

6th Jack Westoby Lecture

Forests – the poor man’s overcoat: foresters as agents of change?

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Introduction

It is a great honour to be asked to give the Jack Westoby Lecture and in particular to come back to the ANU where my own odyssey began over 20 years ago. An odyssey that has taken me around the world in an endeavour to change the relationships between people and trees.

Jack Westoby had a profound effect on me. I have a clear memory of reading all his papers for the first time and knowing that I would never be able to think of the world in the same way again. I'm sure for many people involved in forestry around the world, it marked a similar turning point. Jack Westoby put forestry onto the international and political map, he did the unthinkable he said he was wrong and he put trees and people together.

I want to take as my starting point Jack's words that have lived with me and formed my career in forestry

'Forestry is not about trees, it is about people. And it is about trees only insofar as trees can serve the needs of people' (Westoby, 1987: ix).

People are the reason I became passionate about forestry.

I draw on both the inspiration of Jack Westoby as well as my formative time in the Nepal-Australia Forestry Project. A project, under the leadership of David Griffin that blazed a trail for forestry in Nepal which challenged the conventional top-down forestry science and contributed to the development of community forestry. An approach which has survived the political turmoil and made a significant difference to the rural poor.

Tonight I want to focus on people and their relations to trees and the experience I have gained of trying to make a difference - to make forestry work for poor people. I want to question how far we have accomplished the challenge Jack Westoby laid down for us over 30 years ago – a vision for people not trees.

Central to this questioning are two key elements of Jack Westoby's vision that still drive much of my thinking about forestry:

1. Are forests the poor man's overcoat?
2. Are foresters agents of change?

Why have I chosen these particular elements – because I see them as key parts of the future of forestry and its role in poverty reduction with foresters as facilitators of this outcome.

Let us now turn to the forestry story.

Where have 50 years of forestry development got us? Forest resources directly contribute to the livelihoods of 90% of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty and indirectly support the natural environment that is essential for agriculture and the food supplies of nearly half the population of the developing world (World Bank, 2004). But with over US\$1500 million a year spent on forestry by the donor agencies (Douglas, 1999) - what do we have to show for all the effort and money?

Mismanagement of forests has cost governments' revenues exceeding World Bank

lending to them¹. There is evidence of greater rates of deforestation and increased numbers of peoples living in poverty in forest areas. Experience has shown us that despite the flow of resources and technocratic support we have failed to change the things that really make a difference – the institutional and political structures that frame the world we live in and determine who claims access to resources and benefits from them, whose voices are heard and whose are silenced.

A common forestry assumption is that better science/technology should be the focus of research and action - better inventories, species selection, management practices. I am not going to address this particular thorny issue tonight but what is key is that the social consequences (good or bad) of improving science and technology depends on how it is applied, by whom, for whom and that **is** my focus tonight.

Forests are a source of wealth and power. They are also a locus of poverty. For many millions of people forests and forest products and services provide both direct and indirect sources of livelihood, providing a major part of their physical, material, economic and spiritual lives (Byron and Arnold, 1997:3). They often occur in remote rural areas with poor infrastructure, access to markets and other basic services, the last frontier of unallocated land and at the furthest edge of state reach. The livelihood options in such areas are highly circumscribed.

Increasing globalisation and the search by international finance for lucrative opportunities further increases pressure at the local-level for equitable resource access: this is particularly the case in Africa, where governance institutions are weak and national economies dependent on a rich natural resource endowment, and where conflict and political instability are fuelled by attempts to control access to resources. Evidence suggests that privatisation and enclosure of common pool resources is driving livelihood transformation in quite negative ways, increasing inequality, and generating conflict. The question of how forests should be managed, by whom and for whose benefit, requires governance answers at the local, national, regional and international levels, adding to the complexity surrounding forest management.

Around the world, a growing crisis of legitimacy characterises the relationships between citizens and institutions that affect their lives. In both North and South, citizens speak of mounting disillusionment with government, based on concerns about corruption, lack of responsiveness to the voices of the poor and the absence of a sense of connection with elected representatives and bureaucrats. Trust has apparently broken down and suspicion rides high. Traditional forms of expertise and representation are being questioned. The rights and responsibilities of corporations and other global actors are being challenged as global inequalities persist and deepen.

As foresters we are part of this, over the years in the international development business we (I) have sold global models that will supposedly bring peace, prosperity and poverty reduction, what sort of agents of change have we been? What sort of overcoats have we provided to poor people?

The challenge facing forestry is not just the restoration of trees or forest dwelling biodiversity but the growth of a political and social landscape that facilitates people's abilities to make choices to secure their livelihoods; to move beyond forests as a 'poor man's overcoat' (just sustaining people in poverty) to forests as a means to

¹ In addition US\$10-15 billion per year are lost to governments globally through illegal logging

step out of poverty.

THE PAST

Before we attempt to address some of today's gloomy context let's look back.

Jack Westoby's central proposition, on which much of the international development assistance to forestry was based during the 1960s, was that development based on forests could serve as a lever for overall economic development. In 1977 he published a trenchant critique of this wisdom. He focused on the role of international aid and how it had assisted some irresponsible governments to alienate and eliminate substantial parts of their forest resource endowment, and concludes by stating that development has been largely skewed in favour of entrepreneurs, salaried officials and large landowners. Much development assistance, he stated, has promoted further distortion, enhanced dependence and widened inequalities. In perhaps one of the clearest statements of failure, Westoby outlines for us the tragic outcomes of poor governance, poor judgment and misguided aid which sadly resonate strongly today with my own experiences of support to the forestry sector across the world:

'Nearly all the operations have been such as to have brought no profound or durable benefit to the economic and social life of the countries concerned. Of the revenue which has accrued, only a small part has remained in the countries to which the resource belonged.'

What has forestry done to improve the lot of the common man, of the peasant, for example?

Precious little!

The fact has to be faced, if we are to be honest with ourselves, that two decades of international effort in the forestry sector of the underdeveloped world has made but little contribution to the overall development process, and its contribution to improving the quality of urban life and raising the welfare of the rural masses has been negligible.' (Westoby, 197 cited in Westoby, 1987:291)

The question must now be asked why, if this was so clearly the case 30 years ago, we are still repeating the same mistakes with the same consequences.

THE VISION

Westoby's vision so clearly embodied for us in the declaration of the 1978 8th World Forestry Congress in Jakarta became an important guide for forestry development in the 1980s and 1990s. It was a highly political declaration stressing the need to move beyond forestry to action 'to reduce inequalities, notably in the distribution of land and in access to social and support services' (quoted in Westoby, 1985:320). Critically it reminded us of the need to recognise people as the '**motive** force of development and not simply as the **passive** object of development'. Underlining one of the very important elements of Jack Westoby's vision – that of building the capabilities of people to become active citizens.

THE GAP BETWEEN VISION AND REALITY

So how well have we put this vision into reality?

The last 30 years have been characterised by a number of layers of often conflicting trends in forestry:

1. devolving management responsibility and sharing of benefits to forest dependent communities – community forestry, etc.
2. reforming the forest sector as the 'locus of corruption' (Blaser and Douglas, 2000)
3. changing the role of the state from centralised to devolved control
4. seeing civil society as a panacea to all the ills of the state
5. moving away from the forest sector (too intransigent) to a wider governance and poverty focus

EXPERIENCE OF CHANGE

Let's just have a quick look to see what has happened.

Much energy and resources have been focused on forest reform. (I have just finished a review of 20 years of support to reform of the Ghanaian forest sector – perhaps unsurprisingly there has been little positive change on the ground in terms of people's access to forest resources, rather access has diminished as the resource has been removed and rights become more insecure with strong competition from the timber industry).

These reforms were intended to have profound consequences changing the institutional framework for the whole sector. The challenge was laid down to transform the ways in which forestry organisations function and relate to people who live in and close to forests and depend on tree and forest resources for their livelihoods. Much of this change focused on technocratic interventions, restructuring, down-sizing, removing outside the public sector. As we can see from recent experience in Uganda – this has been nothing short of disastrous with the President pushing for the degazettement of some of the remaining high quality forests, and this just after a decade of donor support to reform the forest sector and improve its governance!

However, in other instances perhaps the story is more positive - as a result of these reform programmes there is some degree of acceptance that forestry should move from being a state-centric programme to one in which local people have a varying role from complete territorial control (e.g. ancestral domains) to partial role as managers of degraded land (much of JFM in India) to none (except on paper), with claims that as much as 22% of developing countries' forests are under **community** forest administration or ownership (White and Martin, 2002:7; Barry et al, 2003) and estimates of community conservation showing there is as much under **community** management as under conservation in public protected areas (Molnar et al, 2004:10).

From this superficial reading of the evidence - perhaps I should stop being pessimistic and say that we are moving forward in achieving Westoby's vision for forestry, but who really is benefiting from all this effort - what is the community, what role does democracy play, how has the role of the state really changed?

THE ASSUMPTIONS

In our clumsy attempts to implement Westoby's vision we have created our own set

of assumptions. These assumptions underpin the different trends in forestry that we have supported - in crude terms they can be described as follows:

- ∞ Poor people live in and near forests
- ∞ Targeting forest areas therefore is pro-poor
- ∞ Poor people's livelihoods are dependent on forests
- ∞ Securing their livelihoods through access and tenure reform is pro-poor
- ∞ Community level action is more pro-poor than state-managed processes
- ∞ Institutional and organisational reform of the forest sector institutions will lead to more pro-poor outcomes
- ∞ Civil society is a better facilitator of pro-poor outcomes than the state
- ∞ Increasing democratic opportunity for control over resources will lead to more pro-poor outcomes.

Leading from this set of assumptions a simple equation can be drawn:

If forests are devolved to the local-level with community tenure and decision-making power over use of forests including commercialisation is also devolved – it will be pro-poor.

My work over the last 20 years has challenged this simplistic equation. Why has so much forest policy change and practice, whether top-down, bottom-up, inside-out or outside-in, not actually been pro-poor?

Challenging community and customary as the panacea

Let's turn to the community forestry story.

Despite growing evidence and significant work focused on understanding differentiation between people and the effects this has on gaining access to and control over resources (Hobley, 1987; Peters 1996, 2004; Ribot, 2001; Woodhouse, 2003; Manor, 2004), there is still a tendency to suggest that community and customary systems are the panacea for pro-poor forestry. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is the origins of the community-based natural resource movement which did not emerge from a pro-poor agenda but from a strong anti-state position (Silva et al, 2002; Li, 2002). There was a strong presumption that devolution of management to the local must be better both in social and ecological terms to that of management under state control.

The early social forestry literature in India and the movement emerging from it, posits community as a relatively unproblematic solution to the poor management and anti-social record of the forest departments. This period dominated by populist movements saw 'everything local and indigenous as good and everything of the state as bad' (Ribot, 2001:7). The widespread and apparently uncritical use of community today and in the past led one early commentator to describe it as 'the aerosol word of the 1970s because of the hopeful way it is sprayed over deteriorating institutions' (Jones 1977 cited in Bryson and Mowbray, 1981). Assumptions about common interests within communities need to be replaced with greater recognition of conflicting interests within communities.

The community development model followed a highly managerial approach prevalent across the rural development landscape, focused on organising groups of individuals for ease of access for input supply or management of a particular interest. The results from this in conditions of weak empowerment of the poor are overwhelmingly ones of elite capture.

Perhaps what this experience points to is the difficulty of transforming structural barriers to decision-making and resources simply through one sectoral process. In societies where political participation of women and poorer people is low, it is highly questionable whether building participation through sectoral groups can be effective or sustained without attention to wider political participation through political parties, local government etc, and through attention to wider livelihood security issues and issues of dependence on patrons and elites.

Just as community is a highly problematic term, so too is the push towards reasserting customary systems. In an era of fast increasing inequality customary systems are not immune to these changes. Simply ignoring or downplaying processes of differentiation and local politics and power relations does not make them go away:

Let's look at some of the reasons why community-based management is not necessarily pro-poor:

1. **Naïve understanding of community** The implausibility of expecting that policies seeking poverty alleviation through community participation will be driven by communitarian values of social solidarity, that is, a different set of rules from those of the market which are expected to prevail elsewhere.
2. **Customary authorities – guardians of the elites** Implementation of programmes designed to formalise village jurisdictions to improve resource management in the Sahel for example, quickly made evident that customary authority of the village resided in the heads of lineages of cultivators, who regarded rights of pastoralists or immigrant farmers as entirely subordinate to their own, so that community based management excluded participation by such stakeholders in decision-making
3. **Incapacity of state institutions** Empirical evidence from case studies suggests that state agencies' intervention in many parts of rural Africa may be ineffective or absent, so that natural resource allocation decisions are largely governed by customary authority with all the issues of exclusion that accompanies such allocation processes.
4. **Differentiated communities** The heterogeneity of most communities signifies divergent and possibly conflicting interests of different community members in the use of a resource, offering as much chance of conflict as consensus in resource management at the level of a 'community'.
5. **Commons require exclusion** The presumption of excludability for well-managed community forests ensures there are winners and losers – usually exclusion is practised against those holding secondary or derived rights, often women, pastoralists, incomers or 'strangers', seasonal NTFP collectors.

Source: Hopley (1996: 146-153); Woodhouse (2002:15)

Challenging forest dependence

Forestry is full of loose words like 'the poor', 'the community', 'customary'. But perhaps the most unhelpful and policy misleading are the words 'forest dependence'

which are often used as a short-hand for poverty, the assumption being that those who live in remote rural areas tend to be more disadvantaged and thus since forests mostly occur in such areas, people living in or next to these forests are therefore disadvantaged and dependent (Kumar, 2004)². Although villages may be forest dependent it doesn't necessarily mean that they are the poorest, it does mean however that there are limited other livelihood opportunities to change the level of their poverty.

Forest dependence is an unhelpful term, its use obscures issues of power, access and control and tends to depoliticise and 'de-genderise' the relationship between individuals and forest resources. The use of the term has led to policy blankets that lump and ignore differential effects and have led to policy assumptions of an even equation between forest dependence and poverty.

The forest dependence argument is often framed in terms of forests as safety-nets for the extreme poor or stepping-stones for those who are already capable, there is a third way in which forest dependence can be thought of – and this is as a slippery-slope. Attention only to forest resource relationships can trap people in highly insecure and unremunerative livelihoods - forests as the poor man's overcoat which become more threadbare as they are overused (Arnold, 2001; Angelsen and Wunder, 2003; Sunderlin et al, 2005).

Challenging the potential for pro-poor income-based forestry

Moving on from the forest dependence argument let's look at where the growing interest in developing income-based livelihoods from forests and trees is taking us. Growth and poverty have recently become key focuses in forestry with increasing attention being paid to ways in which to commercialise forest production for pro-poor benefits (Scherr et al, 2004). The increasing demands for socially responsible forestry by investors and consumers are driving a top-end change in corporate behaviours. At the local-level, changes include supporting community-based commercial logging, trade in NTFPs, state asset transfer through allocation of plantations to communities.

There are a series of important questions to be asked about the distribution of the benefits of growth and who amongst the poor are able to access the opportunities offered through commercialisation 'in contexts where the benefits of growth are unequally shared then the chronic poor are the most likely to see no benefits or find that their livelihoods are weakened' (Hulme and Shepherd, 2003). Indeed whether development efforts supporting commercialisation of forestry products including NTFPs actually does anything to help poor people move out of poverty needs more thorough assessment (Angelsen & Wunder, 2003:34; Vedeld et al, 2004). The World Bank in a recent worldwide survey concluded that it is unlikely that incomes from the forests can be the principal means of poverty reduction in the short-term; and only in a few cases do forestry-related activities provide, on their own, a pathway out of poverty (Vedeld et al, 2004: 66).

Other recent work (Belcher et al 2005) demonstrates the limitations of NTFP commercialisation for poverty reduction. It shows how for the extremely poor, reliant

² Kumar (2004) provides a critique in India of the JFM programme and its lack of attention to issues of differentiation leading to discrimination against the poor in terms of forest management regimes and outcomes

on open-access NTFP resources, the markets are highly controlled often leaving them in poverty traps. At the other specialised end of the market substantial incomes can be made for producer households but these are not the poor, indeed this end of the market can be characterised as 'anti-poor' requiring high entry-level assets including education, market access, infrastructure and secure property rights. 'It is simplistic, and often wrong, to assume that because an NTFP is important to the poor, efforts to develop it will help the poor' (Belcher et al, 2005:1446). Again pointing to the need to think about the differentiated effects of policy change, rather than assuming a blanket good for all.

Attention also needs to be given to a commonly heard view that 'many of the poor have a preference for formal wage labour over self-employment as micro-entrepreneurs' (Woodhouse, 2002:13). The levels of exposure to risk are often unacceptably high for those with limited assets to protect them. Our understanding of what makes a secure livelihood is often far removed from the reality of a poor person.

Challenging the pro-poor nature of devolution and incomplete decentralisation

A common theme of current thinking about forest policy is the emphasis on decentralised forest systems. This is part of a much broader shift in favour of political and bureaucratic decentralisation, seen in donor circles as a means both to improve the allocative efficiency of developing country governments and to build politically engaged citizenries (Manor 2002).

There is an underlying assumption that devolution of control of forest management to the local-level will lead to a more democratic process of resource allocation. The presumption that local-level participation in resource management is purely a positive phenomenon that ipso facto will lead to poverty reduction is one that needs to be challenged. We need to look analytically at participation and ask on what basis poor people participate since there is considerable evidence that local and community level institutions are as likely or more likely to exploit and manipulate the chronic poor as are more centralised institutions (Bird et al, 2002).

However, even with effective political decentralisation the nature of forests makes it likely that they will be exploited for profit and most likely by those who are in positions of power rather than those in positions of livelihood need. What is clear is that there is still much to understand about decentralisation. What is clear too is that far from central government not having an important role, it has an essential role in ensuring more pro-poor outcomes from decentralisation (Tendler, 1997; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Ribot, 2004). Some of the effects of devolution in forestry have been:

- ∞ **Limited transfer of authority with limited pro-poor effects** devolution appears to be transferring little or no authority to local forest users and is having, at best, limited positive impact on the livelihoods of the poor
- ∞ **Lack of local accountability** local institutions set up under devolution have often been accountable to forest departments and other government offices, rather than to local people with the possibilities of genuine co-management being quite limited
- ∞ **Disadvantaging the marginalised** not proportionately benefited women, ethnic minorities or the very poor (i.e. those groups who are generally politically disadvantaged who were often unaware of the implications of policy reform or unable to affect policy implementation to protect their interests)
- ∞ **Small income improvements** gains in income have been relatively small for

- most people and often overshadowed by negative trade-offs in resource access and control
- ∞ **Undermining local institutions** pre-existing local institutions have been undermined by their lack of legal standing and clear property rights relative to institutions that are newly created or sponsored by government
 - ∞ **Trade taken over by elites** policies that expanded opportunities for locals to sell forest products directly, poor and minority men and women often lost their place in the trade to elites within and outside of the local community
 - ∞ **Regulatory frameworks as major barriers** states impose excessively burdensome regulatory frameworks making it difficult (time and financial costs) for poor to enter markets
 - ∞ **Increased state penetration – territorially and in terms of decision-making** state retained control over management decision-making (India); and had through JFM arrangements extended its control into local areas; building alliances with local elites to control decision-making

Challenging civil society

The shift to support of NGOs (written as short-hand for civil society by many) in the 1980s and 1990s arose out of an ideological suspicion of the state and paralleled the strong push towards community management of forest resources and the seeking for alternative forms of institutional relationships between the state and its citizens; including partial removal of the state such as through joint and collaborative forest management arrangements. Much has been claimed for the pro-poor nature of such interventions but there is still much to be challenged about the substance of these claims and indeed whether civil society as a whole is more likely to be pro-poor than the state.

Let's look at some of the propositions:

- ∞ *'NGOs are at the heart of civil society'* – much energy and resources has been focused on developing the role of advocacy organisations to proclaim on behalf of a variety of public interest causes associated with forestry. The burgeoning of these groups is often at the expense of more 'traditional' associational and political life and tends to be dominated by elite run groups that have limited ties to the citizens they say they represent
- ∞ *'Civil society is warm and fuzzy'* – the idea that civil society inherently represents the public good is wrong because the public domain is highly contested, often they are single interest groups, rarely interested in balancing different views of the public good. This is particularly the case between those NGOs arguing for biodiversity interests in the forest sector versus those concerned with improving the livelihoods of those who live within forest areas.
- ∞ *'Strong civil society ensures democracy'* – although often important it only holds true where there are strong political institutions, weak political institutions can become subverted by strong civil society where '...a proliferation of interest groups in mature democracies could choke the workings of representative institutions and systematically distort policy outcomes in favour of the rich and well-connected'
- ∞ *'Democracy ensures a strong civil society'* – the evidence does not support this - 'political parties and elections are what ensure a pluralism of political choices'. Countries with weaker civil society do not necessarily have less effective and inclusive decision-making processes or are less pro-poor in their

outcomes.

Challenging sectoral reform

Let's move to the final set of interventions that were going to change the way forestry was governed.

Much attention has been focused on reform of the forest sector its institutional frameworks and the government organisations that deliver services. Why has it been so difficult to make progress?

The forest sector has particular characteristics that suggest it is more likely to be anti-poor and thus significantly more difficult to shift its outcomes than perhaps one of the social sectors. Forests represent a major source of potential income both in terms of the products they contain and the land they cover. They are thus the locus for competition between multiple interests as well as multiple policies and paradigms for development, particularly between economic growth, conservation of biodiversity, and livelihood development of the poor.

The barriers to pro-poor policy operate at the level of the enabling policy environment, between central and local government, within bureaucracies and their incentives to respond to poor people and at the demand end within local populations and their differential capabilities to exercise voice and claim their rights.

There are major macro-economic drivers for non-responsiveness to the poor – particularly the difficulties of managing high value resources where governments are weak and markets strong. Equally there are internal factors that determine the extent of responsiveness. There are some recurring patterns that can be identified within bureaucracies that do produce major barriers to change (drawing on Johnson and Start, 2001; Hobley and Bird, 2001; Hobley and Shields, 2000):

- ∞ *Bureaucratic politics* is particularly prevalent in the forest sector and between forestry, biodiversity and land. This often results in major turf battles with strong incentives to maintain territorial and allocatory controls particularly over concessions. High levels of bureaucratic secrecy limit the flow of information both within the organisation and between the organisation and the citizenry. This leads to high levels of mistrust as well as impeding decision-making within the organisation and responsiveness to local conditions.
- ∞ The *bureaucratic culture* is another important barrier and particularly for forest departments developed in a tradition of custodial responsibility for the management and exploitation of resources on behalf of the state. This does not fit easily with a transfer to policy processes focused on people and their access to resources. Particularly as this means giving control to people traditionally lambasted by the forest services as the perpetrators of practices that destroy forests. Systems and structures tend to be those that reinforce an old way of doing and understanding things rather than the radically different approach necessary to deliver pro-poor outcomes.
- ∞ *Poor are not clients* - in reality forest organisations rarely take their lead from the poor. This is partly because they are unsure of who their customers are: are they the public or governments that fund them, the companies they let concessions to, their staff, the donor, or the people in the village whose livelihood is the real issue? For staff within the organisation, it is possible that at different levels they consider themselves to have different clients. For

those at the front-line their clients are often the politicians looking for local votes, for middle management concerns about promotion make their eyes turn internally to their bosses, rewarding risk-averse behaviour. For senior management, the treasury, high-level politicians all place pressures for certain forms of action. The real client waiting for effective service delivery has little voice and certainly no political clout – their needs therefore remain unheard.

- ∞ Use of *bureaucratic processes* – forestry provides many examples of the use of regulatory frameworks and overly burdensome processes to discourage the development of community-based management systems. In many cases the burden of management planning falling on local people is far more burdensome than that imposed on industrial concessionaires. Suffice to say that excessive regulatory frameworks in place in many countries with multiple demands for fees for transport of timber along the market-chain, prohibition of particular species, requirements for detailed management planning, criminalizing certain aspects of local forest use all produce significant barriers to the effective use of forest resources by poorer people. They provide ample opportunity for corruption, and oppressive and coercive behaviours by forest officials which tend to fall heavily on poorer people

Why bother with forestry: a Brazilian farmer's view

'...it is much better to develop pasture than forest activities. In raising cattle the whole decision of what to do with the cattle is my own business; i.e. I did not request any permission from any governmental agency. If, on the other hand, I develop forestry activities I need to overcome an excessive bureaucracy allied to the risk of changing rules at anytime, which generates a lot of problems to me, including the possibility of my forest enterprise becoming non-viable'

Source: Sebastiao Kengen pers. comm citing Margulis, 2003

- ∞ *Local-level policy making*: ultimately it is the interface between the bureaucracy and people at which policy is interpreted and implemented. Whether this policy is pro-poor or not will be highly dependent on the local context of the street-level bureaucrat his or her relationships and linkages with the elites and their incentives to target the poor as opposed to providing easy access to resources for the wealthier.

Successive studies have highlighted the need for internal change within forest organisations, to address these different barriers (Hobley and Shields, 2001) with many programmes focused on reform of forest services from India to Guyana to Uganda. In the absence of a serious review of these programmes, we can speculate as to the reasons why success appears to be limited in terms of delivering more pro-poor outcomes. Just some of the many reasons include:

1. lack of attention to the external political context, the nature of patronage systems and the difficulties of replacing these systems in the absence of well-resourced and capable governments; the alliances of central-local elites, retention of elite client base (particularly where timber concessions allocation is retained by the central bureaucracies) reinforce a pro-elite responsiveness
2. a failure to attend to the nature of incentives driving internal decisions and behaviours and the long-time frame required to affect long-term change in the incentive structures

3. poorly integrated reform processes into wider political change, particularly political decentralisation
4. poor integration of forestry into wider poverty and livelihood policy processes and aid instruments

So overall our scorecard of change in forestry is not very good. Jack Westoby would be demanding answers for our failures.

MOVING TO A NEW VISION FOR FORESTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

To move to a new vision we have to base our policies on four key understandings.

1. Understanding the poor
2. Understanding the changing role of forests and trees in livelihoods
3. Understanding politics and power to build active citizenship
4. Understanding the role of the state

Who are the poor?

The first part of our new approach is understanding who we are affecting? Who are the poor? One of the major issues about any 'pro-poor' forest policy is the problem of identifying and targeting the poor. My contention is that this is rarely done; the reasons being both pragmatic (it is very difficult) and also political (it is not usually desired by elites). The word 'poor' is itself a problem covering a multitude of different types of people in different degrees of poverty.

So if we can't use short hand such as poor, community or forest dependence, how are we going to describe and understand poor people's relations with forests?

There appear to be three levels of understanding of poverty that are beginning to appear in forest policy debates either implicitly or explicitly. The first two are gaining some ground in the literature (Wunder, 2001; Sunderlin et al, 2005) with some indication that they are beginning to be used to inform policy dialogues (Swinkels & Turk, 2004; Snel, 2004)

1. Spatially vulnerable (forest dependence argument)
 - remote rural areas and chronic poverty (Bird & Shepherd, 2003:591)
2. Temporal vulnerability (safety net argument)
 - seasonal & within life-cycle (Arnold, 2001; Sunderlin et al, 2005)
3. Structural vulnerability (transformative argument)
 - social, economic and political exclusion (Wood, 2003)
 - little or no voice (Cornwall, 2002)

I would argue that unless we understand all three dimensions of what makes people poor, our policies will continue to reinforce poverty rather than providing the necessary changes to help the poor out of their dependence trap.

Policies have to be able to respond to the spatial poverty traps – sites of chronic poverty in remote rural areas. They need to respond to the livelihood challenges of those in remote forested areas who have little other than forests on which to build their livelihoods. In such areas, chronic dependence means that changes in policy that affects forest usage have more profound effects on livelihoods than in those areas where there is a diversity of livelihood opportunity. Across all areas there are

those who suffer temporal vulnerabilities for whom forests and tree products may provide seasonal and/or life-cycle safety nets. The third level of vulnerability is suffered either by particular groups in society, often indigenous groups, excluded groups (because of caste or ethnicity) or within communities because of gender, caste or life-cycle positioning. The effects of forest policy change on these groups are again different from others in the same community who are not socially or economically excluded. For some all three levels of vulnerability are in operation at the same time. Structural vulnerability is the most profoundly difficult to change through policy processes and is particularly resistant to change through technocratic solutions without due political process.

The implications of this analysis are several-fold:

1. the importance of understanding poverty in a dynamic and differentiated way and thus the provision of different forms of support for those moving out of poverty to those stuck or declining
2. the importance of understanding both formal and informal relations – particularly the complexity of power relations which affects people's capacity to obtain access to resources and constrain others' access and the high risks attached to the poor challenging these political spaces in person or through their proxies.
3. the essential linkages that need to be built in policy dialogues between sectoral policies and those that aim to provide social protection to the poorer groups; and for forestry the difficulties of building pro-poor policies if they do not link into the broader livelihood constraints faced by the rural poor including issues of access to justice, and access to land.

Understanding the changing role of trees and forests in livelihoods

The next step in our pro-poor approach to forestry calls for an understanding of the changing role of forests and trees in livelihoods. While this must be separately assessed in each different social, economic and political country-contexts, as there is huge variation depending on the nature of the resource, the distance from markets, the development of agriculture, the availability of other livelihood opportunities etc. some broader processes of change can nevertheless be identified.

Rapid change is underway in many countries as a result of liberalization, globalization and development. People's relations to trees and forests are also changing rapidly. Where once there were few choices for livelihoods now more options are opening up. The increasing penetration of cash economies, the pressure for land are all driving very significant changes in the way poor people can and do access forest resources. This means that policy needs to be carefully developed as it can drive very perverse reactions at the forest-level.

Politics and power are central

Political analysis is an essential pre-requisite to any intervention. The notion that increasing participation of the poor through community groups, village forest committees etc, clearly needs to be challenged and rethought. The starting-point should be where poor people experience politics in their own associational and political life, rather than building new institutions that are sectorally focused. The development of capabilities to participate more effectively in these existing

associations will probably have more effect on the nature of forest outcomes than setting up village forest committees that become the site of elite capture or marginalisation from the political decision-making process. Evidence shows that political parties remain very important channels for poor people and are their preferred method of problem solving (Centre for the Future State, 2005:22). Evidence also shows that maintaining voice, particularly for the poor is unrealistic beyond the short-term.

From my own experience, it is difficult for poorer people to maintain a high level of mobilisation even for issues that may profoundly affect their livelihoods. The problems I've highlighted previously show that poor people have limited time, opportunity or are prepared to risk sustained participation in decision-making processes that are captured by the elites, or require them to challenge elite positions. We need to start with those interventions that focus on securing people's livelihoods first. This allows them to move beyond sometimes coercive relationships based on patronage and to develop a more effective capability to participate in decision-making processes without fear of upsetting their patrons and risking their livelihoods (Wood, 2003).

Building active and capable citizens

Voice is a recent and important addition to the debate around building pro-poor policy outcomes. It is, as everything else, a highly politicized process and dependent on both the capability of the individual to exercise voice in decision-making arenas, as well as on the incentives for those engaged in the decision-making process to listen and respond to the voices. As has already been discussed voice and the ability to exercise it is an important part of an individual's overall capabilities, and is highly dependent on their social, economic and political position. I am not going to reiterate the arguments already made but summarise some of the problems of recent approaches to forest management and the effects this has had on poor people's voices:

- The predominant focus on setting-up parallel structures to local government – accountable to the 'parent' organisation, open to bureaucratic influence has had negative effects on elected multi-purpose councils which even if working imperfectly are the arena for representation and accountability between government and its citizens
- The instrumental and often single-interest focus of local forest institutions means that they are often exclusive of poor people or certainly non-responsive to the particular livelihood requirements of poorer groups. Focusing on interest groups easily leads to exclusion particularly those who are non-resident, occasional or seasonal users
- External initiation of groups often catalysed through donor-funded programmes increase the tendency to make them donor artefacts with project-bound life spans; for the poor this makes them high risk in terms of investment of time with limited expectations of returns
- The tendency of NGOs to appropriate the voice of the poor rather than facilitating the poor to develop their own voices leads to a level of false representation and gets in the way of direct citizen to government interaction.

The need, therefore, is for analysis and action that is not solely based on issues of empowerment and social action. Of equal importance is the way service providers, state and non-state currently respond to demand, their capacity to alter the nature of that response in future, and developing local government to achieve responsive and

democratic interactions with its constituents.

Understanding the role of the state

The regulatory environment clearly plays a major role in determining the outcomes of forest policy and is a major element determining the responsiveness of the sector to poor people. Evidence from across the world highlights the major barriers to entry for poorer people caused by the heavy official and unofficial regulatory burden from taxes, management planning, fees etc. Another important area for focus is the issue of revenue sharing between levels and spheres of government in terms of its effects on pro-poor outcomes. The question should focus on where the most pro-poor outcomes can be delivered. Is the very local (commune, village etc) a site of elite capture that is too difficult to transform in the short-term; is the role of the central state in ensuring pro-poor outcomes essential in terms of revenue redistribution or is it the sub-national level that can ensure the most effective redistribution of revenue and benefits from forests to poorer people?

In some countries direct support to civil society may be less effective in supporting forest rights for the poor than providing support to forest administration system capacity-building, so as to improve government responsiveness to diverse voices. Similarly, providing a platform to local and national politicians can be part of supporting a more pro-poor political society and a more rounded debate about forestry and its role within poverty alleviation. In other countries, different elements of civil society can be directly supported to take on these roles themselves.

What is clear is that attention to civil society without equal attention to the central state as well as local government will not lead to pro-poor outcomes. The state is the guarantor for associational life and so the vitality of the state is critical to whether poor people can have a greater say in sectoral outcomes. Without the development of political society support to civil society will weaken long-term possibilities for positive political organisation and poverty reduction. The tendency of donors supporting change within the forest sector to move outside the state to civil society runs the risk of strengthening upward accountabilities to donors as opposed to accountability to citizens.

It also underlines the importance of building real connections between the citizenry and the state through strengthening political parties as an important element. This points towards work with parliamentary processes, to supporting new entrants into the political party scene (particularly those with an understanding of the importance of forestry to poor people's livelihoods); changing the rules and incentives that shape the current party structures, and fostering strong connections between parties and civil society groups rather than encouraging civil society to remain separate from the party political process (Carothers, 2002:19; Putzel, 2004). All highly contentious areas of work, particularly for a donor government.

SO WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN FOR US?

Well the easy way out is to say that forestry has a limited capacity to be pro-poor in the sense of reaching the extreme poor, so let's not try. Its major beneficial effects will continue to be felt by those whose livelihoods are already improving and able to take advantage of both improved access to markets and to decision-making as well as for those who are already in positions of wealth. It is perhaps naïve to expect forestry to address the vulnerabilities and livelihood insecurities of those poor people who are in decline or just coping, other than through their function as safety nets

particularly in times of seasonal and life-cycle distress. Ironically policy decisions that support conversion of forest lands into agriculture may provide these extremely poor groups with more livelihood security than leaving them with only the safety-net functions of forests and an inability to build a more secure livelihood.

This points to a need for foresters to support more nuanced policy debates around a differentiated understanding of poverty which links forestry interventions into more joined-up policy programmes focused around reducing livelihood insecurity – so putting people at the centre of the analysis. The lumping of poor people into one category or defining them as forest dependent has obscured policy impacts on different groups. It has failed to ensure that policy approaches based on rural development rather than sectoral development are put in place.

There have been really significant changes in the ways in which forests are managed. Opportunities have been created for benefits to remain at the local-level rather than waiting for them to be redistributed through often inequitable and inefficient state distribution systems through public expenditure. The major challenge now is how to shift the benefit systems to ensure that they really do become sustained in their outcomes and pro-poor in the sense of reaching the poorer members within the 'local', the 'community', the 'customary' and the 'indigenous' group. A focus on poor people not trees increases the level of complexity we have to engage with.

Are forests the poor man's overcoat - well yes and no! They can also be the poor man's straitjacket, if poverty is not properly understood.

Are foresters agents of change – yes they can be, the crucial issue is how they use their agency to support change and whose change.

THE ONUS IS ON US!

Power and politics, trust, deception, rights and duties all frustrate or enhance our capabilities to make a difference. Some 30 years after Jack Westoby laid out such a clear political agenda for change and a charter for action perhaps we need to go back to these basics and reinterpret them for today, to rethink how we tackle poverty and forestry.

So let us return again to the early 1970s and the 7th World Forestry Congress Declaration:

*Foresters recognize that forestry is concerned not with trees, but with how trees can serve people. ... (F)orester(s) being **citizen(s)** as well as **professional(s)**, have the clear duty and responsibility to ensure that (their) informed judgment is heard and understood at all levels of society. (Their) allegiance is not to the resource, but to the rational management of that resource in the long-term interest of the community. To this end, forestry education needs to be broadened, with greater emphasis on those disciplines that contribute to the understanding and exercise of the forester's responsibility'. (quoted in Westoby, 1985: 323)*

The art of forestry is about the art of politics. It is fundamentally about the reconciliation of the conflict between short-term private interest and long-term societal interest. It requires foresters to accept social **and** political responsibility and to accept the challenge of a Westoby-inspired charter for foresters that expects us all

to:

1. reaffirm our commitment to 'Forestry for People'
2. recognize that this commits us to certain minimum social and political objectives: greater equity in access to natural resources; freedom of discussion; and social justice
3. acknowledge our responsibility for helping all classes of citizens to discover their own needs from forest policy
4. insist on our rights as citizens to express ourselves freely on all aspects of forest policy (particularly to state when acts against the public interest are being perpetrated)
5. recognize that a national forest policy can be effective only if it rests on, and has won a broad acceptance from, an **informed** and **active** citizenry (Westoby, 1985: 331)

At the heart of this lies our own capability to make a difference, we as foresters as active citizens, as agents of change.

Let us respond to the challenge issued to me by an Amerindian elder in Guyana:

'to move away from air-conditioned decision-making, the forester must walk by our side.... From government having their plans, their programmes and their priorities to government facilitating us to have our plans, our programmes and our priorities where we are in the decision-making bodies rather than just being spectators.'

Change does not happen by someone else throwing the pebble into the pond, each one of us is responsible for starting the ripples.

When you next look in the mirror

Jack Westoby's agent of change is looking back at you!

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