

**COMMUNITY FORESTRY AND FOREST POLICY
IN ETHIOPIA:
Some Preliminary Thoughts**

Martin E. Adams

Introduction

This paper emerges from a brief desk study prior to a three-month assignment in Ethiopia in order to appraise a rural development programme with a large soil conservation and social forestry component. A number of general papers on Social Forestry (SF) were reviewed, including those of the ODI Network. In addition, relevant World Bank, FAO and SIDA reports were skimmed. The outcome of the desk study is a checklist for appraising SF programmes and a brief review of Ethiopian forest policy emerging from the official documents. The paper inevitably raises more questions than it answers.

Background

It is estimated that Ethiopia's closed canopy forest cover has fallen from 40% to 3% of the land area since the beginning of this century. In no other country in Africa is the impact of deforestation more severe. Over 90% of its annual energy supply comes from biomass, but only one third (about 9 million tonnes) from fuelwood and charcoal. Annual demand for wood is estimated at about twice this quantity. Prices of wood fuel in the Capital are probably the highest in Africa, approaching US\$ 40m, a third of average per capita GNP. In the highlands, where 90% of Ethiopia's population lives, minimum temperatures are 3-5°C and frost is common in the winter at altitudes above 2,600m. As fuelwood becomes more scarce, animal dung and crop residues necessarily make up an increasing proportion of energy, with devastating effects on the organic matter content of cultivated soils (decreased water-holding capacity and nutrient status and increased erodibility). Reliance on dung and crop residues for fuel increases the vulnerability of the poor in drought years.

Deforestation in Ethiopia has been recognized as a major problem for decades. One hundred years ago the now ubiquitous eucalypts were introduced under Menelik II. Prior to the revolution (1974/75), the majority of plantations were established on private land in the vicinity of towns for commercial exploitation. In total, these covered about 200,000 ha, an area approximately equivalent to the annual incursions into the remaining natural forest, of which only about 3 million ha remain. Immediately prior to the Revolution, the State Forest Development Authority had yet to make any

significant impact. Little more than 100,000 ha had been reserved and the authority was having an uphill struggle preventing the expansion of private land into the reserved area. Under Haile Selassie, the provincial governors were personally appointed and forest exploitation was in their gift.

The literature makes no mention of tree planting by peasants. Under the feudal land tenure pattern, widespread tree planting by share croppers was unlikely. Tenants had no protection from arbitrary eviction and received no compensation for improvements made. Peasants were no doubt aware of the benefits of tree planting. This was evident from the clusters of trees around scattered homesteads in Arssi Region in 1985, although villagisation will probably have removed both houses and timber by now.

On the face of it the dramatic changes introduced by Ethiopia's new leaders in 1975 bode well for community forestry, in particular the establishment of participative, local-level, peasant and urban dweller associations (PAs and UDAs) with responsibility for political and economic affairs. The 1975 land reform abolished without further compensation all land ownership, from the largest to the smallest holding, making all land the collective property of the Ethiopian people. In addition, the law stated that no compensation would be paid for any forest or tree crop on such land.

In order to overcome the lack of an administrative presence in the countryside, the revolutionary authorities required the formation of PAs on the basis of 800 ha units (200 to 400 families). Each PA was charged with administering the expropriation and redistribution of land in their jurisdiction. This included the preservation of forest property. To some extent the proclamation merely legalized events which had already taken place as peasants seized land and forests from landlords.

After the Revolution, the ambiguous position of the State Forests Authority (then called the Forest and Wildlife Conservation and Development Authority - FaWCDA) continued in the countryside. The proclamation by which PAs and UDAs were established did not give the necessary authority to the FaWCDA to control the forests which were nominally in its care. An order instructing the authority to take over all forest areas larger than 80 ha was not recognized by the new regional administrations or the PAs because it was not issued as a legal regulation. Although in theory no one was allowed to cut or remove a tree without permission, forests remained a free good to be used and abused as individual PAs thought fit. This situation was addressed by the Forestry Proclamation of 1980, under which the Natural Resources Department of the Ministry of Agriculture was made responsible for ensuring proper protection, rational utilisation and management of forest and wildlife resources. Each PA and UDA is now required to develop and conserve its own forests and to plant trees within its locality in areas designated as forest reserve. However, effective control remains with the 20,000 or more PAs and UDAs and the destruction of the forest and plantations is reported to be continuing.

Government Policy and Institutions

Ethiopia's Development Plan sets a target of 2.9 million ha of plantation (66 ha per daylight hour!) over the 10 year plan period. Investments would represent about 5% of the total planned outlays.

The targets require a six-fold increase in current performance (46,000 ha planted in 1984). The strategy for forestry development is simply stated, the establishment of peri-urban woodfuel plantations for the towns and the development of woodlots and agroforestry practices on a massive scale in the rural areas. Priority is to be given to planting land threatened by erosion. Thus, there is a dual objective - fuelwood production and soil and water conservation.

The planning perspective of government and donors (but not, as yet, the peasants) has been influenced by the FAO Ethiopian Highlands Reclamation Study (1983-85), which defined a 'conservation-based development strategy'. This recognized the futility of conservation measures in isolation. Tree planting and terrace and bund construction on steep slopes would be of lasting benefit only if they were accompanied by improved agricultural practices (so-called biological or vegetative measures) and population control. Further, planners realized that people on the brink of starvation could not be expected to subordinate their acute short-term needs for the possibility of long-term benefits. Hence, the need for food security (basically food-for-work) and involvement of the peasants in planning. For once there appears to have been a genuine effort to make this more than a cliché. An initiative by OXFAM in late 1984 to develop a participative method focussed on service cooperatives has caught the imagination of some major donors. (On average four PAs comprise a service cooperative, the main vehicle for extension, input supply and retailing in Socialist Ethiopia.)

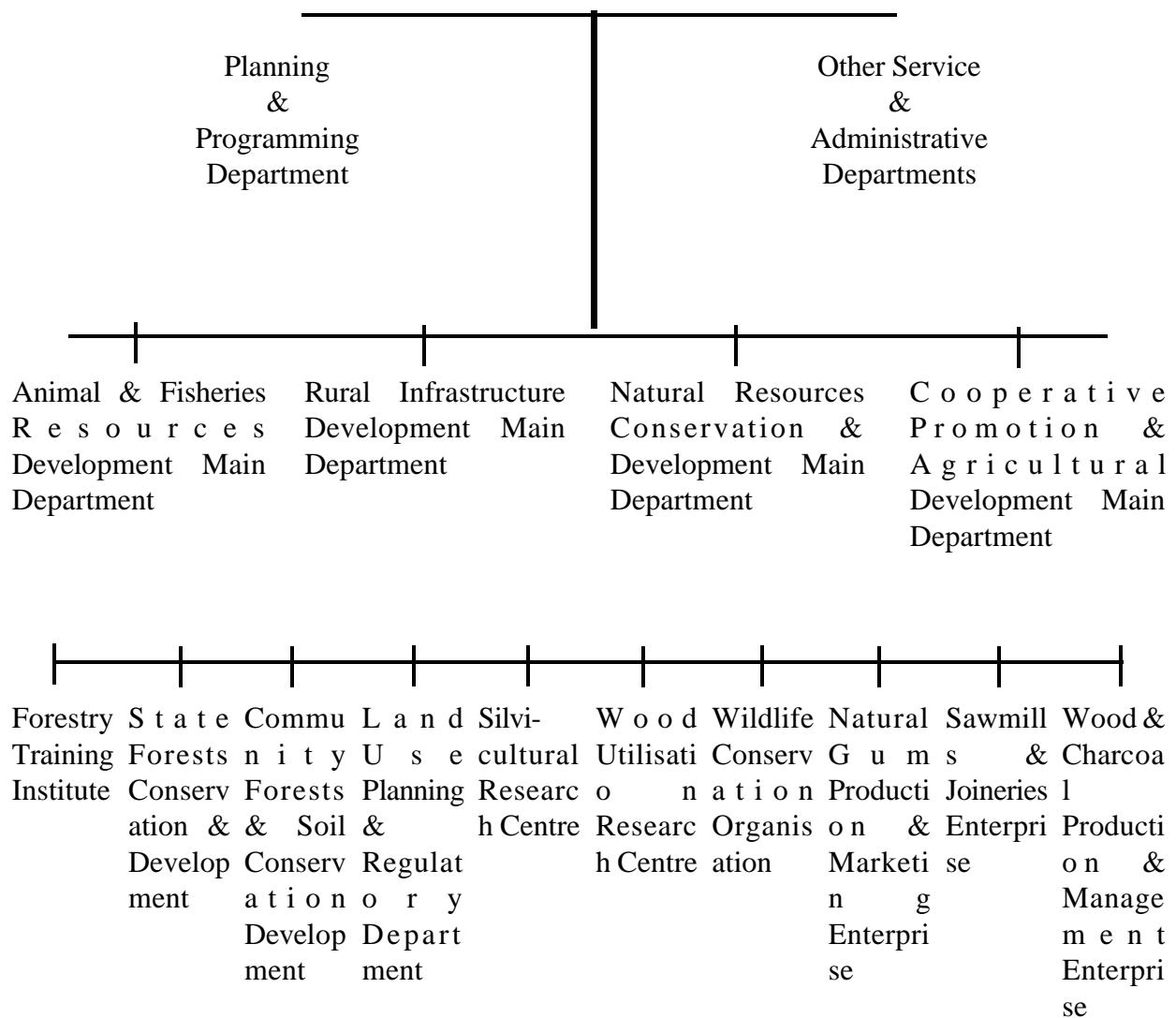
In 1984, the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) divided the country into eight agro-ecological zones for the purpose of launching a comprehensive agricultural development effort, codenamed PADEP (**P**easant **A**gricultural **D**evelopment **P**rogramme).

The administration in each zone is headed by a general manager and contains representatives for all four main departments of the central ministry (see Figure), which retains responsibility for policy, approval of work plans and budgets and planning. The Natural Resources Main Department (NRMD) is responsible for forestry and soil conservation. It is divided into five departments (each represented at zonal level), three semi-autonomous agencies and a number of service units. Currently there are about 160 graduate foresters and 400 diplomats. The NRMD has inherited thousands of forest guards and other field workers, many of whom live off the forest which they are employed to protect.

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

present organisation

Office of Minister



Staff of the State Forest Conservation and Development Department (SFD - formerly FaWCDA) are responsible for demarcating, conserving and managing designated state forests. As the parent organisation for forestry in the country, SFD foresters have been increasingly directed by local political authorities to provide advice and material for numerous local tree-planting initiatives, many of which are unplanned and therefore unbudgeted. This work is in addition to their routine responsibilities for state forests. The personnel in the new department of Community Forestry and Soil Conservation have been drawn from the former Soil and Water Conservation Department (SWCD) of the Ministry of Agriculture and as such they tend to emphasize conservation rather than fuelwood production. The significance of this difference in emphasis can be illustrated by experience obtained on a pilot project in the Borkana Catchment, Wello Region.

One of the major activities of this rehabilitation project (1982-85) was to provide ground cover on the steep mountain slopes and thereby reduce erosion. Reforestation and hillside closure were the means to achieve this objective. In addition it was planned that these areas would supply fuelwood, poles and forage. Both the SWCD and FaWCDA have been involved in reforesting extensive mountain areas formerly used for communal grazing. While the SWCD passed the responsibility for the maintenance of the area to the PAs, the FaWCDA maintained that all areas afforested with food-for-work labour belonged to the Government. In other instances it intended to control trees until they were mature so as to avoid indiscriminate felling.

The Borkana experience also reminded foresters that Eucalyptus is often unsuitable for rehabilitating mountain slopes. The conditions in the catchment range from cool, wet highland to hot, dry lowland and careful choice of species is important. However, either due to lack of planting material or imagination, the same species were planted over an altitudinal range of 1200 meters using the same silvicultural techniques. Not surprisingly, survival rates of trees beyond three years at the lower altitudes were very disappointing. Terracing and reforestation required an average of 350 person days of food per hectare. SWCD staff turned to hillside closure as an alternative means of encouraging regeneration (based on consent rather than fencing). After two years, the revegetation was very impressive, but peasants were not enthusiastic in the absence of an acceptable group plan to manage the resource thus created. They saw enclosure as a threat to their grazing rights. In one instance, grass was cut and carried by compulsory work parties and distributed by the PA executive to their favourites.

Issues to be Resolved

In the absence of information about successful models of participative planning and implementation of community forestry projects, it is necessary to be cautious about predicting the

outcome of the spate of donor assisted tree planting projects. So far uncertainty as to who benefits from soil conservation, reforestation and hillside closure has stifled popular involvement. The World Bank, which is in the process of negotiating a US\$ 43.0 mil loan to the NRMD, a major portion of which is for community forestry, recognizes the difficulty. It observes that since community forestry is basically untested, several models should be tried with the intention of concentrating on the most successful model during later years of the project. The results of the experiments with cooperative-level planning are awaited with interest. It is vital for Ethiopia that some solutions are worked out and a great deal of thought must be given to devising and testing alternative issues. One thing is reasonably clear and that is the prospect for agroforestry on peasant farms. Households have users rights to the plots they occupy but may be moved if the PA redistributes the land to accommodate more members or a producer cooperative. While families are reasonably secure in the knowledge that they will be allocated some farm land by their PA, there is considerable uncertainty about how long they will be allowed to stay. In the circumstances perennial species are unlikely to feature in the farming system.

This points to another overriding issue, the need to be more careful in defining the purpose for which trees are to be planted. Multiple objectives might be difficult to achieve. The community is expected to participate in four types of tree planting: conservation forestry on eroded slopes; community woodlots for firewood, poles and browse; agroforestry on individual farms and producer cooperatives; and peri-urban forestry for fuel and poles. Species, silviculture, site selection, labour for planting and maintenance and tenurial arrangements probably need to be carefully specified in each case.

CHECKLIST FOR APPRAISING SOCIAL FORESTRY PROGRAMMES

A. VILLAGE RESOURCES

1. Land

Availability of cultivable, cultivated and non-cultivable land; irrigation sources and supply potential; local nomenclature for different types of land and plant associations; length of fallow on different land types; grazing and browsing resources; type and number of animals; seasonal occupancy of pastures.

2. Energy Supply and Demand

- a. **Local Resources:** reserves of firewood; preferred and available plant species; use of lower grade fuels (straw, crop stalks, animal dung); access to and availability of different fuel types (seasonality, distance travelled); trees planted and/or protected for special purposes; major factors limiting the supply of these species.
- b. **Local Demand:** fuel consumption of different income groups for heating, cooking, lighting; efficiency of local heating and cooking technology; inequalities of fuel-related work, access, etc. within the household and the village; use of fuel by local crafts (e.g. brick making, ceramics, etc.).
- c. **Local Trade:** type and quantity of fuel traded; costs and returns; organisation of the trade and type and number employed; imported and exported fuel and timber resources by type and value.

3. Construction

Local supply and demand for building material; timber for poles, furniture, tools, etc; preferred species; prices.

B. SOCIO-POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONING

1. Village Level Institutions

Authority structures; relative weight of local and state power; are socio-political conditions stable? Assess the potential of local institutions (local government, field ministries, schools, church groups, women groups, clubs, etc.) for participation in tree planting.

2. Land Rights

Are rights to cultivate, to gather, to graze, etc. relatively secure and clearly defined? In the event of changes in primary rights, have secondary user-rights survived? What are the implications for tree planting? What rights are retained by those who plant trees? Are people clear about their rights? How important are CPRs (traditional or recently established by government decree)? What are the rules and how well do they operate? Does state sponsorship of local politicians undermine or threaten group use of CPRs?

3. Government Institutions

Where does responsibility for social forestry lie (State Forests/Forestry Dept, Agriculture, Social Services, Local Government)? Extension system: extension methods, links between forestry and agricultural field staff, arrangements for training or retraining foresters and field personnel; planning, monitoring and evaluation; budgetary resources; links with NGOs.

C. EVALUATION OF CURRENT PROGRAMME/PILOT PROJECTS

Objectives; means of achieving objectives; results.

Assessment

Did the community participate in programme design? How? Were women actively involved in the process and how did this influence the design adopted?

What was the purpose of the tree planting (fuel, poles, slope protection, etc.). Did the people want to plant trees? Were they coerced? What part did food-for-work play in motivating workers? What was the people's understanding of their future rights to the trees? Was there a group plan for distribution of the produce?

Was the planting on common land? How did the plantation impinge on land use by existing right holders? Was tree-planting at the expense of other forms of land use?

What is the history of relations with forestry staff: before the project, during the project, now? Were foresters specially trained for the working with villagers? What extension methods were used?

Were arrangements made for protection and maintenance? How did they work out?

Did labour requirements for tree planting conflict with agricultural work?

What did people think of the silvicultural methods? What improvements do they propose (species selection, nursery techniques, quantity and quality of seedlings, etc.)?

Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation, follow up, etc.

**Martin Adams
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