



RECOFTC

Community forestry models in Asia–Pacific

Community forestry in Myanmar

Infosheet

In Myanmar, community forestry enables communities to manage existing forests or establish new plantations. This model of forest management aims to create employment and income opportunities, generate food, stabilize ecosystems and improve environmental conditions. The model has three modalities: collective forest management and use; collective management with individual use; and collective management with both individual and collective use.

The legal basis for community forestry is laid out in the 1995 Myanmar Forest Policy, the 2001–2031 National Forest Master Plan, the 2018 Forest Law, the 1995 Forest Rules (with 2019 revision ongoing) and the 2019 Community Forestry Instructions. This framework establishes community forestry as an integral part of Myanmar's strategy to achieve sustainable forest management.

Key requirements

Who is eligible?

Community forestry can be accessed by a group of households who have lived continuously for five years in a forest or within five miles of the forest's edge. The requirements on distance and settlement time may be relaxed for communities managing a forest traditionally and customarily or if other local circumstances require it.

Allocation process

1. Interested households organize and form a community forest users' group with a management committee that has an odd number of, but at least five, members.
2. The chairperson of the management committee applies to the District Forest Office, through the township forest officer, for a community forestry application letter.
3. The district forest officer identifies where to establish the community forest based on the application of the community forest users' group and factors such as the number of households, the site and climatic conditions and the boundary of the area demarcated and accepted in accordance with local customs and traditions.
4. If the forest is part of the reserved or protected public forest, the district forest officer submits a map and field report to the state or regional forest officer confirming that the community forest area does not overlap with existing or proposed state-owned plantations, and other land uses. If the forest is in a protected area's buffer zone, the district forest officer seeks approval from the director general of the Forest Department. If the forest is under the authority of another department or organization, the district forest officer seeks approval from that department or organization.
5. The district forest officer provides permission to the community forest users' group and allots the forest area to the group and, if required, to each household.
6. The community forest users' group prepares a management plan and submits it to the district forest officer.
7. If satisfied with the plan's quality, the district forest officer approves it and issues a certificate to the community forest users' group.

Main elements



Duration of tenure

- Tenure is up to 30 years and is renewable indefinitely.



Type and condition of forest

- Community forests can be established on privately owned lands with the permission of the owner and on three types of government-owned land:
 - Reserved forest, protected public forest and buffer zones of protected areas
 - Forest-covered lands managed by the government
 - Natural forests and mangrove forests managed by communities traditionally
- Community forestry is permitted on the following land types:
 - Degraded natural forests where natural regeneration is difficult
 - Areas with potential to meet local demand for forest products and income opportunities
 - Village fuelwood plantations established by the Forest Department
 - Areas needing soil and water conservation
 - Natural forests, including mangrove forests, that should be managed by the local community
 - Forestlands traditionally and customarily managed by the local community



Type and duration of management plan

- Community forest management plans are up to 30 years.



Internal governance

- The community forest is managed by a community forest users' group.
- Each community forest users' group forms a management committee consisting of a chairman, a secretary, a treasurer and two members, who are all elected unanimously by the group's members.
- The community forest users' group is regulated by the internal rules and regulations it formulates.
- A community forest users' group must have a bank account maintained by any two individuals from among the group's chairperson, secretary and treasurer. The community forest users' group receives information on the financial accounts every six months.



Gender and social inclusion

- A community forest users' group must consider gender equity when forming its management committee.



Community-based enterprises

- A community forest users' group can establish enterprises selling products from the community forest. Products sold in the village are exempt from taxes and the community can sell products freely at current market prices.
- A community forest-based enterprise can be established to harvest and sell timber and non-timber forest products, foods and value-added forest products in local or international markets. The Community Forest Instructions provide the process for establishing such an enterprise.
- Ecotourism is allowed with approval from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation.



Benefit-sharing mechanism

- Community forest users' group sets up a fund. Contributions to and benefits from the fund are shared proportionately or equitably as prescribed in the community forest management plan.
- By consensus of members of the community forest users' group, the group's funds can be allocated to members as income, spent for community development, used as a revolving fund or reinvested to establish forest plantations or to develop enterprises selling forest products.



External support

- The Forest Department provides different types of support to community forest users' groups, including technical assistance, seeds and seedlings, legal awareness-raising and dealing with claims.
- The Forest Department shall also encourage government departments, local and international organizations, business groups and private entrepreneurs to participate in enhancing the knowledge and capacity of communities by providing technical, market and financial-related assistance and facilitating networking among community forest users' groups.



Conflict-resolution mechanism

- A community forest users' group can establish a conflict-resolution or grievance mechanism within the community's internal rules and regulations to resolve disputes within the community.
- The Forest Department assists in resolving conflicts concerning community forestry, common property or the forest.



Rights and responsibilities of community members

Members have rights to:

- harvest and use wood and other forest products from natural forest in accordance with the management plan and with prior permission from the Forest Department in the case of harvesting for commercial purposes.
- apply a locally suited agroforestry system.
- form independent legal enterprises that can harvest and sell timber and non-timber forest products.
- exclude outsiders.
- receive technical support, equipment and financial support from organizations.
- claim compensation if other projects cause loss of forest trees or crops or other damage.
- pass individually owned community forest assets on to legitimate heirs through inheritance.

Members must:

- establish forest plantations and/or improve natural forests in line with the community forest management plan.

- sustainably manage and use the community forest.
- protect the forest from illegal harvesting and encroachment, with support from the Forest Department and other agencies.
- equitably distribute benefits of community forestry, in line with management plan, keep records and report to the Forest Department.
- follow laws and instructions from the Forest Department.

Members cannot:

- sell, rent, mortgage, hand over or donate the community forest to other parties.
- use land for purposes other than those prescribed in the management plan.
- mine metals, pebbles or stones, sand, gravel and other resources.
- construct permanent buildings or settlements that are not relevant to the establishment and conservation of the forest.
- plant crops and tree species prohibited by law.

Links with climate change policies and targets

- One of the objectives of community forestry is to enhance environmental services that can support climate change mitigation and adaptation by preventing deforestation and forest degradation. However, there are no specific requirements for communities to integrate climate vulnerability, adaptation or mitigation activities into their community forest management plans.
- The Myanmar Climate Change Master Plan 2018–2030 states that Myanmar will implement livelihood-diversification activities for members of community forest users' groups, as part of its efforts relating to the sustainable management of natural resources for healthy ecosystems.
- Myanmar Climate Change Master Plan 2018–2030 also mentions community forest users' groups in relation to other activities, such as: testing and scaling up soil and water management technologies in climate-sensitive areas; improving farmers' access to climate-smart technology and such practices as agroforestry; and supporting activities by networks of community forest users' groups to enhance public participation in addressing climate change issues.
- The Myanmar Climate Change Strategy 2018–2030 and the Climate Change Policy 2019 do not mention community forestry explicitly.
- Policies and measures identified in the draft Myanmar's National REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) Strategy of 2018 include expanding the community forest network and putting into operation regulations under the Community Forestry Instructions of 2016 and under the country's new laws on forests, wildlife and protected areas.
- In 2021, Myanmar's updated Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement on climate change stated that establishing community forests on 311,743 hectares through the Myanmar Reforestation and Rehabilitation Program (2017–2027) would contribute to climate change mitigation.

Read more

- RECOFTC, *Special Report: How community forests boosted pandemic resilience across Asia-Pacific*, www.recoftc.org/special-report/community-forestry-boosted-pandemic-resilience
- RECOFTC, *Special Report: Communities are improving lives and landscapes in Southeast Asia through social forestry*, www.recoftc.org/stories/special-report-communities-are-improving-lives-and-landscapes-southeast-asia-through-social
- Find out more about RECOFTC's work in Myanmar at www.recoftc.org/myanmar



We believe in a future where people live equitably and sustainably in and beside healthy, resilient forests. We take a long-term, landscape-based and inclusive approach to supporting local communities to secure their land and resource rights, stop deforestation, find alternative livelihoods and foster gender equity. We are the only non-profit organization of our kind in Asia and the Pacific. We have more than 30 years of experience working with people and forests, and have built trusting relationships at all levels. Our influence and partnerships extend from multilateral institutions to governments, private sector and local communities. Our innovations, knowledge and initiatives enable countries to foster good forest governance, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.


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