



The Resilient Politics of Community Forestry

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Introduction

“While not all community forestry systems will persist, none will be fruitless unless we fail to reap the lessons from their demise.” (Duinker, 1994).

I worked in Community Forestry (CF) for twenty-five years (1984-2009), specifically in policy analysis, programme and project design, research, and evaluation. I understand now that fate had positioned me, with many others, at the visioning phase of CF. I travelled to over thirty countries, met thousands of amazing people, drank copious amounts of tea and listened deeply to a range of diverse community forestry narratives. It was an exciting time but the narratives raised a number of perplexed questions:

- How did CF manage to grow and thrive in a neoliberal environment?
- Is CF a form of neoliberal ‘social washing’?
- What is the political history of CF?
- What role is CF playing in the globalization project?

In 2008 I returned to school to explore these kinds of questions. Now, at the thesis proposal stage, I have chosen to engage in conversations with other practitioners by presenting the beginnings of my analysis and what I have learned so far. I welcome your comments and suggestions.

Aim of My Research

The research will examine CF expectations, objectives and outcomes and provide empirical evidence and a methodology to balance multiple project objectives.

In my research I am not attempting a comprehensive analysis of the practices of CF as they exist today, but seeking the conditions that have made these practices possible; and establishing the foundations on which they depend for their intelligibility and legitimacy.

Methodology

First, using Michel Foucault’s discursive and critical analysis, I will read enough to understand the political, economic and social rationales and current research in CF. Second, I will sift through the documentation on a range of CF projects, gathering data to support the tension and/or compatibility between project rationales, expectations, objectives and outcomes. Third, I will blend the readings and the empirical evidence and focus on methods to obtain the balance of objectives that might satisfy the multiple stakeholders of CF. My theoretical framework is ana-foucauldian.



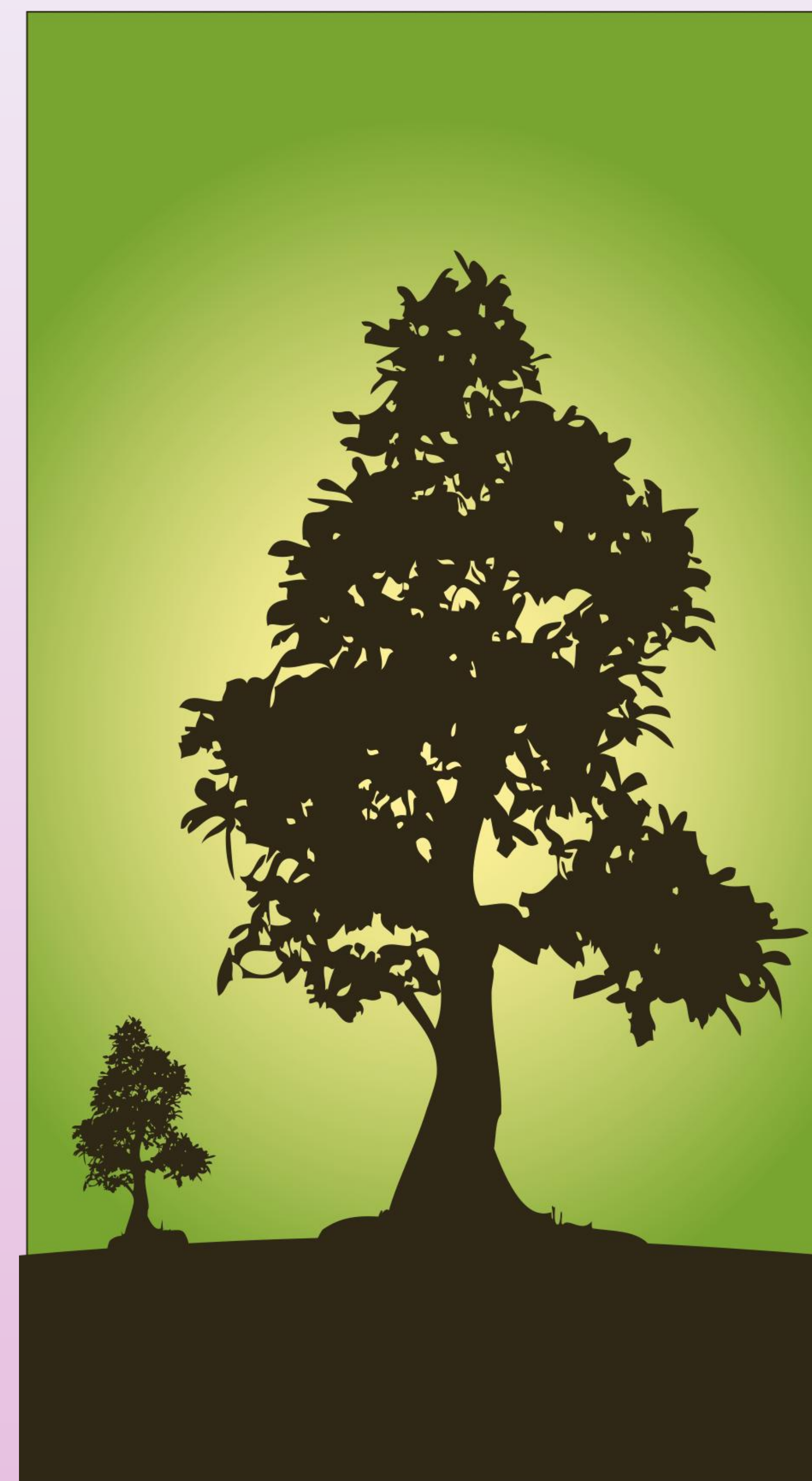
Evaluation in Bangladesh, 2008

Enough Objectives to Satisfy All Stakeholders

Our Trees

Community Social Democratic Objectives

- Agroforestry
- Biodiversity
- Conservation
- Corruption mitigation
- Cultural Areas
- Ecological Services
- Ecology
- Erosion
- Equity
- Flora/Fauna
- Fire
- Fisheries
- Gender
- Governance-democratic
- Governance-traditional
- Grazing
- Indigenous TK
- Indigenous Peoples
- Local Markets
- NTFP
- Participatory Democracy
- Planning
- Poverty
- Protection
- Recreation
- Restoration
- Scientific TK
- SSFBE
- Subsistence
- Sustainability
- Tourism
- Trees/Timber
- Water
- Watersheds
- Wildlife
- Windbreaks



Community Forestry

Their Timber

Nation State/Corporate Neoliberal Objectives

- Costs
- Control
- Industry needs
- Jobs
- Legal Access
- Legal Compliance
- Maintain wood supply
- Market demands
- Profitability
- Taxes

Your Ecosystem

Global Objectives

- Carbon Sequestration

What I Learned So Far

1. CF has political resilience because it offers multiple objectives to multiple stakeholders with diverse agendas.
2. Nation State/Corporate and Global objectives are considered major and Community Social Democratic objectives considered minor. It follows that without balanced objectives, community resilience and innovation will be unachievable.
3. The value to primary producers of wood is much less than the value to secondary processors of wood in the value-chain—approximately 1:1000 (Scherr).
4. CF seldom experiences ownership and control by the community and might more usefully be conceived as a private/public partnership (PPP) of small communities with hegemonic Nation States/Corporations.

The partnership is unbalanced. Communities are weak partners and nation state/corporations strong partners. Because of this, communities require their own organizations of solidarity (like BCCFA in Canada and FECOFUN in Nepal) to successfully negotiate with Nation States/Corporations.
5. Geographic orientation of CF is political and determined by Nation States/Corporations, often to get timber from contested watersheds, land claim areas or problematic control areas.
6. CF is vulnerable to poorly conceived carbon offset projects and land grabs.

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“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”
Albert Einstein