



Working Group

**Socio-Economics of Forest Use  
in the Tropics and Subtropics**

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**Thailand's Community Forest Bill:  
U-Turn or Roundabout in Forest Policy?**

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## Abstract

Is community forestry just a new facette of state-controlled forest management or does it mark a turning point in forest policy? The example of Thailand can deliver valuable insights into the ambiguous nature in the development of this concept.

In this working paper, six German Ph.D. students with different disciplinary backgrounds reflect their experiences with community forestry from field studies which were carried out in 1997. The research focus of each student covered different aspects of local resource management and forest policy development in localities in Western, Northern, and Northeastern Thailand.

The Community Forest Bill in Thailand is the issue on which observations, discussions, and experiences of the researchers meet. Current attitudes and lines of reasoning of proponents and opponents of communal-based forest management are challenged by results from forest inventories, village surveys, and the analysis of political processes.

The paper is neither a policy recommendation nor a complete scientific work on the legal and political issue but rather an essay on people and forests in Thailand.

The first chapter gives an overview of 'global' perspectives on 'local' issues, how perception of nature and forest has changed, and how world forest policies have been adapted to the changing paradigms. The second chapter gives an overview of Thailand's history of deforestation in relation to economic development. It also explores the issues of landrights, forest policies and the ideological framework of forest protection strategies. The paper then traces the evolution of the Community Forest Bill as a political issue and gives an overview of the most controversial points in recent discussions. In chapter four - entitled 'local' perspectives on 'global' issues - the authors draw on their experience in different communities to develop suggestions for a successful community forestry approach.. They raise questions of roles and functions of forests to communities, their uses and meanings as well as what kind of institutions should be responsible for the protection and management of Community Forests. The paper leads to the conclusion that with the willingness and the initiative to critically review and adapt current land use regulations beyond the scope of a Community Forest Bill, community forestry may well be more than just a popular label. It may not only serve as a symbol of democratic resource management but also provide a 'U-turn' towards a more effective forest policy in Thailand.

The Ph.D. students invite all interested persons to get into contact for further discussion.

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