



Christoph Dürre  
**The Contribution  
of Forests and  
Trees to Poverty  
Alleviation**

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This paper has been written and compiled by Christoph Dürri and is based on a study commissioned by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The study was initiated and given expert advice and encouragement by the Working Group on the Role of Trees in Development Cooperation. This group comprises members of SDC, the Swiss Agency for the Environment, Forests and Landscape (SAEFL), the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (seco), the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich), Intercooperation and Helvetas and disseminates information about the important contribution trees and forests can make to sustainable rural development, both as an integral part of nature or landscape and as a vital factor in global environmental policies (<http://www.forestflash.ch>).

The Working Group wants to extend the understanding of trees and forests beyond the context of natural resources, landscape and environment into transversal categories such as empowerment, gender and poverty. The objective is to lobby opinion leaders and the people responsible for the distribution of funds so that they will introduce these contexts into the national and international debates about development cooperation. The work of the group is also based on the firm belief that a successful fight against poverty would

contribute to relieving the ecological pressure many of the world's forests are currently subjected to.

The Working Group consists of the following members:

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# **Preface to the publication «The Contribution of Forests and Trees to Poverty Alleviation»**

Forests and poverty: at first glance, these two terms seem to have little in common. Citizens of the developed world would much more readily associate forests with ideas of leisure and luxury. Our image of poverty is rather one of ramshackle huts in urban squatter areas. This, however, is only one aspect of a much wider phenomenon. The poor and poorest in the developing countries are often living off the forests, with the forests, inside the forests. The poor – in particular women and children – often rely heavily on the products and resources the forests have to offer: not so much different, as a matter of fact, from the situation in our own countries as little as a hundred years ago. The poor are often the landless and need to have free access to the resources of the forests in order to survive. This is why the poor cannot afford to be indifferent to questions of «what happens to their forests». The related question, on the other hand, of how to involve the poor in the management of the forest resources, maybe even how to help them to overcome their poverty with their help, will have a decisive impact on the future of the forests in these parts of the world. The poor must be helped and supported in their efforts to advocate and assert their own interests. Switzerland with its wide range of experiences in

cooperative forest management and decentralised administration structures is in a unique position to make an important contribution here.

This study, written by Christoph Dürr and sponsored jointly by SDC, the Working Group for Trees and Forests in Development Cooperation and Intercooperation, presents the frequently complex interactive mechanisms between forests and poverty in precise, yet always lucid and easily understandable terms. We would like everybody to read it who deals with questions of rural poverty or forest management in the context of international cooperation.

Felix von Sury  
Director Intercooperation



# **The Contribution of Forests and Trees to Poverty Alleviation – Some Reflections**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1 What factors are causing the poverty of population groups who depend on forest products for their livelihood?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2 How can the use of forest resources help to improve the living conditions of the poor?</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3 What must be done to make trees and forests more useful for the poor?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>4 What conclusions need to be drawn, what steps need to be taken?</b>	<b>17</b>

## Introduction

### **Seminar on «Forests and Poverty» dated Nov. 17, 1999**

Four papers were presented: *How to Define Poverty and How to Fight it* (BÜRKI, Hansfranz; SDC); *The Fight Against Poverty in the Real World – An Example from Mali* (POSCHEN, Peter; ILO); *La Foresterie Sociale au Projet Crête Zaïre-Nil* (GASANA, James K.; Intercooperation) and *What Trees and Forests Can Contribute to the Fight Against Poverty* (EGLI, Arnold; Stäfa). The latter paper presented arguments in favour of giving trees and forests a more important part in the fight against poverty, a suggestion which was then discussed by the participants.

(Seminar documents can be requested under the address [inforest@intercooperation.ch](mailto:inforest@intercooperation.ch))

The fight against poverty is one of the top priorities of both the Swiss and the international development policies. The United Nations has vowed to reduce global poverty by half until the year 2015. What contribution can *trees and forests* make in this context? This question was addressed by a seminar held in Bern in November 1999 (see box) on the invitation of the Working Group Trees and Forests in Development Cooperation. The seminar was triggered off by a SDC-sponsored analysis<sup>1</sup> dealing with the fight against poverty, the way it is addressed in official programmes and the pertinent international discussion.

### Why this paper

It is the objective of this paper to stimulate the discussion in Switzerland about questions related to the globally relevant topic of «forests and poverty». The following questions deserve more attention and need to be comprehensively dealt with – internationally, but also in Switzerland: *What factors are causing the poverty of population groups who depend on forest products for their livelihood? – How can the use of forest resources help to improve the living conditions of the poor? – What must be done to make trees and forests more useful for the poor?*

This paper is therefore addressed to all people who are dealing with these matters: the officials of SDC, the seco and the Swiss Federal Forestry Department in the SAEFL<sup>2</sup>, representatives of NGOs and the private sector and all people who are actively working to promote international development cooperation.

On two particular occasions, the fight against poverty and the use of natural resources will make headline news in the course of 2002: in connection with the review of the debate regarding sustainable development (*Agenda 21, RIO+10* in Johannesburg) and with events surrounding the *International Year of Mountains*<sup>3</sup>.

### Why now

A number of recent global developments have focused the attention on issues of «forests and poverty». The question what impact different kinds of forest use may have on the living conditions of the poor is currently explored by virtually all international development organisations. The World Bank intends to use the impact of forests on poverty alleviation as one of the three main pillars of its new forestry strategy (next to the economic sustainability and the protection of the biodiversity). Social criteria are also constantly gaining in importance for the certification of forests. The question as to what extent the increasing environmental problems are caused by the growing gap between rich and poor reveals its relevance in the implementation strategies of the global environment charters – including the three most important strategies with a bearing on forests, anti-desertification measures in arid zones, the protection of biodiversity and the climate convention. The discussion of the role of trees as carbon sinks in the context of the Kyoto Protocol and the international readiness to invest considerable amounts of money into afforestation have demonstrated what impact different uses of trees and forests have on underprivileged and poor sections of the population. Measures to protect the environment on a global scale are urgently required, but it must be ensured that those made to pay for them will not be those who can least afford to do so.

# 1 What factors are causing the poverty of population groups who depend on forest products for their livelihood?

## Who are the poor?

According to the World Bank, the poorest rural people are poorer than the urban poor. The poorer a family, the more it tends to rely on natural resources. This mainly affects *women and children*, who often do the bulk of the 'forest work' of gathering wood and tending the domestic animals. Population groups which depend strongly on forests include:

**Hunters** whose needs are partly or exclusively provided for by wild animals.

**Nomadic peasants** who temporarily harvest crops in tropical forests or arid zones.

**Owners of livestock** whose animals graze in forests and who rely exclusively on forests in the dry season or periods of drought.

**Farmers**, though focused in their farm work on fields and pastures rather than on forests, may strongly depend on forest resources for animal feed, parts of their own diet, building materials and energy.

**Craft and commerce** (in the countryside and towns) have different relationships to forests. Forest products are bought and sold.

(from a background paper of the World Bank<sup>4</sup>)

## The extent of global poverty

Poverty cannot be defined through low average per-capita-income and unstable food resources alone. The fight against poverty is therefore a fight to improve living conditions across a wide range of areas. Forests can substantially help the poor to survive through bad harvests, long periods of drought, seasonal shortfalls and unexpected emergencies. If the extent of global poverty is to be reduced by half until 2015, it is vital that the needs of the poor are recognised and that their rights will be put under permanent protection.

The World Bank intends to use the impact of forests on the fight against poverty as one of the three main pillars of its new forestry strategy<sup>5</sup> – in full knowledge and awareness of the fact that 1.2 billion people (out of a global population of 6.0 billion) have a daily income of under \$1 and that 1.6 billion people rely heavily more or less on forest resources for their livelihood. These resources include both wood and non-wood products, combinations with agricultural forms of use and non-material services. Poor families often depend completely on forest resources for their fuel, animal feed and medical needs (medicinal herbs or plants).

## **Vital decisions are made by others and elsewhere**

Egli<sup>6</sup> describes – based on literature studies and a wide range of case examples – the complex network of cause and effect connecting forests and poverty. How do shrinking forest resources affect the poor? Would a consistently fought ‘campaign against poverty’ automatically increase the volume and the quality of available forest resources?

Many decisions are arrived at far away from the forest resources and the people who depend on them for their livelihood. But it is these people who then have to live with their frequently adverse effects.

Before a sustainable management of trees and forests can make a contribution to a successful fight against poverty, the poor need to be sufficiently empowered to allow them to claim their rights and to gain permanent access to the forest resources. As long as decisions concerning the forest resources are arrived at without the local population having previously been consulted, a number of adverse effects will inevitably result, which must be prevented by improving the socio-economic framework (EGLI, 1999):

- Only a few forest products are actively used (mainly wood). Any profit is channelled outside; no long-term investments are made locally.

- External labour and machinery resources are used (damages to the forest, external investments).
- Traditional knowledge is being lost.
- Property and exploitation rights are defined to the disadvantage of the local population.
- The loss of livelihood will cause the local population to migrate, destroying local social structures and possibly leading to a local shortfall in available labour resources.
- Subsidies, tax reductions, research and training activities, trade regulations etc. are defined for the benefit of large forestry and industrial corporations. These will always find it easier to make their voices heard by government agencies and offices.

*Political, legislative and planning processes will therefore have to consider the following issues:*

- The impact of national and international politics, markets and institutional surroundings on forest resource management.
- The shifting power relationship between winners and losers in terms of access to the forest and its products.
- The assessment of forest management in the context of the sustainable livelihood of the underprivileged population groups, including their access to vital resources such as health and education, but also to institutions such as markets and judicial services.

- The forest needs and demands of forest owners and users with a particular view to the local poor,
- Forest products and services including the conditions on their respective markets.

The study draws a number of conclusions:

- In most parts of the world, countryside without forests and trees can be neither cultivated, protected nor permanently inhabited.
- Degradation of the forest affects everyone, but most strongly those at the bottom of the socio-economic scale.
- The destruction of forests can be both the cause and the effect of poverty or prosperity. The destruction of forests and the rising levels of poverty, however, are often closely connected with certain power structures, centralised decision making processes and bad government.
- Promising responses include job-creation schemes inside and outside the forest, attempts to increase agricultural productivity outside the forest and the institution of land reform laws to broaden the access to land resources.
- Economic growth will only assist in the fight against poverty if the poorest members of society are also given the chance to benefit.

- Sustainable forms of forest management to increase the general welfare and to alleviate and fight poverty require the political processes to be appropriately altered and adapted. Only a new 'social contract' will ensure a fair distribution of and a general access to the natural resources.

### **Poverty equals small income plus hunger?**

A survey<sup>7</sup> about the tree and forest management needs of the poor among different stakeholders (conducted in different areas) demonstrates the extent to which the causes for poverty are intertwined and interwoven. It is generally held that five different forms of capital are required to establish a sustainable livelihood: *natural, physical, financial, human, and social capital*. The following list which is based on the results of the survey outlines the main problems of the poor in the acquisition and the use of these different forms of capital:

**The main problems of poor population groups trying to establish sustainable livelihoods. Source: surveys in different regions (see MACQUEEN, Duncan)**

<i>natural capital</i>	<p>Natural resources (soil, trees, water, pastures)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Overuse through non-enforceable legal regulations and a lack of development plans.</li><li>● Low productivity, marginal agriculture (due to climate, soil and topography), natural disasters (fires, floods, droughts etc.).</li><li>● Insufficient use of alternative options (lack of funds to increase production, lack of information about markets and the opportunity to create added value through processing).</li></ul>
<i>physical capital</i>	<p>Means of production (in private hands or part of the public infrastructure)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Geographical isolation (long distances to the markets), in conjunction with a poorly equipped public infrastructure (roads, communication links, schools, doctors and hospitals).</li><li>● Lack of drinking water and many other elements of a healthy diet.</li><li>● Legal insecurity regarding the rights to own and use the land.</li><li>● Few working opportunities (includes opportunities outside the forest).</li></ul>
<i>financial capital</i>	<p>Financial means and access to markets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● High risks for entrepreneurs, little or no organisation and cooperation between the small companies, insufficient lobbying efforts.</li><li>● Few instruction and training opportunities with a view to savings and loans, insufficient market information.</li><li>● The informal sector suffers from gaps in the legal regulations and inconsistently handled fiscal guidelines.</li><li>● Obsolete processing methods, lack of experience in the development of products.</li></ul>
<i>human capital</i>	<p>Human factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Many people suffer from poor diets and a poor state of health.</li><li>● Few education and training opportunities.</li><li>● Institutional structures are insufficiently equipped (as regards funding and skills) for training / consulting purposes. Services are difficult to access.</li></ul>
<i>social capital</i>	<p>Social network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● No policy to decentralise decision making processes and allow the poor to participate.</li><li>● No training facilities to prepare the planning, budgeting and execution of measures on local / communal level.</li></ul>

In terms of the *Forestry Research Programme*, the conclusion is that the problems are in need of a *transdisciplinary approach*<sup>8</sup>.

Well thought-out solutions will only have a chance of being implemented after *political and institutional changes* have prepared the ground.

# 2

## How can the use of forest resources help to improve the living conditions of the poor?

### Better living conditions

Forests and trees are more than just an assembly of organic wood and non-wood products. They fulfil a wide range of functions and have a substantial impact on the living conditions of human beings who depend on the forest for their livelihoods. The forest as a functional habitat with its drinking water, soil, wood, animal feed, fruit, game and medicinal plants is of central importance particularly for the most underprivileged and poorest members of society. Forests are their places of work and a resource for their own food as much as for their animals, they provide building materials and fuel, places for spiritual significance and for shelter – and they are providers of last resort in hard times.

Generally speaking, forests help to improve living conditions in the following areas<sup>9</sup>:

### Subsistence products, agricultural input and higher incomes

For the majority of the poor, the use and processing of forest products is only a part-time activity to complement seasonal agriculture or for want of other employment opportunities. Bartering or selling forest products often allows these people to acquire the means and instruments for other activities: seeds and fertilisers, the money to pay seasonal workers during the agricultural peak times of seeding and harvesting or the capital needed to trade. Forest products are also capable of generating ›indirect income‹ by reducing the

amounts required to purchase animal feed, food (fruit, mushrooms, roots etc.), fuel (wood) or medicine.

### More stable food supplies and means to acquire food

Forests are an important resource for supplementary food products to complement a diet based on agricultural produce. Most rural households in the developing world rely in one way or another on the forest as a source of food for human beings and domestic animals. Wood quite often provides the only fuel for domestic cookery appliances: if there were no wood, families could not cook or boil their food, make it digestible and kill all germs in the process. Forests also provide the raw materials for agricultural tools, storage facilities, hunting and fishing utensils and feed for the domestic animals. Trees have an important role to play in the drinking water supply system and provide protection for animals and vegetable plots.

### Less vulnerability in hard times: the forest as a safety net

Poor families often live on the edge and cannot make provisions for emergencies. High-energy forest foods such as roots, bulbs and nuts can be of vital importance after floods, long periods of drought, famines and wars. Forests and trees have an important role to play as a safety net (an emergency reserve) to help families survive emergencies such as bad harvests, unemployment, illnesses or unexpected expenses.

### **Sustainable use of natural resources**

A sustainable use of natural resources is a vital precondition for a sustainable livelihood. This is true for all population groups, but particularly so for the rural poor. They are extremely susceptible to a destruction of their local livelihoods. This must not be understood to mean that poverty prevents investments into the environment. Examples demonstrate that poor population groups are willing and able to raise enormous «venture capital» (in the form of time and labour) for such projects if they look promising enough. Technical solutions will fail unless they are based on local experience.

### **A better quality of life**

Forests provide not only income and livelihoods, but also non-material goods and services. Most societies acknowledge the special importance of trees and forests by making them the focus of religious, cultural and spiritual ceremonies or legal proceedings. The perception of someone's own prosperity and quality of life is the product of many factors, including self-respect, the pride in one's capacity to analyse and solve one's problems independently, access to sources of knowledge and services etc. Initiatives which regulate and improve the general access to forest resources and which are based on fair and participatory decision making processes will help to increase the collective prosperity, in particular that of the poor.

This is also why poor population groups need to be integrated into the planning

process involving the forests, and why those concerned must be given responsibility for the pertinent decisions.

### **Lessons from past experience**

#### **The poor are aware of their poverty**

Questions about the origin of poverty and possible strategies of fighting it are extremely complex and are subject to one's personal point of view. Poverty affects the entire range of people's lives and manifests itself first and foremost as the feeling of being powerless and incapable of escaping a desperate situation. The fight against this feeling, the *promotion of empowerment*, is seen as an important battle in the war against poverty. The idea that those affected by poverty need to participate actively in the management of the available resources is in principle uncontested. Before the appropriate steps can be taken, however, more concrete and more clearly defined strategies will have to be agreed. First of all, it will have to become clearer who the underprivileged target groups are. Poverty Assessments – to be carried out in close cooperation with the groups concerned – will help to establish a database regarding the poverty situation in the partner country and the project areas<sup>10</sup>.

#### **Decentralised and joint decisions about the use of natural resources**

Sustainable growth in production, improved access to the means of production and the capability to influence the underlying

ing conditions all contribute to alleviate and eradicate poverty. Often there is a sufficient amount of local knowledge and skills for a sustainable use of forest products. The forest as a place of work and a source of additional income is capable of alleviating poverty provided the poor are enabled to make use of the respective opportunities.

Most interventions fail to recognise the special role of women although, in most countries, women are bearing the main responsibility for the use of forest resources. It is vital to analyse the user groups correctly in order to recognise and eventually fulfil their needs.

Processes regarding the fair exploitation of forest resources in rural areas quite often overlap with projects of community cooperation. The system of Collaborative Forest Management – i.e. contracts combining governmental control with local decisions – stimulates the development of learning processes which may encourage the participants to tackle other problems outside the forest boundaries.

### **Forests have a substantial relevance for development policies**

Forests with all their products, services and their biological diversity have a large impact on questions of local development. Strategies in the fight against poverty need a transdisciplinary approach in order to get a grip on the complexities of the situation. This is not a demand for a return of the integrated rural development projects of the 70s and 80s where the smallholders were supported through a

network of services run by the government. It is more important to support processes which enable the smallholders to participate in decision making processes and to trade independently on the market.

While merely technical forestry projects are slipping down the priority lists, forests are becoming ever more important – and this not only in programmes about the use of sustainable resources, but also in areas such as good government, income support and promotion of social justice.

### **Poverty-oriented, participatory monitoring and empowerment**

Development cooperation projects are often implicitly understood as battles in the fight against poverty. While this may be «self-evident» to some, it is actually quite difficult to find any palpable evidence for this in real life. The assumption that better living conditions for those who are already (to some extent) privileged will, at some stage, also help to improve the life of the poor has unfortunately not been confirmed. What is required is a combination of participatory monitoring procedures<sup>11</sup> to safeguard subjectivity and multidimensionality in the analysis of poverty with a differentiating outside perspective on the uneven distribution of wealth and privileges. This in turn requires a poverty-oriented definition of the basic parameters (poverty assessments, gender assessments). When it comes to evaluating the measures intended to eradicate poverty and to level the differences in the distribu-

tion of wealth and privileges, it is at least as important to eradicate the causes of poverty as well.

Empowerment seeks a *direct* approach to a solution by involving those concerned and by promoting concepts such as responsibility and self-reliance. It supports those immediately concerned, either directly or through intermediate organisations. The *indirect* steps, however, which target the socio-economic framework and exogenous causes of poverty are of equal importance. Existing power structures, legal and fiscal regulations and the distribution of resources (including skills and knowledge) can only be changed under strong political pressure which needs to be generated primarily by those who are concerned themselves. The fight against poverty must aim to ensure a fairer and more even distribution of wealth and privileges. Making poverty less miserable is not enough.

### **More SDC-studies on the subject**

An analysis of the implementation of strategies in the fight against poverty in the context of a comprehensive study<sup>12</sup> of existing programme documents points out the lack of explicit objectives integrated into the practical work. Despite the passionate commitment and wide experience of people working for the projects there is a lack of systematic documentation and coherent monitoring systems.

In late 2000, the SDC issued an orientation paper<sup>13</sup> which attempted to integrate the views of the poor themselves and the aid institutions into one comprehensive definition of poverty.

# 3

## What must be done to make trees and forests more useful for the poor?

### **A willingness to put things into a new perspective**

Trees and forests make a substantial contribution to the livelihood of the rural population. Permanent improvements to the living conditions of the poor require the poor themselves to focus on their needs, to analyse the socio-economic framework and to push for the necessary changes on all levels of politics and society. The management of forest resources is a particularly appropriate stage for such an attempt since it directly concerns a large number of the poor.

The following issues have a particularly high rank of priority:

### **Focus on poor population groups and women**

Since trees and forests have a vital importance for the livelihood of the poor, decision making processes must involve those who are concerned by them. First, the question how and by whom these groups can be represented and how a fair access to the existing resources can be guaranteed needs to be addressed. This discussion must be based on an analysis that clearly states under what conditions the forest resources are being used, who is responsible for them and for what groups of people and what groups of products access needs to be improved or created. This process is also intended to give the needs of women and children a voice. Cooperative behaviour patterns are a precondition for success.

In many countries, the most important step would be the (parallel) change of the political and legal framework with a view to anchor participatory mechanisms firmly in the law. In places where control and management capacities are weak, they will need to be strengthened and supported.

### **Guarantee and secure the access to forest resources**

For trees and forests to be able to live up to their role as poor people's resource for additional income and emergency, the right of access to them needs to be established and permanently guaranteed. This in turn is a function of well-run local organisations (mainly on community level) supported by forest laws and policies, clearly defined property and access rights and participation-oriented planning guidelines.

Development cooperation groups have the task of supporting different institutions (on both government and NGO levels) to promote reforms in favour of a higher degree of social justice, to carry out analyses of the needs of poor population groups and of the existing resources and to support local organisation networks which are working towards a sustainable use of forest resources.

### **Create incentives to plant and nurture trees**

Poor producers must be given access to the means of production, market information and the means of distribution to be able to trade on the markets for forest

products. More and better incentives need to be created for the poor to participate in the national and international afforestation programmes.

Advice about ways to cultivate and exploit the different types of trees must be provided and made easily accessible. Particular stress should be put on the possibilities to combine the cultivation of trees with agriculture (*agroforestry*). Organised producer and marketing cooperatives should – in conjunction with a poverty-oriented trade policy – help the farmers to receive a fair price for their goods.

### **Develop the production in niche sectors**

Crafts and small enterprises based on forest products (both wood and non-wood) provide a large job potential for poor families (with no land of their own) to help them generate additional income and acquire a degree of independence. These people, however, need access to financial services (savings and loans), technical skills and knowledge, market information and training opportunities before they can embark upon a career as small entrepreneurs. Training programmes must be designed to suit the special needs of the poor in order to enable them to improve their chances on the market. Particular attention needs to be paid to the needs of women who are often denied access to loans and certain market segments.

Any successful and sustainable improvement of the earning power of the rural poor must be based upon a trade and fiscal policy which has been tailored to

their specific needs. It is also vital that the existing resources are neither plundered nor destroyed but managed in compliance with the principles of sustainable development.

### **Evaluate and reward the forests' environmental contributions**

This is a practice more honoured in the breach than in the observance of the principles of sustainable development. The practice can help to diversify rural incomes permanently while simultaneously improving the living conditions for the population «downstream». Few people can contest the fact that forests can have a beneficial impact, be it as a protection against natural dangers, a safeguard for biodiversity and clean water resources, a force in the generation of the landscape and a point of attraction for eco-tourists. It is, however, notoriously difficult to quantify the environmental contributions of the various forestry and agricultural practices and to find ways of rewarding the people concerned by setting up sustainable structures of institutional financing arrangements. This discussion is currently being revived in the wake of the debate surrounding carbon sinks, but to no (concrete) avail yet. There is a marked lack of reliable data on the basis of which financing mechanisms could then be developed. In connection with the fight against poverty, the question still remains to be addressed on how a fair reward scheme which gives the poor their due can be maintained in the long run.

## The «fight» against poverty

The objectives of development projects can be categorised according to their intended impact on poverty. The objectives range from *poverty neutral* (do not aggravate the situation or cause any new poverty), via *poverty alleviating or – reducing* to *aiming to eradicate poverty permanently*.

Not all projects are equally suited for the fight against poverty, but this «fight» needs to be transversally (and measurably) integrated into the planning process as a clearly stated objective. Poverty-neutral strategies will not be able to improve the poverty situation!

## Alternatives outside the forests?

In the next few decades, products from trees and forests will still have an important role to play in the economic lives of the poor. At the same time, however, populations will rise and put forest resources under ever increasing pressure. The growth in productivity will not be able to keep up with the pace of this development, and consequently the poor will need help in finding alternative livelihoods outside the forests. In countries with few forests, the improvement of agricultural production and processing techniques can solve many of the pertinent problems. The forest resources will meanwhile not lose their function as the ‘provider of last resort’ for the poor families. The challenge will be to preserve trees and forests both as productive economic factors and as a safety net with all their environmental benefits. If this particular circle can be squared, everybody will be a winner: improved protection from natural disasters and cleaner, healthier drinking water supplies will feature among the results.

# 4

## What conclusions need to be drawn, what steps need to be taken?

Forests make an important contribution to the quality of life for all human beings. *For many poor families in the East and South, meanwhile, the use of forest resources is a crucial means to survival and the focus of their lives.* Forests provide the basic ingredients for their meals, help them generate additional income and serve as indispensable emergency reserves. Whereas many of us think of forest products mainly in terms of timber, for the poor, firewood, non-wood products and non-material environmental functions are of much higher relevance.

This paper has demonstrated that a fair access of the poor to these resources is subject to *political and social changes*.

What contribution can we make in our activities?:

- Past experiences in the areas of forest conservation and sustainable use of forest resources have demonstrated that successful forest management strategies need to be developed from the perspective of the poor themselves. We, the outsiders, have to learn to see things from their point of view. We need to *act together with the poor* in a spirit of true partnership.
- We cannot win the war against poverty by relying on the *collateral effects* of development programmes. We need to develop new concepts and ask the poor themselves to help us design new monitoring instruments. The donor institutions have an important role to play in the field of education and training

and can help to create the right local and national conditions for programmes to prosper.

- These conditions include clear legal definitions of property rights, rights of use and rights of access. Only when poverty-oriented guidelines have been implemented will it be possible to motivate the poor sufficiently to participate in the decision making processes.
- In order to enable the poor to express their needs, *poverty assessments* will have to make the local situation more transparent. The poor must be enabled and empowered to «read» their situation and to insist on their *rights to participate in the design of the legal and political framework*. Planning procedures for the use of forest resources will have to be adapted to the changed socio-political parameters and will have to accommodate the needs of women and children – not only because they will be concerned by the decisions in question, but also because they are the planning authorities' partners under the terms of the new social contract.
- By strengthening the *negotiating position of the underprivileged*, one can also increase their self-confidence, in particular if their knowledge and abilities to arrive at solutions of their own are taken seriously. This will also help them to assert their interests in other areas of their lives.
- New management agreements concerning the use of forest resources are intimately connected with *changes of power structures and the generation of*

*conflicts*. By placing themselves squarely behind the underprivileged, donor institutions can give the poor some hope of improving their otherwise desperate situations.

- Past experience has shown that agreements for joint forms of forest use have far *better chances of permanently preserving the forest resources*, if they have been concluded with the active participation of the poor and women. Participatory models of use should be supported with a particularly high rank of priority.
- Decisions about the use of forest resources need to be arrived at *in a decentralised and political fashion*. This is subject to the existence of a local will and ability to recognise the problems and to help in shaping the future. Switzerland has a vast experience with this type of local democracy.

A wide range of different cases can be found in the history of international cooperation which demonstrates that the hope for changes such as those described above is well founded.

Switzerland can lay down the cornerstones for such developments in international agreements – by implementing the climate and biodiversity convention, by influencing the process of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and the international convention on tropical timber (ITTO) and by participating in the RIO+10 debate about sustainable development.

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