

# SOCIAL FORESTRY APPROACH TO COMMUNITY-BASED FORESTRY

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## ABSTRACT

Rural American forest-based communities are used as the context for an analysis of the Ford Foundation's Community-based Forestry (CBF) Initiative. CBF is premised upon empowering local residents to participate in decisions about how local forest resources are managed, used, and preserved. Through community action with local forest management strategies, important cultural and social structures are maintained and enhanced. Here, a community approach is framed and used to synthesize the first several years' work with the Ford Initiative communities.

## FORESTS AND COMMUNITIES

Forests cover nearly 25% of the earth's habitable surface. It is not surprising that they have played a central role in the development of numerous economies and cultures. However, their value and use has continuously been contested, reconstituted, and revised in disputes that have increased in scale, scope, and vitriol over time. The impact of debates over forest use and value has been felt most in rural communities, where social norms, cultural rituals, and economic livelihoods related to the forest are commonly found.

Many of those living in forest environments believe that they have the ability and right to participate in the decision-making processes associated with local forests. This paper focuses on the roles of local citizens, their involvement in decision-making, and their interactions with the forest. It parallels the emergence of community-based forestry (CBF), an increasingly popular concept. CBF is premised upon empowering local residents to participate in decisions about how local forest resources are managed, used, and preserved. Individuals that live near natural resources often share a firm commitment to sustaining their local environmental resources, while maintaining appropriate economic opportunities (Jungwirth, 2001). By acting in this manner, local people are often able to preserve more than their jobs. It is through such community action that important cultural and social structures are maintained and enhanced.

This paper introduces American community forestry as the context for the Ford Foundation's Community-based Forestry Initiative. A community approach is framed and used to synthesize the first several years' work with Ford Initiative communities.

Surprisingly little concretely applied work has been accomplished that examines the dynamics of CBF in advanced economies (Brendler and Carey, 1998). Largely because CBF in the United States is in its relative infancy, cues regarding its efficacy and successes are obtained from the experiences of nations of the south (cf. Gauld, 2000; Gray, Enzer, and Kusel, 2001; Pardo, 1985; 1993; 1995). A framework for understanding the complex issues involved in its use in the United States is vital to assess its utility for natural resource planning.

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The extant CBF literature identifies a number of important, normative features of model programs. For example, Brendler and Carey (1998:21) suggested that processes such as access, participatory management, and forest restoration were essential. Pardo (1995:23) stressed the presence of an identifiable community and area, a strong commitment from central government, a universally accepted set of management objectives, and a means of monitoring management. While each of these elements play a role in CBF, not all are easily achieved by communities.

Future research must specify some of the issues associated with their achievement, especially in the context of the United States. This will require systematic evaluative studies of CBF programs, including a focus on their impact on communities, regions, and ecosystems. Central to this effort is the need for a delineation of the context in which CBF occurs. We provide such a framework in the next section.

## A COMMUNITY APPROACH TO COMMUNITY-BASED FORESTRY

A community framework drives our approach to CBF. We believe community emerges through concerted actions of locals who are tied to a place by their shared values and actions. Only in such places can a commitment to CBF—or more importantly, *community-based anything*—occur.

Such a definition is drawn from the work of Kaufman (1959) and Wilkinson (1970, 1991) who developed the interactional conception of community. According to this framework, where there is common space, shared way of life, and collective actions, local citizens are able to overcome petty differences and special interests to recognize the common good. Community emerges when the conditions are right and lasts as long as the people in an area care about each other and the place, and act to enhance general well-being (Luloff, 1998).

The mobilization of locality-based, collective human resources is the signal characteristic of place and is vital to explaining what makes a place a community (Luloff, 1998; Luloff and Swanson, 1995). The will to act collectively comes from recognizing shared needs and concerns.

## THE FORD COMMUNITY-BASED FORESTRY INITIATIVE

The Ford Foundation initiated a Community-based Forestry Demonstration Program in 1999 to address a wide array of issues in forest-dependent communities characterized by high poverty rates. Their undertaking was guided by the question of whether community-based forestry was an effective and sustainable strategy for forest restoration and conservation, community strengthening, and poverty alleviation. The major goal of the Ford project was to foster accelerated diffusion of best-practice strategies for forest and other forest-related resource management, while engaging local communities in the decision-making process.

The Ford program includes twelve community-based organizations involved in local natural resource management and

economic development (Table 1). The monitoring and assessment approach designed for this project was premised on case studies in each community. Participation with each community included regularly scheduled interviews with the implementing partner (i.e., project principals), interviews with a cross-section of community participants, review of relevant local or state documents, and analysis of all written project documents (e.g., proposal, project reports, and the like).

Our monitoring and assessment project for Ford was premised on the theory of community agency and the belief that successful models for CBF in the United States, or elsewhere, will present elements of commitment to place and the ability to make decisions and pursue actions that will lead to an outward, shared concern for community. To establish the context for each project, the monitoring and assessment protocol depended on a set of key informant interviews (Luloff, 1999) with at-large stakeholders in each community. Doing this facilitated out gaining an understanding of community wide perceptions of CBFs potential strengths and weaknesses.

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM THE CBF EFFORT

Key Informant interviews were undertaken in participating CBF Project communities. The Ford Project is largely centered on organizations, but key informants spoke mostly to the communities in which the organizations were based. Evaluating how well CBF efforts resonated with communities required a place-based analytical approach. Consequently, this analysis refers to Ford Project sites rather than organizations. Nine Ford Project sites had data accessible for analysis including: Silver City, NM; Epes, AL; Neah Bay, WA; North Quabbin region, MA; Trimble, OH; Southwestern OR; Wallowa, OR; Hayfork, CA; and Addison Co., VT.

Five themes emerged from a cross-site analysis: 1) The extent or reach of CBF efforts depended upon the development scope of community; 2) Different strategies of CBF illustrated diverse options; 3) Controversy, conflict, and power struggles inherent in communities transferred to CBF efforts; 4) Quality of life was perceived as largely non-economic and strongly tied to local natural resources and sense of community; and 5) The relative isolation or independence of a community was either an asset or a liability for CBF.

Table 1.—Ford Initiative Organizations, locations, and goals.

Organization	Place	Goals
Alliance of Forest Workers and Harvesters	Pacific Northwest	1) marketing non-timber forest products 2) conflict resolution 3) harvester education and certification 4) teaching English as second language
Jobs and Biodiversity	Silver City (Grant Co), New Mexico	1) forest restoration and ecological integrity 2) jobs and active participation in community
Delta Montrose Ouray Public Lands Partnerships	Western Colorado	1) adding value to ranch operations 2) mule deer habitat restoration 3) recognition & marketing for indigenous products 4) cowboy-logger demonstration project
Federation of Southern Cooperatives	Epes (Sumter Co), Alabama	1) education 2) technical assistance 3) entrepreneurship 4) demonstration
Makah Tribal Council	Neah Bay, Washington	1) healthy, productive forests for future generations 2) develop non-timber forest resources
New England Forestry Foundation	North Quabbin Region, Massachusetts	1) small landowner certification, chain of custody and marketing 2) training in recreation services 3) selling shared pride in community and products
Penn Center Incorporated	Island communities, Georgia & South Carolina	1) revitalization strategies 2) developing a forest products sector 3) id and promote sectoral networks for community conservation and forest products and markets
Rural Action	Trimble, Ohio	1) NTFP production and marketing 2) forest restoration
Sustainable Northwest	Southwestern Oregon	1) build local capacity 2) use media to create brand name 3) third-party certification 4) technical assistance 5) working partnerships among communities
Wallowa Enterprises	Wallowa, Oregon	1) improve forest ecosystems 2) generate sustainable local benefits from resources
Watershed Research and Training Center	Hayfork, California	1) log sorting yard for small diameter timber 2) create a value-added forest products center for training and business incubation 3) secondary manufacturing and forest restoration business development
Working Forests for Vermont Working Families	Addison County, Vermont	1) implement sustainable forestry practices to generate income 2) develop green certified products 3) management cooperative to benefit low-income members

## Reach of CBF Depends on Development Scope

A natural resources base was the major local economic contributor for most sites. Some of the organizational initiatives focused predominantly on their natural resource base, particularly forests, for economic development. Other communities were actively pursuing opportunities in manufacturing to complement, or in some cases replace, their natural resource interests.

The implications and reach of CBF efforts on community well-being depended upon the scope of such endeavors. Where CBF was a dominant enterprise, communities had higher expectations and aspirations for its role in addressing community problems. In communities with multiple development agendas, CBF played a lesser role in terms of expectations and exposure.

For example, forestry has always played a significant role in the life of Hayfork, California. Efforts by WRTC to use and restore forests in new, creative ways were expected to have wide reaching implications for local communities including enhanced employment opportunities, efforts at fire reduction and restoration, and work to improve area amenities while contributing to a good quality of life. A response from Hayfork sums up this sentiment: "I would like to see a thriving business incubator that spins off meaningful, relatively well-paying jobs. I want to see a healthier landscape that resists fire and is in a state of recovery.... A happy healthy valley."

Silver City, New Mexico, on the other hand, has been historically a mining-based community. There, CBF is only one of multiple initiatives embraced to generate and diversify economic development. As such, the scope of CBF activities and the expectations for affecting overall community well-being were, to some degree, tempered, especially in comparison with other Ford project communities. Epes, southwest Oregon, and Addison also shared an interest in a diversity of economic development aspirations. This statement from southwest Oregon helps clarify their interests in diversification: "Higher unemployment, lack of local per capita income to keep pace with national levels in the efforts to continue to diversify the economy (as a natural resource based economy is the first into recession and the last out of the recession traditionally). Now they want to really diversify to a more mixed base so this problem doesn't occur anymore."

## Strategies and Visions for CBF

CBF endeavors pursued in the Ford sites varied significantly in the strategy and the nature of forestry emphasis. There were commonalities across the sites regarding the importance of stewardship in using and managing natural resources. The following quote from Addison reflects this underlying sentiment: "Those who live here have a connection to the land. Most people understand stewardship as a concept of balance."

Most of the Ford sites practice traditional extractive timber harvesting, but there is considerable diversification within the forestry initiatives of a number of sites. Moreover, a shift beyond traditional large-scale timber harvesting was a central component to many community-based efforts. Changes in national forest policy have had tremendous effects on local economies, such as closed mills and the loss of many timber related jobs. Communities have sought creative alternatives to traditional large scale timber harvesting—the CBF initiatives addressed in this study reflect this. The complexity and challenge of change is captured nicely in this quote from Wallowa: "Natural resource based economies are going to change. This requires change in attitudes by natives, immigrants, and retirees. Lots of possible solutions exist, but none is likely to have broad based support."

Some sites have shifted their emphasis to smaller diameter timber harvesting, in part reflecting an interest in fire reduction or forest restoration. Concerns over forest health and fire risk in SW Oregon

provided incentives for new forest management: "The forest is in serious danger of catastrophic fire. There is too much forest in poor condition. It will burn or decay."

In Addison, Silver City, and southwest Oregon there was interest in pursuing value-added timber products as an extension of timber harvesting. Non-timber forest products are being harvested and marketed in Trimble and are under consideration in Epes and Neah Bay. Creative strategies are being pursued as indicated in the following quote from Trimble: "Future opportunities are in natural resources generated, especially non-forest timber products. The fact that these are labor intensive is a plus. This fits with the nature of the people who express an interest in defining their own employment patters, freedom to work when they want." There are difficulties with non-traditional forest product marketing, however, as indicated by a Silver City respondent: "New Mexico is like a third world country: it extracts and exports. It's hard to achieve vertical integration and move to value-added production." Five of the sites are interested in diversifying into non-forest product enterprises such as ecotourism and alternative natural resource products.

There was a common concern with providing opportunities for retaining a workforce. A number of communities viewed training as an integral part of CBF efforts, especially in the pursuit of harvesting and marketing alternative forest products and ecotourism. A respondent from Neah Bay stated the following regarding the need for training: "Members of the community need training in the use and harvesting of alternative forest products, especially sustainable harvesting. To market the products they have to understand the market demands and packaging. Most importantly, they have to find more outside buyers."

## Controversy and Conflict

The above strategies have not been met with unbridled support. All sites find themselves enmeshed in some sort of controversy. Among other things, community conflicts have emerged from racial tensions, clashing development philosophies, and land use and access issues. These conflicts overlap into CBF and clearly affect strategy formation and implementation.

Controversies relating issues of growth and development were found in six sites and often spilled over into decisions about ecotourism. There was an antidevelopment perspective in the north Quabbin area: "The major concern of people I am working with is they see a wave of suburbanization. This will change the community drastically. Most are concerned about building capacity of local residents so they value what they have and are willing to preserve a sense of community. I'm nervous about large-scale ecotourism. This will accelerate the development rush. It is visible."

However, most of the community initiatives have stayed outside of the view of national environmental groups. Neah Bay is the exception. The Makah's recent whaling activities drew national attention. There have been heated controversies and clashes with local environmental groups in other sites. The following statement describes the implications of environmental conflict in Silver City: "We are in the middle of a flash ground where economic development and environmental misuse occurs. This has led to two big issues. One, lots of money is being spent here to fight both loggers and ranchers versus environmentalists. Some towns are okaying carrying guns to hip (Catron County). They won't stand for outsiders coming in and telling them what to do. Two, CODC is in the middle with its Terra del Sol project. Environmentalists won't let them clean up the damaged wood. It is simply not perceived as being possible by environmentalists to use economic development and environmental use here."

A majority of sites are dealing with racial and ethnic issues that present tenuous circumstances for economic development and

collective community action. "There is no trust along racial lines. There is no real interaction between the races other than at work" (from Epes).

### Quality of Life

Problematic themes across the sites, including local levels of poverty and unemployment, and insufficient infrastructure and social/community services, reoccurred throughout the interviews. Poverty and unemployment were present in all nine sites. In Addison, lower income populations have been marginalized and were often outside the scope of most key informants' perspective. A north Quabbin informant lamented their community's inability to find economic opportunity and described it as a place that "always misses the boat, even when the boat is in."

Despite the recurring themes of poverty and its ancillary ills, respondents from almost all of the sites referred to a high local quality of life. This quote from Hayfork describes the distinction between quality of life and economic condition: "Quality of life in the area is pretty high if you put the unemployment aside. The cultural aspects of life outweigh all that. Things have gotten worse but there are lots of things about the quality of life that are priceless."

Natural beauty and recreational resources were commonly cited reasons for high quality of life. Many sites had an abundance of community services, some of which emerged as a result of organizational efforts during the last decade. Almost all of the sites had a noticeably strong sense of place and community, which clearly contributed to local quality of life. The respondents often referred to ties between community residents, especially when times were tough. Such an emergence of community provides a fruitful base upon which CBF could develop.

### Relative Isolation and Independence

The majority of sites were either dependent upon other places and/or served as bedroom communities for other locations. Others were either isolated or relatively independent of outside areas. The level of dependency has had varying effects on the sites themselves. In some cases, the dependency of a site on outside communities was seen negatively—as inhibiting economic development and/or sense of community. In other sites, the relationship and interdependence with other places was seen as an asset. In the more independent or isolated sites, respondents saw their isolation as a problem, whereas in Silver City this issue was less of a problem.

On the basis of the data from these organizations and communities, it was evident that no clear relationship between isolation and community and economic development, much less CBF, existed. The contextual factors in each setting appeared to play a significant role in determining the relative effects of isolation or dependence.

### DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

*"(CBF) bridges community and agency, bringing folks together to find solutions."*

This quote from Wallowa, Oregon, illustrates a key finding from our analysis of CBF using examples from the Ford Initiative. Despite variations in scope, strategy, geographic location, and inner tensions, CBF efforts were seen more positively and as more likely to succeed in communities where people, from different and often competing perspectives, came together to address community problems.

In addition, despite different agendas and strategies for CBF, there was common attachment to the ideal of stewardship. Natural resources, especially forests, played important roles in these communities and regions. This was important for economic development, quality of life, and community identity. CBF efforts which embraced the important connections between economic, social, and aesthetic values of natural resources were more likely to be successful.

Ultimately, we believe that the principles expressed in the theory of community agency will lead to successful implementation of CBF in the United States and may serve to predict those Implementing Partners in the Ford Initiative that are most likely to achieve measurable results over the five-year duration of the project.

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