

1. ABSTRACT

The Blantyre City Fuelwood Project (BCFP) is coming to an end in December 2001 after having existed for 15 years. The evaluation took place in the period 17th to 27th of September 2001 by a joint Norwegian-Malawian team composed of Ivar Jørgensen (team leader), Einar Høystad, Judith Kamoto and Dennis Kayambazinhu. The evaluation covers Phase III, 1997 to 2001. The first two phases of the project had as a main objective the establishment of some 5,000 ha of eucalyptus plantations to supply the city of Blantyre with cheap fuelwood. 4,250 ha of eucalyptus were planted and 12,000 ha of indigenous woodlands were demarcated. Phase III represented a dramatic shift in objectives, since it was decided that all the plantations and indigenous forests should be handed over to the local communities. The communities were assisted in organising themselves in village natural resource management committees (VNRMCs) with 10 elected members on each committee (minimum three women) with their own by-laws. The VNRMCs are supported by area natural resource management committees (ANRMCs) consisting of village heads in a defined area.

It was concluded that the BCFP, in its third phase, has successfully been able to assist the establishment of 113 VNRMCs and develop by-laws to be used as organisational and management guidelines and train committee members in leadership, management, book-keeping and marketing principles. On that basis the project has been able to hand over plantations and indigenous forests to 92 communities and has supplied them with equipment and management plans. Five more are awaiting the handing over of plantations, hopefully before the end of the project. It is believed that the VNRMCs/ANRMCs will be able to manage the forests in a balanced way if the competent technical body supplies additional training and follow up support to the committees. Further development of the local organisations is necessary in the fields of, e.g., adapting and improving the by-laws, strengthening of accountability, transparency and development planning. This will also include continuing the comprehensive training programme implemented under the BCFP.

The preparation of management plans is incomplete since productivity and annual harvesting estimates are not recorded. Project interaction with the local committees during the planning process has been insufficient. It is seen as a prerequisite for future success, in the management of the forest resources that have been handed over, that the forest authorities are able to give continuous support and that sufficient technical staffing is made available for this purpose. Management plans for indigenous forest plots that are non-existent should be developed forthwith.

More than 400 km of roads have been constructed and will be handed over to local communities and forest authorities, or road authorities, at the end of the project. Attempts to make the Ministry of Works (MoW) take over major roads has failed, as well as attempts to avail additional funding for upgrading of the roads to an acceptable state for take-over by MoW. Many roads have been repaired during the last phase of the project, but many will also be handed over in a poor state. No mention of the road situation is done in the phasing out plan of the project, and a plan for this should be developed.

Monitoring in the project has been introduced but follow up is still poor. An improvement in this respect is vital in order to establish a learning and feedback loop and to maintain some level of control over progress and obstacles.

The latest statistics show that the average participation of women on the committees is in the order of 43%, and that the women are holding positions like chairperson, treasurer and secretary and are regularly taking part in meetings and activities. The income generating activities component has been of little significance to the target group. The training of trainers and committee representatives has been relevant but not sufficient. The monitoring and evaluation system has improved, but it is uncertain whether the feedback to the committees has been sufficiently participative.

Many recommendations on the different project components are included in the main report. General, overall recommendations include the following:

- The BCFP should be terminated in December 2001 according to existing plans. Remaining funds should be used within project components where objectives are not yet accomplished or where weaknesses exist, mainly within training in organisation building and accountancy.
- The FD should establish an internal task force or an internal project in order to establish a work plan for following up of BCFP related activities that fall naturally under FD responsibility. This task force should have a mandate with a wider scope than the current group working on the handing over process.
- The FD should embark upon a bold process of establishing a new integrated programme where, e.g., the Ministry of Local Government and the District Assemblies in relevant districts are involved to establish a programme in support of the decentralisation process, improvement of local governance, poverty alleviation and sustainable natural resource management. A concept note on such a programme is offered in Annex No. 16.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. The Evaluation mission

The final evaluation of the Blantyre City Fuelwood Project (BCFP) took place in the period of 17 - 27 September 2001, during which the evaluation mission visited the project area. The evaluation was commissioned jointly by the BCFP and NORAD. The period under review is the third phase of the project, lasting from 1997 to 2001. The mission was composed of four persons, two Malawians and two Norwegians. From Malawi, Ms. Judith Kamoto from Bunda College of Agriculture and Dr. Dennis Kayambazinthu of the Forest Research Institute of Malawi (FRIM) participated, while Norway was represented by Mr. Ivar Jørgensen of Noragric (team leader) and Mr. Einar Høystad (independent consultant) of RURENAGRI Consult. The work of the evaluation mission was based on the Terms of Reference (TOR) as presented in Annex No. 1. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the extent of achievement of the goal and objective and to consider its replicability. In addition, the exercise has been meant to identify remaining challenges for future sustainability and discuss possible ways forward.

The Mission paid visits to the different districts within the geographical area of the project and to institutions and organisations in Blantyre, Zomba and Lilongwe and had meetings with many people. See Itinerary in Annex No. 2 and List of persons met in Annex No. 3. Approximate demarcation of the project area is shown on maps in Annexes 4 and 5.

2.2 Background

The BCFP started in 1986, funded by the Norwegian Government under the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). The Project is implemented under the Department of Forestry in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs. The BCFP was started in response to the alarming rate of deforestation taking place adjacent to the cities of Zomba and Blantyre. The initial objectives were to:

- supply inexpensive fuelwood and poles to urban populations, and
- provide SADC member states with data on how to cost-effectively produce fuelwood and poles for urban communities.

While knowledge on peri-urban fuelwood plantations was generated and disseminated during the first two phases, the project failed to become economically sustainable. Therefore, after the implementation of two project phases, the BCFP Steering Committee in 1995 decided to restructure the project. The main objective of the restructuring was to transfer the management, including the revenue collection, from project plantations and indigenous forests to adjacent communities. For this purpose about 100 village forest committees were to be established and trained. The appraisal of Phase III of the BCFP was done in 1996 and a new project document was prepared in April 1997. NORAD decided that Phase III would be the last one and project support should then gradually be reduced until it ended in 2001.

The 1998 review mission states in its report that the envisaged reorientation had not taken place. The weakness had been the inability to reorganise and adequately train and monitor the recipient communities in their new role as managers of forest resources. To improve the situation, the mission came up with a five-point recommendation. For more detailed

information reference is made to chapter 2.4. The continuation of the project beyond 1999 should be made conditional on the fulfilment of six specific criteria.

Apparently it was deemed by the Donor and the relevant Malawian authorities that the project was able to cope with these recommendations in an acceptable way. Therefore project activities have been continued right up to the end of 2001, focusing on the handing over of plantations and natural woodlands and training of the village forest committees.

2.3 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation team has used the following main sources of information:

- Various studies and reports, papers and project documentation (Annex No. 6)
- Progress reports, monitoring forms and management plans
- Direct observations through field visits
- Interviews with project staff, FD staff, the RFO and DFO staff
- Interviews with VNRMC members, traditional leaders, non-governmental organisations, extension workers and villagers in groups and in one to one interaction.

Interviews have been open-ended but with some questions being repeated to several informants. Quantitative methods have not been used.

2.4 Recent reports and consultancies

Several reports related to the project are available, e.g., on workshops, studies conducted, report on training programmes, consultants' reports, etc. The only ones that will be commented upon here are the Financial Management Review of September 2000 and the Review report from the mid-term review of October 1998.

The financial management review revealed several examples of poor financial management and dubious practices in the project. Among numerous other comments in the report, it was revealed that staff members have taken contracts under false names and payments have been made without proper documentation. This has caused the funding for the project to be withheld from the Norwegian Embassy. According to the Embassy and the response report given by the project, serious action was taken as a result of the said report. New routines were established and deviations corrected. The Auditor General of Malawi issued a letter after these corrective actions had been taken and documented. He certified the appropriateness of the responses taken by the project and, based on this, the Embassy again released funding to the project.

In the view of the team, this incidence shows that training in accountability and transparency is vital for all levels in a project. Training and establishment of systems to avoid financial mismanagement have been directed towards the local and village levels, but the importance of such programme components are crucial at all levels. Some good systems including e.g. a contract awarding committee was established in the project as a result of this, and the FD should ensure the transfer of these practices to the RFO upon handing over of the project.

The review report from 1998 reveals many weaknesses in the project implementation and structures. Its 5 main recommendations include increased efforts in training, improved management plans, more support to improve the accounting systems, improved monitoring and implementation of a new review in 1999 to check on the progress. Some of these aspects are discussed in separate chapters of this report. In general some progress can be seen on most

of the recommendations, but the same weaknesses still exist, and the mission of the project is not at all completed. In the view of the current evaluation team, the 1998 team may have had unrealistic expectations as to the progress that should be expected one year after the total change in project approach and objectives. However, the 1998 report is said to have had a significant effect in sharpening the focus and realising that the pace had to be changed in many of the project activities.

2.5 Structure of this report

This report mainly follows the structure of the TOR. The team has sought to limit the volume of the main report and confined supporting information to the Annexes. The first chapter after the abstract (i.e. Chapter 2) discusses briefly the background and starting points for the evaluation. Chapter 3 relates to project design and relevance. The fourth chapter discusses project implementation and results. Chapter five concentrates on sustainability and handing over of the project after termination, including some remarks on future follow up needs. The sixth chapter discusses the replicability of the project experiences and the seventh and last chapter is a fairly extensive summary of the findings and recommendations of the team. This chapter corresponds to the debriefing note given by the team on the formal debriefing on September 26, 2001.

3. PROJECT DESIGN AND RELEVANCE

3.1. Policies, legislation and national strategies

The project design, formulated on a logical framework approach (see Annex No. 7), is aimed at improving living standards of the local communities by empowering them to manage the forest resources (plantations and indigenous woodlands). This was to be achieved by handing over to them the ownership and management responsibility of the forest resources and by providing them with capabilities to manage these resources sustainably on an ecologically sound basis. The strategy to hand over, or give back, 4,700 ha of forest plantations, previously established and managed by the project, to the local communities has had not only socio-economic implications, but also a bearing on current policy and legislation.

The goal of the National Forest Policy (1996) is to sustain the contribution of the national forest resources to the upliftment of the quality of life in the country by conserving the resources for the benefit of the nation. The Forest Act (1997) (Sections 25 and 31) removes restrictions to the access and use of woodlands and their products, prevalent in the earlier two phases of the project (1986 – 1992 and 1992 – 1996) and promotes equity and participation in woodland management by local communities. The Policy and Act are both embedded in a solid policy framework of the Constitution of Malawi and find legislative support in the decentralisation policy of the Local Government Act (1998).

The mechanisms and strategies to operationalise the Policy and Act have been drawn in the National Forestry Programme (NFP). The NFP sets strategies, priority actions and identifies key stakeholders for operationalising local community participation. Of direct relevance are areas such as managing the process of institutional change, optimising policy influences on forests and livelihoods, building local forest governance through decentralisation, supporting community-based forest management and strengthening of forest extension.

Decentralisation as implied in the Local Government Act has been based on the new order of democratic principles, accountability, transparency and participation of the local people in decision-making and development processes. Under the Act, the District Assembly (DA) runs activities of the district, known as the Local Government Area. Administratively, the Chief Executive Officer takes on the responsibilities of the erstwhile District Council and the District Commissioner, to run the affairs of the DA. Among other things, the DA makes policy and decisions on local governance and development, mobilises resources for development and makes by-laws for the Local Government Area. The composition of the DA is as follows:

- elected members of wards in the Local Government Area,
- Traditional Authorities (TAs) and Sub-TAs (non-voting members),
- MPs (non-voting members),
- 5 persons as non-voting, to be appointed by the elected members to cater for the interests of special interest groups,

This signifies that greater power and control is now vested in the local communities, through their ward representatives. This implies that community participation in and decision-making concerning the management of forest resources, for example, is very much under the control of local communities.

The Forest Policy also promotes co-ordination between the FD and other government departments and NGOs on multi-sectoral issues, and specifically emphasises the need to ensure that the role of women in woodland resource utilisation and management receives due attention. In a country with limited resources, much advocacy is given to collaboration and integrated approach to assisting local communities in the management of their forest resources. To this effect the Government of Malawi produced a National Environment Action Plan (NEAP), launched in 1994, which recognises the importance of co-operation, collaboration and information sharing while recognising the vital contributions from a wide range of non-governmental stakeholders.

The project therefore appears to have been set, developed, implemented in tandem with appropriate and current supportive policy, legislation, national strategies and decentralisation in a positive socio-political climate. These are essential prerequisites for successful implementation of the project and in providing an enabling environment to effectively promote and sustain community participation in the management of forest resources.

3.2 Organisation structure

The organisation structure for the implementation of the project, while using existing Forestry Department personnel, has been set apart as an independent structure from and not been integrated within the normal Regional Forestry Office's organogramme (see Annex No. 8 and Annex No. 9). While there is some evidence of some collaboration between field personnel, it has been almost non-existent between the project and RFO central offices. The establishment of such an independent structure, however efficient, may not be sustainable and has posed serious problems of integration during the handing over transition phase. This is to the extent that officers are uneasy and uncertain about the nature of the organisation structure that will implement community activities when the Project phases out.

Though it is appreciated that the integration process has been implemented at a late stage, there is an indication that the project activities are being slowly integrated into the mainstream RFO by the inclusion of the DFOs in the training programme for short courses. The day-to-day involvement of the RFO and DFO staff in the implementation process is vital for sustainability of the project activities and this process must be speeded up.

At the village level, the locally based forest guards (FG) have played an important role in the first phases of the project in organising the plantation work and controlling the use of the forest etc. There are indications, however, that the necessary changes in the role of the forest guards, in order to support the community-managed forests has not taken place. The forestry assistants (FA) who are posted at the project offices have been the most important extension workers, but their presence in the village has been insufficient. Transferring some of the roles of the FAs to the FGs should be tested, in order to bring the extension message more effectively into the communities.

In general, the establishment of VNRMCs and ANRMCs is seen by the evaluation team as the initial step towards setting up a transparent and accountable local organisation to handle the management of the forests handed over through the project. This structure is not yet sustainable, and there is some indication in some communities that the roles played by the ANRMC, mostly as an advisory body, and the VNRMC were not clear and, to some extent, have led to confusion and mistrust. It is, however, clear that a system of checks and balances is important in community forestry management as the absence of it has led to misuse of funds especially by committee members and, in one instance, the Village Head (VH). The ability of the VNRMC to manage and control the finances on behalf of the community is observed as critical to community empowerment. If such committees cannot properly manage their financial resources in an accountable manner it might become an option that the District Development Funds, through the Traditional Authority, can be used to safeguard community funds. In general terms it is, however, dubious since it runs counter to an important principle that this type of organisations should be absolutely autonomous. It is a viable option only in the case when the VNRMC itself opts for such a solution.

To facilitate project implementation, the project established a number of committees to monitor, review and set direction for project activities. The most important committees have been the Local Steering Committee and the Project Transition Monitoring Committee as a Task Force. However, the meetings these committees have held have been infrequent and, therefore, their roles may have been reduced for maximum impact on the project.

The involvement of stakeholders outside the project, such as the Traditional Authorities and NGOs is commendable, although those involved wished they became involved earlier in the project than has been the case. This has given the impression that the process, towards the end of the project, has been hurried. As a consequence it must be expected that further support to local organisations and local empowerment is needed.

4. IMPLEMENTATION AND PROJECT RESULTS

4.1. Achievements in relation to project objectives

The development objective of the BCFP is “improved living standard for the local communities within and around the BCFP areas”. No social surveys have been conducted to verify any changes in this respect. It is, however, believed that the living standard has been improved in some villages because of a significant increase in cash flow, better transport facilities and certain improvements in schools, clinics, orphanages, etc. Income from the sales of forest produce or salaries from working in the plantations seems in some ways to have contributed to increased spending for family purposes. On the other hand it is known that the VNRMCs are using money for many different purposes to improve community life, mainly within the health, education, transport or development sectors. Some examples on what has been done are: construction or repair of bridges, maintenance of roads, school improvements, contributions to village dispensaries or clinics, help to orphans and orphanages, planting of new forest areas, food to overcome food shortage for parts of the village population and establishment of a small village credit fund, that was seen in one example. No studies have been made to determine to what degree actions are taken to address the poorest or underprivileged villagers, but helping the orphans and buying food under precarious food shortages has been seen in several villages. This shows that in some cases different strata of the community population are cared for, and the standard of living will to a certain degree have improved.

The immediate objective of the project is “forest resources managed by the communities, in an ecologically sustainable way. ” This is also difficult to measure because of lack of statistics, surveys or relevant physical monitoring reports. Annex No. 10 shows that 97 VNRMCs have been organised, out of which 92 have received their own plantations. See copy of handing over contract Annex No. 11. Consequently it is justified to say that the communities themselves now manage their own forest resources, on the average in a more or less balanced way, but with several examples of poor management practices. Among the indicators several require exact measurements, studies or analysis before any appropriate answer can be given. It is not possible to say if the average annual increment is equal to or higher than harvested quantities, but the situation varies at great deal between communities. The vegetative cover has not been measured, but it is believed that the cover is better than before, since the plantations initially were established on degraded hilly land. The fact that some plantations have been overexploited has not changed this impression. No indications of deteriorated soil conditions or pollution of rivers have been observed by the team itself or mentioned by villagers or project staff. How the forest is affecting arable land is unclear, but the policy has been to prevent people from tilling the soil within the plantations. Encroachment by people not normally residing in the area is reported to be a general problem, but it has been noted that some VNRMCs are taking action to remove squatters from the forests.

When it comes to the project outputs it can, in general terms, be said that most have been accomplished to some extent, but a lot still needs to be done in order to make the achievements sustainable. For further details on achievements in project activities, reference is made to Annex No. 12.

Recommendation: The results of the handing over process should be monitored even after project termination in order to determine future development in relation to use of forest resources, effects in communities, distribution of benefits etc.

4.2 VNRMC and By-laws

As part of the process of handing over of the forest plantations within the project area it was decided that every community receiving plantations should establish a village natural resources management committee (VNRMC) and an area natural resources management committee (ANRMC), responsible for running the plantations, with their own by-laws as a tool for organisational and practical matters. An example of VNRMC by-laws is shown in Annex No. 13.

In spite of the fact that the local communities initially were involved in the preparation of the by-laws, the final elaboration was done centrally and the text was standardised. The comment from one committee was: "We made our proposal, but when we got it back, it seemed somewhat changed." The by-laws are not entirely free from outside influence (government or project), plantations can be removed from community jurisdiction, wood product prices are fixed and fines for offences are uniformed and extremely tough. Despite this, it is believed that the by-laws have greatly helped the village committees in their execution of forest management. "First we practised our own by-laws, but when we got the printed ones things became more clear to us," commented one committee. According to the by-laws any offender should be taken to the police. In Village Headman Katunga's area they practised a somewhat modified form, e.g., they would first try to solve offences themselves within the committee, or with the help of the headman, and the value of the fine would be according to the importance of the offence. For a minor one the fine could be a chicken.

In the formal by-laws there is no paragraph giving room for changes. Theoretically this is a weakness; a possibility should exist to change the by-laws, adapt them to local conditions, thus making them more flexible or realistic, for instance with a 3/4 majority. However, it might be justified that they are strict and rather inflexible in the beginning, until greater confidence is built both on the part of the forest and on the part of communities, increasing technical knowledge and mutual trust. For optimal functioning of any organisation with economical activities a number of sub-committees should be established: these are a control committee and an election committee. In the case of the VNRMCs a development committee should also be included. These committees should be incorporated into the by-laws be and directly subordinated to the VNRMCs.

How the VNRMCs function varies considerably. This is mainly because the committees represent something new to the villagers, for which they are lacking experience. In principle the village committees should be independent, not being influenced by any outsiders (including authorities). However, it was found that often this was not the case. In one village the headwoman was always participating in the meetings. Another example was when the district commissioner demanded that he had to authorise withdrawals from the committee's bank account. There is also a risk that project staff or representatives from the forestry service incorrectly try to influence the committees. Anyhow, this is a general problem that can only be solved with more training and practical experience. When it comes to the traditional authorities their assistance may sometimes be of vital importance. Examples to the contrary may certainly also be found. It is, however, said in the by-laws that the VNRMC shall be "guided" by the village headman/woman.

The conclusion is that 113 VNRMCs have been successfully established and are functioning. There are weaknesses in organisational and book keeping matters that will have to be improved. The by-laws are not free from outside influence and they are lacking obligatory sub-committees, and have no room for changes. However, it might be justified that they are strict and inflexible in the beginning. Additional training support is necessary to make them sustainable.

Recommendation:

-It is recommended that committee members receive more training in organisational and accountancy matters.

-Essential sub-committees should be elected.

-Outside influence should gradually be removed and changes in local by-laws should be permitted with $\frac{3}{4}$ majority vote.

4.3 Collaboration with other Public Institutions and NGOs

Findings from field visits in the BCFP project area indicate that there are public institutions working in the project area, but these are not specifically working on forestry issues/activities. The communities, however, were not aware of any institution working on forestry activities and didn't know that they might approach NGOs and other government institutions for assistance in development activities like road maintenance, bridge construction, etc. Communities have not systematically been informed of procedures of soliciting development activities from such organisations.

Some public institutions like for instance the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) are capable of assisting in activities like road maintenance and school and health clinic construction. There is therefore a need to embark on awareness campaigns to the local communities, focusing on their roles and how communities can access support from such organisations in relation to decentralisation policy and guidelines laid out by such organisations. There is also a need to identify NGOs and other public institutions, which may support the communities in the management of plantations in terms of roads, harvesting equipment and protective clothing.

The link between government and civil institutions is almost non-existent in the project area. There is a need to establish partnerships between government institutions and NGOs. These linkages may bring value added benefits to both partners and the communities as well. There is potential for NGOs to undertake various types of activities in the project area, but the potential needs to be exploited. One example of this is CURE, which is an umbrella NGO, coordinating environmental NGOs in Malawi. It has the capacity to engage in training and policy dissemination at grass root level. It is a fact that the village level does not always understand key policies, for instance on forestry and decentralisation. There is a need to mobilise and sensitise communities on these matters. The NGO Act that recently has been passed creates room for NGO involvement in development activities and government co-operation with NGOs. This Act supports the empowerment of NGOs as well as communities.

Recommendation:

-It is recommended that the project and the DFO should establish partnerships with NGOs and public institutions at central, regional and local levels in order to become less dependent on project assistance in the future. Villages should be informed about how to solicit support from such institutions.

4.4 Training and Extension

The BCFP has a training component as part of its capacity building activities. Most training sessions were conducted from the second quarter of 1997 to the third quarter of 1998. However, cross-farm visits have been a continuous form of training for new office bearers in the course of implementation. Priority in training was given to local leaders (Traditional Authorities, village heads, VNRM committee members) and project staff, as a way of soliciting support and understanding of project goals and activities.

An evaluation of the training programme shows that a massive training programme was mounted for the two categories targeted. The elements of the project staff training included Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), training of trainers, training for transformation, project management and gender issues in project implementation. The local leaders were trained in team building and leadership skills, forest management, marketing and accounting, community by-laws formulation and enforcement, bee-keeping and guinea fowl rearing. Tours were also conducted to other areas/sites with similar projects.

The results of this training are easily observed in the communities. Many are now able to conduct patrols, forest management operations, account for finances and plan for development activities in their areas from the proceeds of sales. It has been impressive to note that some communities have created a local credit system serving the members of the community, which is said to be working well. The money is therefore not only helping the communities in managing their plantations and development activities, but also the individual household members of the community.

The element of forgetfulness in community training cannot be overemphasised. Some communities are already experiencing this phenomenon and this calls for follow up visits and training to strengthen knowledge and skills required for the implementation of project activities. Follow up training by the extension personnel will deepen the understanding of the information within the communities. This will ensure sustainability of the activities and the communities will feel more qualified for the execution of their activities.

The project seems to have overlooked the need for training of forest guards, who normally stay in the communities at village level. Training has stopped at the level of forestry assistants (FA), who are charged with the responsibility of the extension work. However, the FA is resident at the forestry station and requires transport to execute his/her duties. In light of the budget constraints, there is a need to consider training and empowerment of the forest guards, who reside in the villages and understand the setting well. They do not need transport facilities to visit the villages. Giving the forest guards a new title would also underscore their new role.

Training and extension work have mainly been focused on plantations and not on indigenous woodlands. However, experiences from the EU social forestry project shows that FAs and local communities also can be trained in extension and management of indigenous woodlands.

Recommendations:

- *Training of communities, traditional leaders and staff should continue*
- *Forest guards should also be trained in extension*
- *Training on management of indigenous woodland should be included*
- *The partnership with traditional authorities in extension should be reinforced*

4.5 Management plans

The project has instituted forest management plans for the plantations intended to have been developed by the community with facilitation by the project. The extent of community participation in the development of these has been limited in many communities. Each party is supposed to keep a copy of the plan for implementation and monitoring of the management activities.

The management plans, out of necessity, have a simple design that can be easily followed by the local communities (see Annex No. 14). The harvesting schedule in the management plan is based on the estimated annual increment, which determines the actual cut in a year. This is based on sound calculations on a rotational system of harvest and therefore bringing about sustainable utilization of the plantation resources. Regrettably, however, a number of management plans do not indicate the estimated annual cut although the quantities of actual harvest are indicated. Needless to say, with the current heavy demand for wood in the project area, this may well lead to unsustainable levels of harvesting and to resource degradation.

It is also evident that, despite having the management plans, some communities never followed them and decided for one reason or other, to harvest anyhow. The level of discipline and technical knowledge required to implement a management plan is therefore in question. Close follow up from FD staff will still be needed to foster this discipline and improved management skills.

These indications point to the fact that more work needs to be done in sensitizing local communities (including the committees and traditional leaders) to the importance and value of having the management plan and the need to follow the prescriptions in managing the plantations. A major thrust of extension would be to determine the extent of the resource and work out, together with the community, the estimated annual cut.

The project, in its handing over of forest resources, has only provided an enabling environment for local communities to access and utilize the indigenous woodlands available in the project area. It has obviously been unable to provide any advice towards their management; hence no management plan has been developed. Yet, these woodlands provide more than economic benefits; they also provide important non-timber forest products (NTFPs) that are critical to improving livelihoods of local communities. With no proper management plan available, this resource, which is the most preferred for charcoal production, may not be sustained in the long run.

Recommendations:

- Management plans should be continuously improved*
- Close follow up and training on how to manage the forest according to the plans is still needed*
- More focus on management of indigenous woodlands is required*

4.6. Monitoring and Evaluation

The developed monitoring and evaluation mechanism for the project at the community level has mainly been in the form of visitations by project extension officers to the communities. Village meetings, including committee members, traditional leaders and villagers, have been convened to discuss activities undertaken and problems encountered by the community and to

deliberate on possible solutions. The issues discussed are recorded in a Monitoring Form (see Annex No. 15) and agreed upon in a participatory manner.

Mission interactions with communities and committee members, however, revealed that this monitoring form is not properly implemented (most of the forms are not fully endorsed by the required signatories, e.g., Forest Assistant, Station Officer, and sometimes very few recommendations are made). In some instances, the form may not have been used at all as communities visited expressed ignorance of ever using it. In general, the existing monitoring and evaluation system does not seem to consider the concerns and feedback of local communities. This low level of participatory monitoring and evaluation poses a great risk by usurping community confidence. There is great need to ensure that the concerns of local communities are properly addressed, otherwise this may have led, or may lead, to general apathy in the community towards participation in forestry management and development activities.

Monitoring has also been observed as thin on the ground in terms of forest management; apart from communities participating in other forest operations such as firebreak maintenance, no replanting has been done in some areas. Effective monitoring and evaluation would have resulted in the need for the community to get involved in tree planting for sustainability of the management and utilisation of the plantation.

It is feared that part of the reason for not properly using the form could have been due to limited visitations and interaction with communities, despite the available resources. Monitoring and evaluation would become a major concern to sustainable management of the forest resources by the community if resources become limited after the project phases out.

A more effective mechanism that should be developed and tested would be to reorient the role of the Extension Officer, operating from a forest station, to that of an extension officer cum-supervisor and thereby spread out the visitations to be made to remote areas. For effective participatory monitoring and evaluation, the 'forest guard', residing in the area, should instead be reoriented and trained to assume some of the extension responsibilities of community forestry management. This would considerably reduce the costs involved not only to effectively monitor and evaluate community activities but also to those of ensuring that a management plan is implemented. However, in order to attain and sustain community participation in forestry development activities, the delegated tasks to the field officers, such as the 'forest guards', must be accompanied by corresponding support and authority. In this regard, the starting point would be to substitute the reproachable title of 'guard' to a more community-friendly title commensurate with the assistance such personnel give to the communities.

Recommendations:

-The Monitoring Form should be more actively used by the extension people of the Forestry Service to ensure that the problems at VNRMC level should be seriously addressed. It should be used as a base for discussions and problem solving, practising transparency, interaction with and feedback to the villagers.

-For effective participatory monitoring and evaluation, the 'forest guard', normally residing in the villages, should be reoriented and trained and in addition to assuming some of the extension responsibilities of community forestry management, he /she should take part in monitoring in participation with community members

4.7. Environmental considerations

The evaluation team has not done any specific research into the environmental values of promoting sustainable management of the forestland under the BCFP. Convincing evidence exists however that maintaining a forest cover offers numerous environmental benefits, and that a sustainable management regime is important to enhance these benefits. Enhanced biodiversity, reduced erosion and improved soil fertility are some of these benefits. The effects of forest on the water balance is debated, and depends on, *inter alia*, soil types, precipitation and tree species. Under some circumstances trees may use more water than they conserve, and if the project objectives included improved water balance, further studies would have to be conducted. The Forest Research Institute of Malawi (FRIM) has conducted some studies on land suitability classes for supporting trees for fuelwood production and candidate species for afforestation (FRIM Reports 870025 and 92002), effects on soil and undergrowth on biodiversity (FRIM Report 97002) in the BCFP plantations and in agroforestry plots managed under the project. Results indicate reduced soil erosion in forested areas compared to grassland or agricultural land. Different afforestation and agroforestry species and practices have been identified, and increased crop yields have been documented. Greater variety of species selection in plantations was recommended, as 95% of the plantations consist of eucalyptus species. With greater variety in species selection, a better effect on biodiversity, nutrient utilisation and water balance would probably have been achieved. The research plots of FRIM have been closed down, and to the knowledge of the evaluation team, no environmental research is currently being undertaken in the project area.

The management of natural woodlands is also a major component in the BCFP. Management techniques for these are poorly developed and resource assessment is difficult. The project has not been able to put sufficient effort into developing knowledge on the management of these woodlands. Some other projects (e.g., the Social Forestry Project financed by EU) have gained experience in this field, which could be tapped by the BCFP.

In conclusion, the environment is not an important explicit element in the objectives or the activities of the project, but implicitly, considerable environmental benefits have accrued and will continue to accrue from the forest areas under the project if they are sustainably managed.

Recommendations:

-In future plantations, and in enrichment of existing plantations, a better mix of species should be used. Species for propagation should be selected in collaboration with communities

-The project (and its successor administration under the RFO) should tap experiences on natural woodland management gained in other projects, and give more emphasis to development of sound management plans for these forests.

4.8. Gender and equity issues

The Gender issues have never been an outstanding element in the BCFP, not even in Phase III. However, a significant achievement was obtained when it was decided in the by-laws that a quota of a minimum of three out of 10 members on the VNRMCs had to be women. The trend varies from community to community, on the average 43% of the committee members are women, and the participation is rising. There are 113 VNRMCs in the area. In many cases there are more women than men, up to 90% women have been registered. In some of the VNRMCs where women account for 30% to 40 %, women do not always hold important

positions like chairperson, secretary or treasurer. The project area also consists of a number of ANRMCs, which are composed of village heads. Most village heads in Malawi are men and therefore the percentage of women on these committees is much lower than on the VNRMCs. The committees are elected for a period of five years and new committees are elected after this period. The question of re-election of any one of the sitting committee members will come as a result of voting in the general assembly.

Despite gender issues not being a part of the project design, it might be said that the project has achieved an impressive involvement of women. Women are now able to participate with men on more equal terms and take lead positions if required. However, there is no system in the project to ensure that both rich and poor groups are represented in the VNRMCs and that women should hold important positions on the committees.

According to the by-laws all members of the community are able to participate in the general assemblies, hence any group in the village is free to propose their own candidates. If they receive more than 50% of the votes they are elected. The only limitation to the composition of the committees is that 1/3 of the members have to be women. However, this freedom of election does not guarantee an equitable representation of different groups. Hence, without any specific measures for ensuring representation, the project activities can not be expected to have any positive effect on power relations and sharing of wealth within the communities.

However, there is no deliberate attempt in the Project to target poor families in the villages. If specific social needs arise in a village, the VNRMC is free to spend money generated from the plantations for such purposes if so decided by the majority. Support to initiatives taken by local communities in matters like social responsibilities and credit structures can be supported within the extension and training programmes if prioritised by the project.

The communities are engaged in various development activities using the income realised from sales of plantation products. The money is banked and withdrawn when required for particular activities. The activities include moulding of bricks and subsequent building of schools and health clinics in their areas, social responsibilities like caring for orphans and the elderly, a need that has grown especially in these times of HIV/AIDS, providing for funeral condolences and funeral related equipment and needs, providing spare parts for maintaining and repairing potable water systems etc. Some communities are also ready to embark on bridge and road maintenance. Some communities have also set up a local credit system in the village to help individual households with small loans. Sharing of benefits is not always done through community development activities, but might also be done on an individual basis. These are not activities aimed specifically to help women, but they still contribute to improve the daily life of women and children.

Recommendations:

- Initiatives to encourage equitable sharing of benefits and social responsibility in the use of sales proceeds should be encouraged. Equitable distribution will promote sustainability*
- There is a need for developing guidelines and specific training courses for women holding important positions on the committees or in the communities.*

4.9. Road maintenance

The project established a road network in the area that includes major roads and feeder roads. Construction of roads started in Phase I of the project and is still ongoing. Most roads have

been constructed and only a few kilometres are remaining which require blasting of rocks. A total of about 400 km of new roads was constructed. The road works have been delayed due to lack of disbursement of funds, resulting from unacceptable accounting practices and subsequent comments by the auditing firm, which occurred during the course of implementation of the current project phase. However, the project seems determined to finish the work before it phases out. The major roads are supposed to be handed over to the Department of Roads. This department has developed standards for road maintenance, which must be met before taking over is accepted. So far most of the project roads are not brought to that level. A proposal was submitted to NORAD asking for additional funds to bring the maintenance of the roads up to required standards, but new funds were not made available. Therefore the roads are being handed over to the communities in their current, sometimes poor, state.

Most feeder roads in principle fall under the responsibility of the District Road Improvement Programme (DRIMP), under the Ministry of Works and Supplies. It is their responsibility to maintain all earth feeder roads, including roads established by other departments, like the forestry department. However, with the existing budget situation, and shortage of funds from the Government, it has proved difficult for this programme to achieve its objectives.

Some communities have the will to maintain the roads on a self help basis, using funds from the plantations. However, they will need assistance for major works like bridge construction and training in road management techniques. The situation of the roads in the project area is not mentioned in the phase out plan and hence their fate is not known.

Recommendations:

-As to roads it is recommended that they be upgraded within budget limitations before they are handed over to road authorities and local committees.

-It is urgent that the MoW, DRIMP, VNRMCs, TAs and other relevant actors are being involved in the transfer process.

-Communities should be informed of other organisations/institutions like the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) that can assist in road construction and maintenance.

4.10. Income generating activities

To make the target group less dependent upon forest products alone, certain efforts have been made to identify new income generating activities. In the project document five activities are described; bee-keeping, guinea fowls rearing, construction of half-orange kilns for charcoal production, installing fruit juice extraction equipment and establishment of credit provisions. Apparently this project component has had a limited budget and therefore been limited to bee-keeping and guinea fowl raising. For bee-keeping the total number of clubs remains at 19. A few training courses have been arranged and a certain number of people trained. Bee suits and hives have been bought and distributed. In one village in the Zomba district it was reported that they had received beehives and were now awaiting swarms to be delivered.

As to guinea fowl rearing 12 clubs have been trained. Some clubs have collected eggs, but few chicks survived, at Nkhalamu only 23. Fowl for 12 clubs has been ordered from the Wildlife Society but have not yet been delivered.

Traditionally the forests have been used for collection of non-forest products. This is specifically mentioned in the by-laws, where some products can be gathered free of charge, like mushroom and grass, while different categories of wild fruits will have to be paid for.

One activity that until today has given work and income for a considerable number of village people is charcoal production, which according to the law is now prohibited or strongly restricted. Nevertheless this production continues and charcoal sacks for sale can still be seen in quantities along all major roads. Under Offenses and Fines in the by-laws charcoal is not especially mentioned, but it is said that “any person found guilty of selling forest produce without authorisation shall be fined MK 2000 and/or imprisoned for six months.” Whether it represents a viable solution to prohibit the charcoal production is quite uncertain, but it deprives the villagers from an income generating activity without giving them new options in return. Large parts of the eucalyptus plantations are not accessible by roads, so charcoal production might have represented a potentially acceptable way of harvesting such areas. It is believed that finding mechanisms to license the VNRMCs for charcoal production using improved production methods is worthwhile studying.

Surprisingly, one issue that is missing under income generating activities, or production diversification, is tree species other than eucalyptus, like precious wood (for example *Burtt-davya nyasica* or *mvule* in local language), fruit trees, agroforestry species, etc.

It is concluded that the income-generating component, even if it is important, has had a rather insignificant importance to the target group. More emphasis on this component may have had additional beneficial effects for women, who normally engage themselves more than men in many such activities.

Recommendations:

-If the initiated activities shall continue, NGOs or other relevant partners should be identified. For the future it is also recommended that diversification in tree species for the plantations is addressed, especially in the direction of precious woods, fruit trees, agroforestry species and useful indigenous species.

-The charcoal problem should be studied carefully to find viable ways to license the VNRMC for a sustainable charcoal production.

5. PROJECT TRANSITION AND SUSTAINABILITY

5.1. Capacity of communities to manage plantations:

Whether the village communities will be able to manage their plantations and indigenous forests in a sustained way rests to be seen. There is no simple answer to that question, it solely depends on the village populations themselves and how they are using the mechanisms and tools they have at their disposal. Basically there are two main elements: 1) the VNRMC/ ANRMC and 2) the traditional structures represented by the headman/woman. A third element is their interaction with the Regional Forest Office and other government and non/government entities.

It should be taken for granted that the fact that the government has given the plantation to the village populations is an irreversible act, i.e. the government will not take the forests back.

Nevertheless it has been seen that plantations are taken back from the villagers, like the example of Sanganiza village, where the forest allocation was withdrawn after deliberate misuse. This action was justified by the by-laws. Incidents like this one serve as an example to other VNRMCs, but this paragraph should be dormant and only used in extreme cases; it is a signal to the communities that they are still in the hands of the Government.

Experiences from many countries throughout the world have shown that management of customary forest areas is most successfully done under some kind of formal organisation. This was acknowledged when the project decided to establish democratically elected VNRMCs to administer and manage the forest plantations. In a society where people are not used to formal organisations, there is no guarantee that this system will work, especially when there exists a traditional structure that is used to exercise power in another way. If there is competition between these two systems, the VNRMC may experience problems when it comes to management of the plantations. It has been seen that the real decisions are not always taken by the committee, but by the headman-headwoman. Generally this is not a problem, if both parties understand and respect the by-laws, but it should be recognised that the formal power lies with the VNRMCs. Strong chiefs may help the organisation, on the other hand there is ample room for abuse or mismanagement. Examples have been documented where chiefs have been behind total destruction of plantations.

Without exception the VNRMCs depend on project and regional forest office staff for assistance, especially for training in organisation, accountancy and forest management systems. To secure a steady flow of income to the communities it is essential that the village committees receive natural resource management training, so that they are capable of setting up management plans. Even if all villages receiving plantations have been given some training on management issues, the quality of their management plans and logging practices is of varying quality. Even though some plantations are well managed, it must be stated that many of them have been poorly managed and even over-exploited. Harvested volume should normally not be higher than average annual increment.

The conclusion is that when the VNRMCs and the traditional village structures have the same conceptions and understanding on the management aspect of village forests, it has been proved that the villages have the capacity to manage the plantations in a relatively balanced way. However, the system is not yet sustainable.

Recommendation:

-It is strongly stressed that more training of village committee members, extension workers and representatives from the traditional authorities is vital for a balanced use of the forests resources. Therefore more training is necessary to ensure that the local communities are enabled to increase their administrative, financial and management capacities, thus improving the chances of avoiding total failure.

5.2. Handing over the BCFP to the Regional Forest Office

Since the Blantyre City Fuelwood Project is expected to come to an end in December 2001, it is of vital importance that the handing over process is prepared well ahead of that date. For some time discussions on the handing over of the project to the Regional Forest Office have been held in the Local Steering Committee. A phasing out plan has been developed by a task force in the Project Transition Monitoring Committee that was appointed to that effect. A handing over plan has been written, including several different points like re-deployment of

established and non-established staff, handing over of buildings, vehicles and equipment, and disposal of unserviceable stores and equipment. The plan is rather superficial and does not deal with important issues like roads and matters related to the DFO and its different entities, the VNRMC/ANRMCs, the TAs, the District Council or other collaborating entities.

One of the crucial points in the handing over process is the question on what is going to happen to the technical staff of the project. It is important that the established technical staff is transferred to the Regional Forest Office since this will positively affect the sustainability of project activities. To avoid failure this personnel must not be laid off or transferred to other regions of the country, but be kept in RFO service within the project area. This is because the VNRMCs are not yet considered to be fully sustainable organisations, they have got too little knowledge and experience on organisational matters, accountancy and forest management to survive on their own. Equally important is the information given to the VNRMCs and other collaborating actors, it has been signalled that the village level is left without information and is unprepared for the closing down of the project.

Even though some discussions on the handing-over issue have been held, the overall impression is that the contact between the various actors involved have come at a late stage and has been rather limited, and so far the personnel have not been involved in the process. Even the Regional Forest Officer seems to be relatively unprepared for the new situation.

Recommendations:

-It is recommended that the Regional Forest Office is more directly involved in the final stages of the handing over process to ensure that personnel and equipment is maintained.

-The task force planning the handing over process should have a wider mandate, including development of a work plan for RFO activities to follow up and safeguard results from the project.

5.3. Public and private institutions of relevance

The planning, implementation and management of community forestry projects and activities designed to improve living standards of people, such as the BCFP, inevitably involves the participation of numerous agencies and organisations. It is therefore necessary to establish and maintain effective institutional linkages and to continuously marshal adequate logistical support for the implementation of the Project and effective financial utilisation, monitoring and control mechanisms. Evidence on the ground has revealed that this has not been fully exploited in the BCFP project and that it cannot be attained with the current departmental resources without necessary input from other public and private institutions.

The development of a Directory of Local Development Experts listing local expertise to help create opportunities for utilisation of local capacity in the project has been a step in the right direction. The Project should, however, have encouraged greater participation of NGOs to take part in these extension activities as some communities were unaware of potential NGOs that could assist them in development work related to forestry development. Further, some NGOs expressed concern over the lack of consultations from the project for their input in development activities required in the project areas.

With inadequate present levels of staffing to carry out extension work, especially as there seem to be more activities in the community that require more workforce than is available, there is a need to involve technically trained people in other fields from other institutions.

The future of community projects such as the BCFP lies in the integration of activities by different stakeholders at the community level, and this ought to be promoted through greater awareness and sensitisation on the community forestry programme.

In the future, especially in the case of external financing of a new programme continuing parts of the present activities, it might be desirable to contract expertise from other public or private institutions or organisations, if necessary special budget lines to that respect should be established. Networking in another way than today will be increasingly important in the future. Poor public institutions with lack of funds and limitations in human resources will not be able to supply sufficient service and know-how alone.

Recommendation: In future work under the RFO and potentially under a new project, a wider array of public and private institutions should be involved in the community development process

5.4. Future follow-up

As mentioned under several paragraphs above, many activities are not yet sustainable, and safeguarding and expanding the achievements is a great challenge for the future. The responsibility for the follow up of BCFP activities will be handed over to the Forest Department in December 2001. The forest department is increasingly implementing its programmes in line with the National Forest Programme (NFP), which is strongly supportive of participatory approaches and interagency co-ordination. Following up along the same lines as have been promoted through the BCFP are therefore fully backed by policies and strategies of the forest sector.

At the same time, major efforts are taking place in Malawi related to decentralisation, establishment of local institutions, programmes to combat corruption and efforts to establish new patterns of natural resource management. Many of the follow up needs identified as the BCFP phases out would benefit greatly from being addressed in this extended context. It is also clear that the capacity and financial strength of the FD will not be sufficient to give an adequate follow up, unless careful planning is done and new alliances formed. In the view of the evaluation team, the FD should do two things:

1. Establish a task force or an internal project in order to establish a work plan for following up of BCFP related activities that fall naturally under FD responsibility. This task force should have a wider scope than the one currently preparing the handing over process;
2. Embark upon a process of establishing an integrated programme where, e.g., the Ministry of Local Government and the District Councils in relevant districts are involved. The purpose of this would be to establish a programme in support of the decentralisation process, improvement of local governance, poverty alleviation and sustainable natural resource management.

Regarding 1, many tasks of the BCFP must be regarded as normal ongoing activities of district units under the FD. This relates to, e.g., the extension programme, following up management plans, monitoring activities and training. The BCFP plan of operations offers ample support to establish a work plan of priority activities to safeguard the achievements made under the BCFP. This priority list must then be matched with staffing plans and prioritised together with other duties of the Department. Securing local partners to support

some of the activities will be a natural element in this process, e.g., involvement of NGOs. This scope is considerably wider than the mandate of the current working group preparing the handing over process.

Regarding 2, the experiences from the BCFP offers an opportunity to develop a new programme that may well attract donor support if carefully designed. This should in the view of the team have been initiated earlier, in order to avoid long delays before continued support to communities can be given. On the other hand, new national strategies like, e.g., the National Forest Programme (NFP), the new NGO act and the decentralisation policy now offers new backing for integrated approaches and intersectoral collaboration. Bold steps will have to be taken in the direction of forging new partnerships between public institutions and between central government, local institutions and NGOs. An input to the process of establishing such a programme is offered in Annex No. 16. As one activity prior to preparing a new programme, a study has been proposed to look more in depth at experiences from the community-managed forests arising from the BCFP.]

6. REPLICABILITY OF PROJECT EXPERIENCES

The BCFP started out as a SADC demonstration project on fuel wood production for urban poor. To that effect, the project never was really successful. With the dramatic change of approach and objectives that came with Phase III, the demonstration effect will not be exactly the one foreseen at project initiation. Nevertheless, several features of the current project may bring lessons and experiences of considerable value to other development programmes, both in the form of *do's* and *don'ts*. Ironically, emerging effects of increased market entry of forest products from plantations managed by communities, include increased output of wood fuel and other forest products at the urban markets of Blantyre and Zomba.

First of all, the project has pioneered a handing over of forest areas to communities at an unprecedented scale. Several projects in Malawi engage in social forestry activities that also include full or partial handing over of responsibilities to communities, but none have done so in the scale found in the BCFP. Experiences from this process have been discussed in the previous chapters, and include inter alia:

- the strong need for follow up in the form of extension and training
- the importance of confidence building between villagers and authorities
- the importance of village headmen (-women) and group village headmen being involved in the process
- the importance of having formal agreements, locally adapted by-laws and formal organisation structure in the local organisations
- the importance of involving villagers at an early stage and ensure their involvement in development of the management plans
- the importance of diversifying the species used in plantations and the importance of combining forestry activities with other development programmes
- the importance of working closely with Traditional Authorities
- the importance of market access and transport facilities, including roads

In cases where many of these factors are conducive, the evaluation team has seen impressive examples of empowerment, increased pride and improved livelihoods. In many cases, this is the first time the villages have had access to any substantial resources and the power to utilise them according to their own needs. In exercising their management powers, many villages

have shown great willingness and capability to organise themselves and mobilise their strengths around the task of forest management. The integration with Traditional Authorities seems to be strong. It is also encouraging to see the willingness of villagers to take social responsibility when deciding on how to use the benefits from the forest. This could be enhanced further by encouraging the development of local criteria for benefit distribution using poverty indicators as one entry point.

If on the other hand the follow up is poor, training is insufficient and village leadership is weak, there is a considerable risk of degrading the forest resources and seeing inequitable sharing of benefits. Cases have been seen of villagers averting to the “cut and run strategy” if they do not trust or understand the intentions of the forest authorities.

On the organisational set up of the project, the replicability is also rather in the form of a “don’t”. Setting up a project like the BCFP *outside* the parent organisation (FD/RFO), may lead to efficient implementation, but at the expense of institutional sustainability. Up to very recently, the project staff have operated very independently of the staff at the DFO and RFO offices. The interaction instigated in the few last months before termination of BCFP is commendable, but it comes too late. The benefits of implementing projects internally in the mother organisation is seen by the evaluation team to outweigh possible benefits of setting up a parallel organisation.

In the training of staff and villagers, training packages have been developed, and training skills and experience has been developed. A combination of training conducted by project staff and contracted external institutions is recommendable. Project staff normally will have more intimate knowledge about the challenges facing the trainees, but professional training entities usually will have more experience in training methodology and adult learning principles. Experiences from the massive training effort undertaken in the BCFP will definitely be of interest for other development programmes.

Many experiences have been gained in the process of handing over plantations to the communities, although several challenges remain as discussed in previous chapters. Experiences gained will, if properly documented, have considerable value for replication in other districts and programmes, not only in Malawi, but also in other African countries.

7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction: The Blantyre City Fuelwood Project was initiated in 1986 as a NORAD project under the SADC programme. Since its inception the Project has been implemented by the Department of Forestry in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs. The present project period is the third phase, running from April 1997 to December 2001. During the first two phases 4,250 ha of eucalyptus plantations were established and 12,000 ha of natural woodlands were demarcated. Phase III is characterised by a total reorientation centered around handing over of forests to village communities organised in village natural resource management committees (VNRMC).

The methodology that was used by the mission to evaluate the BCFP is based upon the study of reports and documents, field trips to the villages, discussions with the BCFP staff, representatives from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs at central, regional and local levels, interviews with community and VNRMC/ANRMC members, representatives from the Traditional Authorities (T/A) and the District Assembly and NGOs. Discussions have also been held with representatives from the Norwegian Embassy. In general, compiled statistical data, research surveys or comparison studies have not been available.

Project design and relevance: The project design is well adapted to the new development paradigms resulting from world-wide policy changes towards decentralisation, democratisation, local empowerment/ local governance, poverty alleviation, etc. In that respect the new orientation of the project is extremely relevant. It largely corresponds to reorientation in national policies in Malawi on important matters like local empowerment and decentralisation. It also corresponds with the guidelines for a new national forest policy as manifested in the document “Malawi’s National Forestry Programme.”

The organisational structure of the BCFP is appropriate for the implementation of project activities. It is, however, considered to be a weakness that the linkage to the Regional Forest Office has been rather superficial. Organising a project outside the parent institutions does not foster sustainability. Luckily it has been observed that staff of both organisations on district level has collaborated well in the field.

From a theoretical point of view project committees have been relevant for the purpose they were meant for, but it is a general impression that the transition committee, that should prepare the transfer of the project to the Regional Forest Office, came into operation relatively late, has had few meetings and has not been able to establish firm strategies to minimise the risks in the transfer process. Furthermore it has not been able to include or properly inform the village level about the process.

Implementation and project results: The development objective of the BCFP is “improved living standard for the local communities within and around the BCFP areas”. No social surveys have been conducted to verify any changes in this respect. It is, however, believed that the living standard is improved in some communities because of a significant increase in cash flow, better transport facilities and certain improvements in schools, clinics, orphanages, etc. in some villages. The immediate objective of the project is “forest resources managed by the communities, in an ecologically sustainable way. ” This is also difficult to measure because of lack of statistics, surveys or relevant physical monitoring reports. Nevertheless a

situation exists where the forest resources are managed by the communities themselves, on the average in a more or less balanced way, but with several examples of poor management practices. When it comes to the project outputs it can in general terms be said that most have been accomplished to a certain extent, but that a lot still needs to be done in order to make the achievements sustainable. For further details on achievements in project activities, reference is made to the annexes in the main report.

On the implementation side the most visible achievement is the handing over of plantations and the establishment of VNRMCs in the villages. The Mission was informed that 113 village natural resource committees have been created and up to now 92 of them have received plantations and indigenous forests blocks. The creation of a VNRMC in close co-operation with the Traditional Authorities has been an indispensable prerequisite for the communities to receive any forest at all and, thus is a fundamental element in the handing over process. The VNRMC is composed of 10 members, of which a minimum of three must be women, and they have been trained in leadership, forest management, bookkeeping and marketing issues. The presence of an accurate accounting system based on transparency and group control is indispensable, which is not yet the case and is representing a major obstacle.

Also other target groups have been trained, including staff, community members, traditional leaders, etc. All in all a massive training programme has been implemented through the project. Follow up and refresher-training programmes need to be carried out in order to sustain the social capital built through this effort.

The existence of proper management plans is of vital importance for the daily execution of forest operations. Plans have been introduced for all plantation areas, but they suffer from a series of deficiencies, and will have to be amended. Estimated yields and annual harvesting must be recorded. Participation by the local committees in the establishment of management plans has not been adequately practised. In this respect the extension service must improve their routines.

Regarding management planning in indigenous forests, little progress has been made. There is a considerable risk of these patches being degraded, since the villagers have not been properly trained in how to manage them. Some other projects in Malawi have developed skills in indigenous forest management, and these should be tapped by the project.

The 1998 evaluation mission pointed out that the monitoring and evaluation system had to be improved considerably. Elements of such a system now exist, but it is of vital importance that feedback and follow up is improved. A monitoring form is being used to record village meetings, but follow up is weak and some communities seemed not to be aware of the existence of the form. Monitoring of harvesting and forest maintenance work is virtually non-existent.

Assessment of the impact on ecology/environment could not be done because of lack of specific data. It is, however, obvious that better plant coverage prevents erosion, it may improve water balance, increase biodiversity, etc. Since the eucalyptus plantations are to a large extent a monoculture, efforts should be done to diversify tree species in the future. More emphasis should also be put into the management of the indigenous forests.

Gender and equity issues have not been included as important components in the project design. However, in the third phase the participation of women on the village committees has

reached an average of about 43%, with some examples of committees with a clear majority of women. Women are also holding key positions, frequently as chairpersons and treasurers, and seem to take active part in discussions and meetings. Equity concerns in benefit distribution has not been addressed by the project, and no mechanisms are in place to ensure the inclusion of the least privileged village groups.

More than 400 km of roads have been constructed. They are supposed to be repaired before they are handed over to local authorities and communities, but funds seem to be inadequate to fulfil this task within the project period. With income from the plantations the VNRMCs should be able to maintain most of the minor roads themselves, but maintenance of the major roads and possible handing over to the Road Department is still pending.

The income generating component was only included in the third phase. Five activities were described in the project document, but only two of them have been addressed; namely bee-keeping and guinea fowl rearing. A certain number of clubs have been created to receive training and equipment. NGOs have been involved in the training. Even if beehives and fowls have been distributed this year, the activity has on the whole been insignificant. For diversified income generation it is recommended that something be done on the use of other tree species, like precious/ semi-precious woods, agroforestry species and fruit trees. As to income generation the ban on charcoal production represents a problem and a limitation.

Project transition and sustainability: The capacity of public institutions to organise training and extension activities for the village committees is considered to be weak, mainly due to lack of funds and training of staff members. However, during the project period a lot of knowledge has been accumulated at all levels of the forest authorities. Forest assistants and forest guards are important staff categories at district level. After the implementation of the Local Government Act of 1998 the District Assembly and the Traditional Authorities (T.A.) will become increasingly important to the VNRMCs, but they are also lacking funds. In the immediate future a well-functioning extension service will be of utmost importance to the village committees.

The capacity of communities to manage plantations varies a lot. A few of them seem to be able to manage them in a sustained manner, while the majority stands for acceptable to poor management and at the bottom are those that are mismanaged, even to a degree where all trees are cut down. This damage is not necessarily disastrous, since eucalyptus regenerates easily through coppicing. To improve management capacity more training in planning is absolutely necessary.

The project handing over process has been discussed in the Local Steering Committee for some time, it must, however, be concluded that the Regional Forest Office so far has not been fully involved. This will have to be improved immediately.

So far very few outside institutions or organisations have been involved in project activities, but with the transfer of the BCFP to the Regional Forest Office this will have to change. New actors will enter the scene, actors like the District Assembly, the MPs, the Road Department, the District Development Committee and hopefully a number of NGOs. The VNRMCs should be trained to actively exploit the existing opportunities for development support from diverse sources.

It is strongly believed that there is a vital need for additional support to certain activities, above all for training of committee members and technical staff on matters concerning all sides of administration of village organisations and sustainable management of village forests. It is, however, believed that future support to the project area should be given a different focus, mainly within decentralisation, local empowerment, organisation building, local (village) governance, etc. This orientation will have to be anchored in some practical activities, among which capacity building and management planning are vital elements.

Replicability: When it comes to replicability of the project, several lessons and experiences are included in the main report. A central conclusion is that it is feasible and potentially sustainable to hand over forest land (plantations or indigenous) to local communities, under the condition that the villagers are trained in how to organise themselves and are receiving adequate training in organisational, accountancy and management matters, and that they have access to training and extension services. Very good results can be achieved in the form of community empowerment when strong local organisations are matched with the availability of financial resources stemming from the forest products. Experiences from the training programmes under the BCFP will also be of considerable interest for other development programmes.

Conclusions: It was concluded that the BCFP in its third phase has successfully been able to assist the establishment of VNRMCs and develop by-laws to be used as organisational and management guidelines and train them in leadership, management, book-keeping and marketing principles. On that basis the project has been able to hand over plantations and indigenous forests to 108 communities and supplied them with equipment and management plans. It is believed that the VNRMCs/ANRMCs will be able to manage the forests in a balanced way if the competent technical body supplies additional training and follow up support to the committees. Further development of the local organisations is necessary in the fields of, e.g., adapting and improving the by-laws, strengthening of accountability and transparency and development planning. This will also include continuing the comprehensive training programme implemented under the BCFP.

The preparation of management plans is incomplete since productivity and annual harvesting estimates are not recorded. Interaction with the committees in the planning process has been insufficient. It is seen as a prerequisite for future success in management of the forest resources that have been handed over that the forest authorities are able to give continuous support and that sufficient technical staffing is made available for this purpose. Management plans for indigenous forest plots should be developed forthwith.

More than 400 km of roads have been constructed and will be handed over to local communities and forest authorities or road authorities at the end of the project. Attempts to make the Ministry of Works (MoW) take over major roads has failed, as well as attempts to avail additional funding for upgrading of the roads to an acceptable state for take-over by MoW. Many roads have been repaired during the last phase of the project, but many will also be handed over in a poor state. No mention of the road situation is done in the phasing out plan of the project, and a plan for this should be developed.

Monitoring in the project has been introduced but follow up is still poor. An improvement in this respect is vital in order to establish a learning and feedback loop and to maintain some level of control over progress and obstacles.

It is registered that the average participation of women on the committees are in the order of 43%, that the women are holding positions like chairperson, treasurer and secretary and are regularly taking part in meetings and activities. The income generating activities component has been of little significance to the target group. The training of trainers and committee representatives has been relevant but not sufficient. The monitoring and evaluation system has improved, but it is uncertain whether the feedback to the committees has been sufficiently participative.

Recommendations: Many recommendations on the different elements are included in the main report. General, overall recommendations include the following:

- - The BCFP should be terminated in December 2001 according to existing plans. Remaining funds should be used within project components where objectives are not yet accomplished or where weaknesses exist, mainly within training in organisation building and accountancy, as well as sensitising communities on the expected changes as the project is terminated.
- - The FD should establish an internal task force or an internal project in order to establish a work plan for following up of BCFP related activities that fall naturally under FD responsibility. This task force should have a considerably wider scope than the one currently preparing the handing over
- - The FD should embark upon a bold process of establishing a new integrated programme where, e.g., the Ministry of Local Government and the District Assemblies in relevant districts are involved. The purpose of this would be to establish a programme in support of the decentralisation process, improvement of local governance, poverty alleviation and sustainable natural resource management. The new programme should be designed in such a way that support to communities that have been involved in the BCFP are included in order to safeguard the achievements in community empowerment and reduce the risk of jeopardising the substantial forest resources now under community control. A concept note on such a programme is offered in Annex No. 16.

ANNEXES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. TOR	29
2. Itinerary of team	32
3. Persons met	34
4. Map of Malawi	36
5. Map of project area	37
6. Documents consulted	38
7. Logical Framework for the project	40
8. Organogramme Project Organisation	42
9. Organogramme Department of Forestry Organisation	43
10. List of VNRMCs and their handing over status	44
11. Copy of Handing over Contract	47
12. Project Outputs results	50
13. Sample VNRMC by-laws	55
14. Sample Management plan	62
15. Monitoring form	63
16. Outlines for a new project proposal	64