poorest region of Honduras, with a high population density (approx. 50 inhabitants per km²). The altitude varies from 0-800 metres above sea level. There is a pronounced dry season lasting six to seven months; the annual average rainfall varies in the region from 1000 to 2500 mm per year. The risks to farm forestry plantations in this zone are significant, especially from drought, pest attack, fire, and poor growth due to soil degradation. In this region there are no institutions providing funds and technical support for reforestation in spite of widespread fuelwood scarcity and watershed/soil degradation.

Collaboration results

Unlike other collaboration agencies, CINDES was the instigator of its collaboration with CONSEFORH and a Memorandum was signed in early 1995. It was rapidly agreed that extension methodology for farm forestry activities should be based on male and female farmer facilitators from participant communities, helping to compensate for low numbers of CINDES field staff.

Through the use of participatory tools, the complementary objectives of the women's cooperatives and the men's land reform groups were defined as increasing the supply of fuelwood, initially for cashew-nut processing and domestic use and, in the longer term, for external sale. Farmer leader facilitators (equally men and women) were the target group for a series of training activities following which, in 1996, programmes of seedling production began in nurseries established by the women's groups (14,000 seedlings produced in 1996 and 20,000 in 1997). Seedlings were used to

establish small woodlots held by the agrarian reform groups. At the same time, four on-farm trials were established to provide information to support species selection for the nursery programme. Even though these initial gains were on a small scale compared to need, participatory workshops revealed significant attitude changes and a meaningful increase in the skills and technical knowledge of facilitators and participating farmers.

In 1997, drought and insect pests arising from the El Niño phenomenon led to problems in the planting and maintenance phase, resulting in lower-than-expected survival rates. This led to socio-economic action research being carried out with farmer groups, facilitated by CINDES, CONSEFORH and CATIE, to examine management options for areas under natural regeneration and fallow. It became apparent that improved fallow and natural resource management were viable lower risk alternatives to farm-forestry plantations. In addition, CINDES suffered funding problems leading to cuts in resources assigned to nursery production and plantation establishment. To try to solve funding problems CINDES prepared and presented a funding proposal to donor agencies in 1997. For these reasons, from 1998 onwards, emphasis shifted to management of natural regeneration, with a high degree of local participation, with facilitators and community leaders responsible for community activity planning.

Comayagua Agrarian Reform Farmer Enterprises Consolidation Project (PROCORAC)

Agency

PROCORAC was a trilateral project set up by the Agriculture and Ranching Secretariat

(SAG), the National Agrarian Institute (INA) and the Government of Holland, which coordinated assistance to more than 50 farmer businesses involved in mixed subsistence and commercial agricultural production. The PROCORAC project ran from 1993 until August 1998, when Dutch external funding was reduced and the project transformed into an NGO called the Foundation for Entrepreneurial Development (FUNDER). PROCORAC contracted the services of the extensionists through two private companies providing technical assistance, with a focus on profitability and the support of small farmer enterprises.

PROCORACs' objectives in farm forestry were strongly influenced by donor agencies, which sought to incorporate an explicit environmental focus within the project. Requests for farm-forestry interventions from the farmer groups assisted by the project also influenced PROCORAC's interest. The forest products and services required by the groups were very varied, with an emphasis on inputs to commercial agriculture, such as tutors for horticulture and fence-posts. In spite of ample funds and personnel resources, the PROCORAC extension approach was relatively traditional, based on the training-and-visit model.

Institutional context and zonal characteristics

The Comayagua valley is the principal feature of the central zone, and is a dry zone at 600 metres above sea-level, surrounded by high mountains. Vegetation in the zone varies greatly, encompassing dry, pine and humid forest. In the valley there is considerable irrigated land while sloping areas suffer from severe soil degradation. Population density is less than that of the southern zone; economic growth is

based mainly on clothing and food processing industries. As one of the most important watersheds in Honduras, feeding a large dam which provides most of the national electricity supply, Comayagua is a priority area for reforestation and sustainable agriculture programmes implemented with high levels of financial incentives.

Collaboration results

The collaboration between CONSEFORH and PROCORAC began at the instigation of CONSEFORH at the beginning of 1995. In 1996, after a series of training events, fieldwork began with twenty farmer enterprises establishing small-scale nurseries and plantations. Three on-farm trials were set up. The scale of initial operations conformed to the motto 'start small', but nevertheless lacked finance and incentives to cover costs. PROCORAC explored the option of farmer enterprises obtaining finance from the formal banking system for plantation establishment, but without special credit lines the anticipated low profitability and long payback period meant this was not feasible.

In 1997, facilitated by CONSEFORH, PROCORAC established links with the Francisco Morazán Dam Watershed Management Project (PROCUENCA) funded by the InterAmerican Development Bank. PROCUENCA's nationally important objective of reforesting priority zones of watersheds feeding into dams justifies its use of high levels of financial incentives. PROCUENCA may cover about 70 percent of the costs of groups or individuals involved in plant production, plantation establishment, maintenance and management. If very efficient nursery producers may even earn a small profit.

The collaborative programme agreed between PROCORAC, CONSEFORH and PROCUENCA resulted in activities with seven farmer enterprises, which produced about 250,000 seedlings to reforest approximately 280 ha. This constituted a large increase over the activities of the first year and demonstrated PROCORAC's capacity to respond to the opportunities provided by incentive programmes. The PROCORAC project served to obtain bank guarantees to support the contracts between the farmer enterprises and PROCUENCA. In 1998 farmer-run model nurseries with a production capacity of up to 300,000 seedlings each were contracted by PROCUENCA in an ambitious programme of forest plantations in which more than 40 farmer enterprises reforested over 500 hectares.

Limitations of the work carried out so far relate to the extension methodologies used. These have produced a tendency on the part of the extensionists working for technical assistance companies and farmer groups to focus on the immediate benefits deriving from incentives. Less attention has been paid to the facilitation of community learning and organisational development processes, which feeds concern that plantations may be managed inadequately.

CARE Diversification and Privatisation of the Community Agroforestry Project (DIPPAC)

Agency

CARE, a renowned international NGO, implemented the Community Agroforestry Project (PACO) from 1992 to 1996 in four departments in the Honduran north and west. In this first phase, activities were directed towards the development and strengthening of farmer associations and sustainable agriculture,

including the establishment of small plantations in blocks and along field boundaries.

Beginning in 1996, the current phase, entitled DIPPAC (Diversification and Privatisation of the Community Agroforestry Project), is jointly implemented by CARE-Honduras, AFE (State Forestry Administration), INA and SAG. In addition to the activities carried out in the earlier phase, DIPPAC has emphasised sustainable natural forest management and non-traditional and export crops diversification. Currently DIPPAC is attempting to gradually privatise technical assistance services, seeking to increase farmer participation through direct contracting of extensionist staff by farmer associations. Elements of its methodology include the application of strict selection criteria regarding the participating communities, a strong emphasis on the training of its staff in extension methods, participatory monitoring, and the use of farmer leaders in local capacity-building technical teams.

Institutional context and zonal characteristics

The western Departments of Santa Barbara, Lempira, Intibuca and Copán encompass dry, humid, pine and cloud forest. This region is one of the most deficient in socio-economic indicators, with a high degree of poverty, geographical isolation, and a lack of infrastructure and basic services.

Collaboration results

The collaboration between CARE-PACO and CONSEFORH lasted from 1994 until 1997, effectively finishing when the DIPPAC project started. During this period CONSEFORH contributed to the technical training of personnel, and led to PACO achieving annual community-nursery production totals of

150,000 seedlings in 1995 and 200,000 in 1996, for use in plantations and agroforestry systems. Four on-farm trials were established and a range of training events contributed strongly to human resource development.

Changes in CARE's priorities between the first phase of the project and the current one brought collaboration activities to an end in 1997, since the technical assistance privatisation plan compelled the farmer groups to focus on short and medium-term high-profit activities, and farm-forestry woodlot establishment was suspended. This was compounded by the absence of national reforestation incentive programmes; the emphasis in DIPPAC therefore shifted to agroforestry systems.

The CONSEFORH-PACO collaboration was also limited by PACO staff transfers from one zone to another, by shifts in operational zones between one phase and the next, and by the cancellation of activities in communities which on-farm trials had been established by CONSEFORH, when these did not fulfil DIPPAC's strict selection criteria. At the same time, CONSEFORH's technical 'menu' became less appropriate for the new DIPPAC phase, in which commercial agriculture and agroforestry systems were promoted at the expense of farm forestry.

DISCUSSION: FACTORS AFFECTING COLLABORATION

This section covers the major factors that have affected the course of collaborative links – in relation to an analysis of the phases of interinstitutional collaboration – and presents observations on the methodologies used.

Extension agency attributes

Organisational characteristics and other factors relevant to the development of collaborative links in the CONSEFORH case are listed below.

Objectives of the agency in relation to the needs of its beneficiaries: It is important for the intermediary agency to define its own objectives before collaboration starts, and that these objectives reflect the felt needs of the community. In the CINDES case, the communities' requirement was specific – fuelwood – and this resulted in clear strategies and local participation focused on problem solving. A high degree of women's involvement as facilitators and in nursery programmes also resulted. The role of an extension agency in representing beneficiary needs was also reflected in the proactive role of CINDES in initiating contacts with CONSEFORH, leading to a collaborative programme that – in spite of funding problems – obtained a high degree of managerial support.

In the other two cases, the requirements of the beneficiaries were very varied and led to a lack of definition and instability in the objectives of the extension agencies. Additionally, in the PROCORAC case, initial objectives responded to donor requirements to incorporate an environmental component in the Project, and were much less linked in to participating farmers' needs.

The type of agency and its extension approach: In the case of CINDES, a local NGO, there was a notably high level of interest amongst all actors in ensuring farmer participation as an integral element in the extension approach. With PROCORAC, a project of limited

duration with far greater donor and government intervention, the emphasis was task-orientated rather than on capacity-building and facilitation of social process. In the CARE case, a further factor at the project level was radical changes in methodologies from one phase to the next, accompanied by substantial shifts in geographical zones and communities assisted.

Agility in accessing incentives and funds: Due to its significant experience in managing financial resources for commercial agriculture, the agility of PROCORAC in taking advantage of the availability of forest incentives through the PROCUENCA project was notable. CINDES also used the institutional collateral of CONSEFORH to present financial proposals to donors to continue to implement farm forestry.

Technology, farmer characteristics and attributes of operating zones

The complexity and risks implicit in woodlot establishment were another limitation in relation to target group characteristics (e.g. small farmers with little formal education, limited access to land resources and other socio-economic limitations). The wide range of skills required for seed collection, nursery production, plantation establishment and management with diverse species over long time horizons, are often well beyond the current community skill and knowledge base and therefore require sustained extension and training programmes – which may also be difficult for extension agencies to ensure in the long-term.

In the CINDES case in southern Honduras, soil degradation and drought risk were the most evident examples of multiple limitations for

farm forestry. These risks were not as severe in the other geographical zones where the partner agencies were active.

With the exception of its natural regeneration work, CONSEFORH's history as a project involved in genetic research and tree seed production, made it difficult for it to offer a 'technological basket' that included a range of agroforestry systems more appropriate to the chosen target groups' limitations and needs.

The low private returns and financial profitability of forestry plantations in comparison with other land-use options was a critical factor limiting participant demand, in the absence of financial or market incentives. In addition, the high demand for labour at the start of the wet season (when nursery stock is to be established in the field) causes competition between agricultural and forest activities that it was not possible to resolve definitively, except through use of financial incentives that compensated farmers for the opportunity cost of taking part in farm forestry activities at a critical time of year.

The absence of effective governmental norms and national policies favouring reforestation has been a serious limitation in all cases. Only with PROCORAC were conditions suitable for a large scale 'take-off' in plantation establishment, owing to the existence of a technical and financial incentive programme, PROCUENCA. However, such incentives are only a partial solution as, in the management and harvesting phases, a series of problems will probably arise due to deficiencies in Honduran government norms and forest policy.

KEY LESSONS

Selection process

Selection of suitable collaborators is clearly fundamental – once initiated, a programme between incompatible agencies will result in wasted time and resource investments. While obvious, this fact may easily become under-appreciated in the initial enthusiasm following contact. Reliable information must therefore be generated during a process of 'institutional familiarisation'. In initial meetings rigorous criteria should be applied by one or preferably both parties, and the attributes of each organisation that might negatively affect collaborative activities over different time scales should be identified.

Right from the initial decision to work together, it is important that draft agreements should be checked internally at all levels of both organisations, and the time, resource and strategy implications of the potential work programme evaluated. Workshops using participatory tools and involving personnel from both organisations are useful to facilitate and widen discussion with staff who would be involved in implementing the collaboration, and to analyse as systematically as possible the advantages and disadvantages of starting a relationship. Such processes also avoid the risks of a decision at the higher managerial level of each organisation leading to obligations being imposed on field staff who do not have in-depth knowledge of the overall agreement. Likewise intra-organisational discussion of the terms of a prospective agreement avoids the adoption of unilateral initiatives by personnel at middle administrative levels that are not supported by management or headquarters.

Box 3 Phases and risks in the cycle of collaboration links**Acquaintance phase (courtship)**

In this phase representatives of the two organisations take part in initial contacts to see if a common interest exists. Meetings are carried out to define 'rules of engagement': these should cover the objectives of the organisations, perceptions of staff, and the definition of community needs that will be met through resource investments in a collaboration programme. Key personalities committed to collaborative activities are identified. One or both organisations may apply formal or informal criteria to the candidate agency to provide input for intra-organisational discussions. Finally, the decision is taken to proceed and the components and time scale of the collaborative programme is defined.

Collaboration agreement (marriage)

In this phase the details of the collaboration and the formality level desired by the two parties are defined. Discussions are focused on the convergence of working methods, definition of degrees of flexibility in resource investments, risk analyses of factors that might affect the performance of the partnership, and the preparation and signature of written agreements, usually in the form of memoranda of understanding.

Initial implementation (honeymoon)

This phase is characterised by a degree of optimism and positive spirit toward the collaboration and a range of activities that enjoy high levels of institutional support. Activities are carried out in accordance with the action plans, and formal and informal mechanisms of communication are developed. This phase is characterised by high degrees of 'mutual learning' often focused on training and farm-level research activities. Differences in operational modes and methodology may emerge, but generally the degree of optimism suppresses concerns and prevents these differences from turning into obstacles; generally little effort is applied to review or overcome deeper differences in methodologies. The quantity of activities compels formal and participatory monitoring systems to be developed. As the relationship progresses, informal contacts become more important at the expense of formal communication.

Maturity and transition (tension; potential for growth or for divorce)

The consolidation of the collaboration is the most difficult phase, and carries the greatest risk. In this phase, after two or three years, the collaboration is taken for granted, and runs the risk of being less well-esteemed than it was at the beginning. There are changes in the personnel responsible for the collaboration as their contracts finish, as well as transfers and the ending of programmes or phases of the agencies involved. The implications of the differences in the philosophy of each organisation start to be evident, as do internal differences in opinion about the collaboration. As a result, institutional priorities can change, leading to lessened managerial support for the collaborative links. Budgetary changes and amendments imposed by donors can reduce the resources available for the collaborative programme, leading to diminished

Box 3 (cont'd)

achievements of the outputs agreed in the annual action plan. Often the resources available to the extension agency are inadequate to satisfy the needs arising from scaling-up operations after the initial pilot stage. During this phase the real impact and the cost/benefit ratios of the technologies promoted are evaluated. Both parties hold internal discussions on the value of the collaboration, make assessments of the cost of investments in links, and its yield in the form of actual benefits obtained in the field. Finally, in this phase new links can emerge with other organisations that are better able to satisfy the needs and current priorities of one or both organisations.

Source: Based on Farrington et al. (1996)

Following these guidelines is likely to take two to three months as, given the normal work in hand, neither organisation is likely to be able to put in the substantial amounts of time required for a quicker decision on the prospective collaborative programme.

Phases of collaboration relationships

An observation based on CONSEFORH's experience is that institutional relations follow a cycle which passes through defined phases (Box 3). Collaboration between organisations is a 'living relationship' in some respects resembling those of humans. This confirms development patterns observed by other analysts (Farrington et al., 1996).

Application of the 'collaboration toolkit'

While a successful collaboration relationship is clearly based on comparative advantage and complementarity between organisational objectives and activities, it is the interactions between the individuals involved that are crucial in making collaboration work on a day-to-day basis, and into the longer term. In consequence, changes in staff assignments can have serious effects on the collaboration.

Thus an important purpose of what could be termed the 'collaboration toolkit', is to facilitate

optimal interactions between individuals of both organisations. Tools employed to manage collaborative links can increase the 'transfer tolerance' – the durability of the collaboration arrangements and their survival after staff changes.

Formal agreements

Why formalise the collaboration? Firstly, a significant degree of formality is desirable because both organisations will have to invest time and resources in the joint activities and therefore will require formal justification for these expenditures if they intend to implement a serious work programme with meaningful results. Secondly, a level of formality compels the organisations involved to produce agreements at a strategic level that ensure that the interests of the organisations are complementary and that mutual confidence can be maintained over different time frames (Alsop et al., 1996).

As collaboration in this mode is voluntary, the most suitable type of agreement is the 'memorandum of understanding'. In the preparation process which follows on from the above-mentioned selection process, common understandings are developed regarding the objectives, responsibilities and

methodologies to be used. For example, extension strategies will be discussed in relation to planned levels of local participation – one of the collaborators may wish to implement a highly participatory strategy, in which case requirements for training, finance and time need to be anticipated. The memorandum demonstrates the serious intent of both parties, so it is appropriate that it should be signed at a high level of management.

Notwithstanding the employment of the selection procedures suggested above, the most serious difficulty with memoranda of understanding is that, as their elaboration normally occurs in the honeymoon phase, they tend to be filed away and forgotten, and then fail to be referred to, modified or updated. One reason for this is that they are usually of indefinite duration. The CONSEFORH experience indicates that memoranda of understanding could instead be fixed for a set term, for example one year. After this time, periodic revisions could be carried out, and the terms and strategies redefined on the basis of the experience acquired during the first period of collaboration, beyond the honeymoon phase.

Coordination meetings

Communication is the key to maintaining active and effective collaboration. Though formal and informal meetings will consume valuable staff time, they are clearly an indispensable means of maintaining contact. This agrees with the conclusions of Farrington et al. (1996) that meetings are arguably the most important dimension of collaborative programmes. The CONSEFORH experience indicates that at the beginning of the collaboration, meetings should be frequent (probably every two or three months), and as the relationship matures they

can occur less frequently, perhaps every three or four months.

Although the basis for intensive interaction, meetings tend to be seen as chores and may be downgraded in priority by each organisation, especially if staff assigned to collaborative programmes are over-burdened with other unrelated tasks. This presents risks: as the organisations begin to take the collaboration for granted or reduce the priority assigned to it, so communication will be affected and in-depth discussion of problems and differences of perspective will be neglected.

At the same time the phenomenon of ‘meeting fatigue’ may develop when meetings are seen as both too frequent and unproductive. Normal democratic tools enabling them to be effective should be employed, such as setting their length beforehand, sending out agendas in advance, compiling minutes with a focus on action points, and defining efficient mechanisms for executing decisions and monitoring agreements.

Action plans

The annual action plan is the basic tool translating general agreements to collaborate into specific sets of tasks. As action plan preparation involves negotiation and scheduling of activities at all levels, it must be participatory, and should include representatives of the farmers and extensionists, usually through planning workshops at the beginning or the end of the year. This timing permits a close link with the presentation and validation of monitoring reports on the activities carried out. These plans cover two complementary areas:

- Setting goals, e.g. areas of plantation to establish, numbers and types of training

courses to set up, the number of families to be involved, etc. In setting its goals the general principle used by CONSEFORH was to ‘start small to grow big’, i.e. applying knowledge at a scale which minimises risks for the farmers as a basis for more ambitious goals to be established later.

- Participatory definition of the activities necessary to fulfil the goals and their systematic ordering within a format describing the activities to be carried out: this kind of format lists the participants, the exact dates assigned to each activity, expenditures and the division of responsibilities among those involved. The detailed programming of activities avoids indecision during implementation. A key point that needs to be stressed is that the staff of both organisations must take the plans seriously and do everything possible to achieve the agreed activities. Therefore the action plan specifies precise dates rather than vague times or open periods for each activity. Once there is slippage in dates and failure to complete planned activities, both parties’ credibility will suffer and lead to a feeling of distrust and a lack of motivation requiring major efforts to reverse. However, action plans can certainly be readjusted in coordination meetings during the year as new circumstances demand. Changes of dates are normal, but should be restricted to a few days or weeks only; activities should only be cancelled if there is adequate justification.

Monitoring systems

Systems to monitor the collaborative activities carried out make it possible to measure their impact, detect problems in the performance of activities in good time, and provide input for

subsequent planning. Normally the system will be based on both participatory and formal elements (records). Each organisation probably applies its own monitoring system, and therefore any system developed subsequently must be compatible with it or develop it further. Annual monitoring and evaluation meetings are very important since these are opportunities to compare planned goals with actual achievements, validate formal monitoring data, discuss aspects of the collaboration in depth and begin planning the next cycle of activities. Such meetings should include participating farmers, extensionists and – to discuss the results of the evaluation – management personnel from both collaborators.

Sequence and logic of tools used

The CONSEFORH experience has shown the value of following an annual cycle that provides a reference framework and helps to psychologically consolidate the collaboration. A cycle provides those involved with a sense of a work routine in which both office and field-based activities are carried out in a logical and sequential manner. CONSEFORH has followed the cycle presented in Table 2 (overleaf) with its collaborators.

Lines of communication

The four tools mentioned that are used to manage collaborative links should open up multiple lines of public communication. However, sole dependence on these tools is insufficient, since unexpected developments and internal changes in either organisation could affect joint activities, so private or semi-private communication is also crucial. This enables sources of problems to be identified early on, and actions defined to resolve them. Organisations involved should name one or

Table 2 Annual sequence of coordination activities

Period	Activity
Year 1: November	Annual participatory evaluation with farmers and extensionists to discuss problems and to check the field results of Year 1 and develop draft action plans for Year 2.
Year 2: January	Meetings with decision-makers to finalise the action plans for Year 2 on the basis of the participatory evaluations of Year 1.
April	Quarterly meeting to monitor the seedling production programmes, combined with field tours to monitor nursery progress.
June/July	Quarterly meeting to monitor plantation activities, with field tours to provide direct support.
October	Quarterly meeting to follow up monitoring records; planning of the evaluation workshops.
November	Annual evaluations with farmers and extensionists to check the results for Year 2 and develop drafts for Year 3 action plans.
Year 3	Repetition of the activity cycle.

two individuals responsible for the collaboration with delegated decision-making authority who communicate frequently via different media. Even during casual contacts important matters can be discussed and a transparent exchange of opinions achieved, which can be more difficult to manage during public meetings. Therefore, the levels of internal democracy, fluency of communication and the culture of participation of the organisations involved are also important factors in enabling effective communication.

Human resource development

The development of skills by extensionists and farmers is the fundamental objective of collaboration, based on an appreciation of indigenous knowledge and capacity for experimentation. An important principle in planning training programmes is the continuity of the participation of the target population (extensionists or leader farmers) in a series of training events, so that the participants benefit

from a continuous increase in knowledge and skills in which, ideally, the same people would attend several events so as to complete an integrated programme of training. Planned activities should follow a development cycle that allows for the training of personnel in an incremental and systematic fashion. Links should be established between the training activities and the immediate tasks to be carried out in the field – for example, training events in nurseries should be held at the end of the calendar year to allow recently-learnt knowledge to be rapidly applied.

However, the systematic participation of trainees is difficult to achieve, since it depends on the internal planning and remuneration systems, workforce stability and the extension methodologies of the development agencies. As noted above in the PROCORAC case, when extension agencies contract out technical assistance services, an emphasis on targets for areas under tree plantations has tended to

dominate, with less attention paid to the training and participation of the farmers. On the other hand, the use of voluntary unpaid farmer-facilitators does not necessarily lead to consistent participation in training events either, especially when these are obliged to cover the opportunity costs of their own participation. As Alsop et al. (1996) noted, “human resource development cannot be divorced from the institutional context in which new/enhanced skills will be acquired and used” and emphasis should be placed on “flexibility...and innovativeness among the staff, and responsiveness more to farmers’ requirements than to top-down organisational imperatives...”.

Farmer participation

The participation of farmers in the extension processes is not automatic, since it depends on the strategies applied by the extension agencies. In most cases systems of accountability to farmer communities were poorly developed. The support agency may seek to influence methodologies used, but it is not easy to achieve optimal results. The tools suggested by CONSEFORH included participatory evaluations of field trials, socio-economic studies using participatory tools, annual evaluations and planning/training workshops involving participating farmers. However the development and use of these tools requires the complete support of the development agency at different levels in its hierarchy.

If the objective is that these participatory tools will become incorporated as elements in the extension agency methodology, then significant time investments should be anticipated and budgeted for beforehand in the action plan. The CONSEFORH experience demonstrated two contrasting participation

patterns. With CINDES, a high level of farmer family participation was achieved in the collaborative programme, although field results to date were on a small scale relative to needs and expectations. In the PROCORAC case, an ambitious programme of activities was implemented, but community participation was restricted to an operative level, and less directed at farmer skill enhancement and community development.

In general the tendency was for the lead on specific participatory activities to be taken by CONSEFORH, with the intermediary agency in a more passive support role, which led to concerns about the sustainability of these methodologies, as these tended to be incompletely ‘owned’ by the partner organisation and, especially in the PROCORAC case, were unlikely to become well-incorporated into their extension approach. The lesson here is that collaborative activities will make new demands on intermediary agencies, and that achieving appropriate farmer participation requires that methodologies must be agreed beforehand and maintained through common understandings.

Organisational development, intervention and tolerance of change

The range of services offered by the support agency needs to adjust and develop to meet the growing needs of the extension agencies. If the development agency requests services beyond the scope of the support agency, it is important that the latter should provide these services by other means whenever possible. This flexibility on the part of the support agency will make collaboration attractive for the extension agency.

A key role is also played by the institutional assistance offered by the support agency, e.g. in supporting the preparation of funding proposals, and in sponsoring links between the intermediary agency and local sources of assistance, incentives or funds. In this way a close relationship can be attained between the needs of the participants, the long-term results of collaboration, and the organisational competence of the development agency in a wider environment. The support agency must avoid viewing itself simply as a provider of technical advice, and be prepared to take on a wider institutional accompaniment role. This itself makes demands on the support agency that may not be easy to fulfil, as occurred in the CONSEFORH case, where local COHDEFOR (Honduran Sustainable Forestry Corporation; counterparts to the DFID assistance personnel) staff were not accustomed to taking on this wider institutional-support role.

The collaboration relationships depend on a continuous overlap of priorities and interests. In the fourth phase of maturation and transition, it is normal for differences between the parties involved to emerge. Collaboration (in the CONSEFORH case) was voluntary, not contractual, and therefore the parties were not obliged to comply with guidelines or strategies specified by the other collaborator. But acceptable intervention mechanisms need to be defined, as both parties are investing resources in the collaboration in the anticipation of specific results.

What action should be taken by a collaborator organisation if the results are not those hoped for? The experience of CONSEFORH indicates the value of refraining from heavy-

handed intervention, and initiating instead a process of reflection concerning different perspectives. This is one of the objectives of the monitoring systems, especially the participatory element of the annual evaluation workshops. Another method is to try to formalise the collaboration through joint redefinition of the collaboration's objectives, by reviewing the collaboration agreements after a one-year initial phase. This enables an evaluation of the objectives and methodologies of each organisation dispassionately once the honeymoon stage of the relationship has passed. Further tools have been described in Farrington et al. (1996).

Any reappraisal of collaboration agreements should be related to the preparation by the extension agency of its own strategy document for forestry-related activities. This process (carried out with the help of the support agency) implies investment of time, but will contribute to forestalling the risk of new farm-forestry activities failing to become properly incorporated into the long-term priorities of the extension agency.

Termination of collaboration agreements

Collaboration has been characterised as a "temporary and changing intersection of means towards different ends" (Alsop et al., 1996). Therefore the end of collaboration relationships is not necessarily a regrettable event, since it is 'natural' for organisations to change and to cease to need external support, or otherwise diverge. A case in point is PROCORAC/FUNDER, which was assisted by CONSEFORH and whose need for direct help has probably diminished as its experience has grown and its links with other organisations have developed.

How to proceed when a collaborative relationship appears to be winding up? As organisations diverge, the trend is for a gradual cooling in relations, the progressive non-fulfilment of joint activities, then a drying-up of communication. The disadvantage of this scenario is that it does not allow for institutional learning – instead the earlier collaborative programme should be ended through a formal evaluation which incorporates discussion of the various factors which affected the collaboration, and defines its achievements and principal lessons as a foundation for future strategies, for the benefit of both organisations.

CONCLUSIONS

To date, experiences in collaboration among organisations have frequently been characterised by the poor fulfilment of plans, worse-than-expected results and the progressive disappointment of the parties involved. The theme of this paper has been that available knowledge – strategies and practical tools – should be applied to develop successful collaborative programmes. In response to the questions posed at the start of this article and on the basis of the experience described, the following conclusions can be highlighted:

1) The key characteristics of the intermediary development agencies were their extension methodology, administrative capacity and agility in accessing sources of funds and incentives. Other significant features related to farmer beneficiary characteristics, and the high-risk attributes of particularly marginal geographical zones in relation to the farm-forestry technologies implemented.

2) Opportunities must be developed to integrate the participation of farmer leaders in monitoring and annual evaluation activities. However the routine participation of farmers in collaborative activities depends on the extension methodology of the intermediary agency, over which the support agency can expect to have limited influence.

3) Careful selection and training of staff responsible for the development of the collaborative links is recommended, as well as paying attention to the phases through which collaborative relationships tend to pass over time – bearing in mind the significant shifts that are likely to occur in the mature phase of institutional relationships. Corrective measures should be applied as soon as difficulties in the relationship appear, if divergences are not to become insuperable.

4) As noted in Alsop et al. (1996), in the long term the most visible effects of collaborative programmes aimed at human resource development should be appreciated at farmer level, manifested as skill acquisition based on indigenous knowledge, experimentation and innovation dissemination. While too early to judge these enduring effects of the CONSEFORH programme, some substantial results have been obtained, if not on the scale dictated by severe forest product/service scarcities in rural dry-zone Honduras.

5) Multiple risks capable of derailing collaborative programmes must be anticipated. The tools for coordination comprise a starting-point for combating these, which can be adapted to other situations. A significant level of formality is recommended between organisations involved in the preparation of

agreements, in the implementation of annual plans and in communication, especially for conducting collaboration programmes concerned with the development of human resources. However, as Farrington et al. (1996) likewise concluded, a 'toolkit' approach is most appropriate in which different techniques can be flexibly drawn upon as needs and circumstances develop. A key requirement in applying tools is the faithful fulfilment of commitments undertaken, in order to maintain the mutual confidence of the organisations and farmer communities involved.

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ACRONYMS		FUNDER	Fundación para el Desarrollo Empresarial <i>(Foundation for Entrepreneurial Development)</i>
AFE	Administración Forestal del Estado <i>(State Forestry Administration)</i>		
CATIE	Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza <i>(Tropical Agriculture Research and Training Centre)</i>	IICA	Instituto Interamericano de Cooperación Agrícola <i>(Interamerican Institute for Agricultural Co-operation)</i>
CIEF	Centro de Investigación y Estadística Forestal <i>(Forest Research and Statistics Centre)</i>	INA	Instituto Nacional Agrario <i>(National Agrarian Institute)</i>
CINDES	Consultora para Iniciativas de Desarrollo Socioeconómico <i>(Socio-Economic Development Initiatives Consultancy)</i>	NGO	non-governmental organisations
COHDEFOR	Corporación Hondureña de Desarrollo Forestal (Honduran Sustainable Forestry Corporation)	PACO	Proyecto Agroforestal Comunitario <i>(Community Agroforestry Project)</i>
CONSEFORH	Proyecto de Conservación y Silvicultura de Especies Forestales de Honduras (Honduran Dry Forest Species Conservation and Silviculture Project)	PROCORAC	Proyecto de Consolidación de Empresas del Sector Reformado <i>(Comayagua Agrarian Reform Farmer Enterprises Consolidation Project)</i>
DfID	Department for International Development	PROCUENCA	Proyecto de Manejo de la Cuenca del Embalse Francisco Morazán <i>(Francisco Morazán Dam Watershed Management Project)</i>
DIPPAC	CARE Diversificación y Privatización del Proyecto Agroforestal Comunitario <i>(CARE Diversification and Privatisation of the Community Agroforestry Project)</i>	SAG	Secretaría de Agricultura y Ganadería <i>(Agriculture and Ranching Secretariat)</i>

Please send comments on this paper to:

Rural Development Forestry Network
Overseas Development Institute
Portland House
Stag Place
London SW1E 5DP
United Kingdom
Email: forestry@odi.org.uk

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Rural Development Forestry Network
Overseas Development Institute
Portland House
Stag Place
London SW1E 5DP

Tel: +44 (0) 171 393 1600

Fax: +44 (0) 171 393 1699

Email: forestry@odi.org.uk

Website: www.oneworld.org/odi/

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