Participatory Methods for Planning the Future in Forest Communities

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Forest devolution and government decentralization have increased community control over forests. Remoteness, low literacy, and lack of formal planning experience often leave forest communities unprepared for their new responsibilities. Forest communities need to develop skills that allow them to establish goals and make decisions transparently and democratically and to negotiate effectively with other local actors if they are to become more proactive participants in local governance processes. In Bolivia and Vietnam we tested four adaptations of scenario-based methods to assist forest communities to develop these skills. This article reflects on the strengths, limitations, and new applications of these methods. The methods encourage participation by members who have little experience with structured planning, including the most marginalized: women, elderly, and illiterate participants. The methods are useful as planning tools, for generating records of decision-making processes, and for preparing for negotiations between communities and local governments.

Keywords Bolivia, decentralization, forest devolution, forest-dependent communities, future scenarios, participatory methods, Vietnam

Political and social forces are transforming forest landscapes in the tropics. Land reform, decentralization policies, the advance of agricultural frontiers, and the impact of global markets are affecting tropical forests and the people who depend on them. One of the most significant current policy trends is forest devolution, which transfers forest usage rights and tenure to local communities (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2003; Wollenberg et al. 2004). This trend has been prompted by diverse forces: grass-roots land re-allocation and community empowerment movements, democratic decision-making reforms encouraged by outsiders such as donor nations, recognition of the economic consequences of unsustainable forest management by central government or private enterprises (Sunderlin and Huynh 2005), and growing confidence in the capacity of communities to maintain forest biodiversity (Colfer 2005). The process—albeit erratic and incomplete—is profoundly transforming forest property arrangements worldwide; as a result, responsibility for the future of tropical forests lies increasingly in the hands of the people who live in or near them (White and Martin 2002).

In spite of new opportunities to control the future and improve their livelihoods, many communities that live in forests and rely on their resources face daunting obstacles when attempting to exercise their rights in local governance systems and claim benefits from policy reform. Typically, forest-dependent communities are remote and small; their isolation is compounded by the lack of formal education. Many have emerged from paternalistic power structures, such as patronage systems or centrally planned economies (Colfer 2005). These legacies typically leave them with little practice negotiating with other stakeholders over the future of their communities and their forests. As a result, forest communities frequently lack the skills and experience to articulate views and communicate them to local authorities within formal channels. Important skills such as arriving at decisions transparently and democratically, developing consensus, articulating needs, and demanding recognition of rights are often underdeveloped. Their voices are less likely to be heard or fully considered in the decision making and planning that affect their forests and their livelihoods. Government officials, private economic interests, and other stakeholders often do not appreciate local people's perspectives. This is recognized as a shortcoming when pursuing objectives of livelihoods improvement or conservation of nature with forest communities (Colfer 2005; Lynam et al. 2007; CIFOR 2007).

Government decentralization reforms have encouraged the adoption of participatory decision making and planning. Decentralization generally reverses centralized planning to initiate decision making at the local level (Manor 1999; Ribot 2002). Such reforms hinge on the belief that citizens can be "trusted to shape their own future" (Jennings 2000). The trend toward decentralization frequently requires that communities take a more active role in the annual planning and budgeting processes of local government.

There are several reasons to encourage community involvement especially in natural resource decision making. Their proximity to the resources often means they can influence whether decisions can be enforced. They can bear the brunt of unintended consequences from decisions made without taking their needs into account. Participation can minimize conflict and maximize equitable benefit-sharing (Ostrom et al. 1999). Community perspectives are not detrimental to other stakeholders; rather, they can create win–win outcomes where everyone benefits (Colfer and Byron 2001). In fact, communities can be effective champions of sustainable management when given a voice in decision making (Colfer 2005).

Since the 1990s, development and donor agencies have encouraged participatory planning methods for engaging with forest communities (Davis-Case 1990; Fisher 1995; Lynam et al. 2007). Participatory planning techniques can empower communities who have traditionally been marginalized and who have little experience negotiating with outsiders. They are intended to improve opportunities for local people to influence planning or project implementation and increase the likelihood that they will respond to their needs. Nonetheless, participatory methods have their pitfalls. Critics have challenged how participatory methods have been adopted and implemented, referring to the "tyranny of participation" (Cooke and Kothari 2001), contending that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or development agencies may outwardly embrace participatory methods but continue to validate top-down planning under the cloak of "warmly persuasive" participatory methods (Hildyard et al. 2001). Methods become "well-honed tool[s] for engineering consent" (Hildyard et al. 2001). Communities may believe that they are influencing decisions, but their participation manifests itself as token measures to manipulate or placate with the appearance of community involvement, while the true decision making continues to take place elsewhere (Mosse 2001). When this happens, communities can be sidelined by more powerful interests or stakeholders. Others argue that participatory methods are worthwhile, but they must address the issues of power and politics and play a role in institutionalized decision making if they are to be effective at promoting bottom-up planning (Hickey and Mohan 2004). Some critics contend that the public nature of many participatory planning methods amplify the voices of those who already express them loudly (Mosse 2001), while marginalized groups such as women or the poorest are further excluded and less likely to be heard.

In response to the challenge of improving the participation of forest communities in the decisions that affect them, we adapted and tested scenarios-based methods with forest communities in Bolivia and Vietnam to help residents think about and plan for the future. The first section of this article describes these tests and the evaluations of the methods by local stakeholders to identify their strong points, pitfalls, and applications for assisting communities to become proactive participants in local governance processes. The second section discusses the general context surrounding forest communities in both countries. The third section describes the scenario-based methods used and the manner in which they were tested and evaluated. The fourth section examines the results based on evaluations by participants and observations by the authors. The fifth section discusses the weaknesses and problems of scenario methods in communal forestry settings, and the last section presents conclusions and recommendations.

Communities and Forests in Vietnam and Bolivia

Although geographically and culturally distinct, Bolivia and Vietnam offer opportunities to study how forest-dependent people respond to decentralization reforms. In both countries, devolution has prompted the transfer of forest property rights and decision-making power to lower administrative levels and allowed involvement of local constituencies (Pacheco 2004; de Jong et al. 2006a; Ruiz 2005; Sikor 2001, 2004; Nguyen 2005; de Jong et al. 2006b).

Since in the mid-1990s Bolivia has devolved greater powers to municipal governments and defined clear roles for communities to participate in local policy formulation, at a time when the government also recognized forest property rights of

rural communities (Ruiz 2005; Pacheco 2004). These reforms brought dramatic change to Pando, a northern department in Bolivia with 90% of its surface area covered with humid tropical forest and an economy dominated by the extraction of Brazil nut (*Bertholletia excelsa*). Prior to the agrarian reform in the 1990s the majority of the territory was held in vast forest estates claimed by individual entrepreneurs who controlled the rural population through debt-peonage (Gottwald 2006). Decentralization reforms created mechanisms for communities to participate in municipal decision making, but the communities have had difficulties exercising these rights. The region lacks transportation and communication infrastructure, and communities are scattered in forested areas far from municipal capitals. In some villages illiteracy rates approach 80% (Fuentes et al. 2005; Gottwald 2006), while poverty rates surpass 95% (INE 2001).

Given the legacy of the patronage system of the extractive economy, rural communities lack the skills and experience necessary to make collective decisions, articulate needs, and engage with local government to communicate and negotiate effectively. Conversely, the greater decision-making powers handed to municipal governments require local officials to work with communities to involve them in participatory planning. Local governments suffer from lack of experience and lack of appropriate tools. Communities complain that local governments do not consult them adequately, while municipal governments hold that community leaders are not able to adequately represent communities (CIFOR 2007).

In Vietnam, communities have been receiving control of forests in an effort to decentralize and improve management and forest rehabilitation since the early 1990s. Hue Province in central Vietnam used to be heavily forested before much of its forests was degraded by Agent Orange during the Vietnamese–American war and by logging by state forestry enterprises and agricultural expansion in the 1970s and 1980s. Since the 1990s new legislation allows private citizens to manage forests, and since 2004 communities can hold the same rights as a legal entity. By 2005, close to 2.5 million hectares of forest had been allocated for protection and management by communities under this new legislation (Nguyen 2005; de Jong et al. 2006b). Forestry professionals in Hue, however, are uncertain how forest devolution to communities will affect the forest (Evans 2006a), while many officials remain skeptical of the ability of communities to be responsible custodians of their forests.

In addition to forest devolution, the Vietnamese government's planning process is being decentralized to the local level. Communities are now expected to participate in the design of village development plans. However, to date both village development planning and the forest devolution process have been criticized as donor driven and information extractive, without devolving true planning and decision making powers to villagers (Sikor 2004; Nguyen 2005; Wunder et al. 2005; Sunderlin and Huynh 2005).

The two countries provide contrasting contexts with distinct challenges. While Bolivia's governance structure and planning process were also once strongly centralized, the absence of government in rural areas has made the decentralization transformation more effective. Vietnam's official governance structure, in spite of recent economic and political reforms, continues to be heavily centralized, with most planning and decision-making processes initiated at the national level. Decisions filter top-down through government officials in a multilayered bureaucratic system. Local officials are responsible for implementing policies that are generated

at the highest levels and directed outward to the rural areas. The result is a heavy government role in all aspects of life in rural areas. Therefore, even though there is government interest in decentralizing decision making, there is little incentive to implement government reform and risk loss of influence and position. Reversing the power flow from top-down to bottom-up is expected to be a difficult transformation of structures and attitudes.

Testing Scenario Methods for Thinking About and Planning for the Future

In this article we report on the adaptation, testing, and evaluation of scenarios-based methods to help communities reflect on common goals, articulate proposals, and communicate them to others so that they can take more proactive roles in decision making and planning processes. Scenarios methods were originally developed by the Rand Institute for military war games (van der Heijden 1996), were later adopted by Royal Dutch Shell for business strategy development (Wack 1985), and are now being applied in regional environmental impact prediction and planning (Peterson et al. 2003b) and in large-scale environmental assessment such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (Carpenter 2005). The methods were also adapted from business visioning and planning techniques developed in Trist and Emery's Search Conference (Holman and Devane 1999).

Scenarios-based methods can be developed in the form of maps, drawings, narratives, or sophisticated models. Our work concentrated on promising methods for assisting forest peoples to develop common agendas and become more active in local governance. We tested the following scenario-based methods: alternative scenarios, visioning, pathways, and projections. This article focuses primarily on how these methods were tested and evaluated by local observers. The use and facilitation of these scenario exercises with local people have been described in greater detail elsewhere (see Wollenberg et al. 2000; Nemarundwe et al. 2003; Evans et al. 2006; CIFOR 2007).

Alternative scenarios are creative stories about the future. They are "plausible futures" or events that might occur under particular assumptions or within certain parameters. Participants develop realistic stories of possible outcomes based on their understanding of driving forces and contingencies resulting from uncertainty. The intention of scenarios is to consider a variety of possible futures rather than to focus on the accurate prediction of a single outcome (van der Heijden 1996; Peterson et al. 2003a). *Visioning* is a simple technique that helps participants to imagine an ideal future. It is primarily a goal-setting exercise that encourages creative thinking, makes expectations more explicit, and identifies areas in which relevant actors are in agreement. The method creates spaces for reflection where people feel free to express their hopes, share their dreams for the future, and reach a consensus about a common vision. Participants might draw, write, or act out their visions of the future to share with others. *Pathways* help participants build a bridge from the present to a desired future by devising specific strategies and actions. Pathways frequently are follow-up exercises to other methods for thinking about the future, such as visioning. *Projections* are forecasts of the future based on current trends. Projections are usually more analytical than creative, calculating a single expected outcome of a current trend or a range of specific possibilities. Projections work best for short-term forecasting since they do not take into consideration uncertainty or unforeseen events. Evans et al. (2006) provide detailed descriptions of the methods.

The Evaluation Methodology

The objective of the testing was to provide insights into the applications and impacts of the scenarios-based methods. We designed field activities to observe the methods in progress and collect feedback and suggestions from participants and facilitators using the four scenario methods. In addition, feedback was collected from professionals and local government officials who work with communities and who joined the scenario testing events.

This research effort originated in the Bolivian Amazon as part of a project to develop local level decision support tools (CIFOR 2007). Two communities—San Roque, a community with 15 families that is accessible only by river, and Turi Carretera, a community with 18 families located on a secondary road near the municipal capital El Sena—were invited to participate in the scenarios methods testing. In proposing the test, it was emphasized that the exercises were not intended to provide material benefits but would be a learning opportunity.

First, community workshops were held in both locations over a 3-week period with each workshop consisting of three scenario development meetings. Each meeting lasted several hours and tested a different scenario-based method (Table 1). All residents were invited and encouraged to attend the workshops. During the meetings, men and women were initially divided into separate groups to facilitate greater participation, but later were combined to share scenarios and identify commonalities and differences. Each workshop was followed by an evaluation to provide feedback to facilitators. The participants were divided into small groups and asked to answer the following questions: Did you understand the activity? How would this activity be useful? Which activities did you like or not like? Did the activities achieve any of these goals: motivate participation, think about the future, develop a common goal, understand different perspectives in the community, or develop strategies? A rating key using simple ''smiley face'' diagrams was used to assure that literacy skills would not influence participation. Following the exercise, residents were invited to express their opinions in an open discussion with key points noted by the facilitators.

The community workshops were followed with a similar workshop in the municipal capital of El Sena, although this time the participants included municipal leaders such as the mayor, the priest, teachers, the doctor, the water committee president, municipal council members, and neighborhood leaders. Following each

Table 1. Summary of scenarios testing in Bolivia

Activity	San Roque		Turi Carretera		El Sena	
	Duration	Participants	Duration	Participants	Duration	Participants
Preparation	1 week	All families	1 week	All families		
Visioning testing	3 hours	13 Adults	3 hours	33 Adults	5 hours	13 Officials
Pathway testing	3 hours	14 Adults	3 hours	26 Adults		
Alternative scenarios testing	3 hours	8 Adults	3 hours	23 Adults		
Presentations of results					3 hours	32 Community members and leaders

Table 2. Summary of scenarios testing in Vietnam

Activity	Duration	Participants
Scenarios training	5 days	20 Workshop trainees, 1 translator
Scenarios testing	Two 3-hour workshops each morning	Khe Tran: 19 villagers, 9 workshop trainees, 1 commune officer Thuong Nhat Village 1: 20 villagers, 8 workshop trainees, 1 commune officer
Presentation of results	3-hour meeting and discussion	Khe Tran: 20 villagers, 9 workshop trainees, 1 commune officer Thuong Nhat Village 1: 20 villagers, 8 workshop trainees, 2 commune officers

workshop, participants completed written evaluations answering the same questions as the villagers. The observers from NGOs and other government agencies were asked the same questions independently. Time was set aside to discuss and reflect upon the workshops: strengths, weaknesses, and ways to improve the next event. At the end of the testing, a final presentation to all community leaders in the municipality was organized, which was followed by a discussion and evaluation.

One year later, the exercise was repeated in Vietnam with a few modifications, given differences in local context and language barriers (Table 2). The institutional constraints to working with communities in Vietnam are high; permits are required for any contact, and foreign researchers are generally not permitted to spend the night in communities. This seriously limited interactions between facilitators and participants. In response, the project trained 20 local forestry professionals in a 5-day training session in the capital city Hue. At the end of each training session, the trainees evaluated the methods. They then used the methods in workshops over 3 days in Thuong Nhat Village 1, a community of 50 families of the Kutu ethnic minority in the Nam Dong district of Hue, and in Khe Tran, a village of approximately 18 families of the Pahy ethnic minority in Phong Dien district. These communities were selected because of ongoing communal activities being carried out by development organizations. The facilitator trainees selected a combination of the scenarios methods for their workshops. Following the workshops, community members and facilitator trainees completed oral and written evaluations of the methods with the format used in Bolivia. They then presented their results to local government officials, who gave their feedback on the usefulness of the methods.

Evaluation of the Results

Based on field testing and evaluations, the following impacts and benefits of the methods were identified. The results are illustrated with examples and observations drawn from participants' feedback.

Building Democratic Processes and Transparency

The methods created opportunities for all participants to express their opinions in a more structured way (i.e., small-group activities, drawing), cast votes, and observe

the results from voting together. During the evaluations, participants stated the experience would help them prepare for organizational meetings and structure decision-making processes and planning because it provided tools for facilitating discussion in groups, arriving at decisions, encouraging participation, and developing practical strategies. Villagers in Bolivia used the results as input into the municipal planning process, and, unlike in the past, the proposals were based on open discussion to list alternatives followed by voting. A Bolivian observer stated that the methods promote transparent decision making with the types of activities used, including drawing, open discussion, ranking, and voting (Evans 2006b). The activities created spaces for democratic expression by participants with mechanisms to help them arrive at consensus.

Planning and Negotiating with Local Government

In Bolivia, both communities and local government found that visioning and pathways provided a mechanism for community members to discuss their vision for the future, vote on elements of the vision to develop a consensus on the village's priorities, and develop plans to present their vision to the local government. The municipal government representatives also identified the two methods as effective for encouraging the communities to plan for their future and reflect upon and articulate their wishes for their community in a structured process that created opportunities for more people to participate. This could help them to prepare for municipal planning meetings through a consultative process involving all community members. These findings were particularly significant because local government officials had been struggling to engage communities in the municipal planning process. Community presidents frequently did not appear for municipal meetings, and if they did, they had not consulted with their communities, resulting in ineffective planning processes.

Improving Participation

In all of the community tests between 90 and 95% of families took part in the meetings at some point and expressed their opinions. Observers noted that people enjoyed developing the different types of scenarios. The mayor of the Bolivian municipality where the testing took place noted approvingly that in subsequent meetings with the two participating communities residents had become more vocal, prepared, and assertive in expressing their opinions. In addition to developing communication and negotiation skills, community leaders reported that the methods helped build confidence for presenting ideas in formal planning meetings with the municipal government (Evans 2006b). During the evaluation, men in the community of Turi Carretera in Bolivia said that they were surprised by the differences in the visions developed by the women, and that it was helpful and unusual to hear the women express their opinions (Evans 2006b).

Developing Planning Capacity at the Community Level

The methods provided a simple, structured approach to help communities prepare for the future and provided strategies that encourage self-reliance. Using pathways, community members of Thuong Nhat Village 1 in Vietnam were able to develop a village budget for building a community house, decide how much each family needed

to contribute, and design a schedule for the entire project. A community member commented: "When we made plans before, we easily met failure, because we have no experience making plans. But this method is powerful. We were able to develop a budget and decide how much each family needs to contribute" (Evans 2006a). Observers in Vietnam commented: "People often focus on individual development, but they learned how through community development, by working together, they can achieve things that they couldn't individually" (Evans 2006a). Community members in the Vietnamese community of Khe Tran explained that they found the methods valuable and interesting, easy to use, and helpful for their village planning. The concrete products of the methods—drawn or written visions, prioritized lists of needs, strategies, and proposals—served as records of the decision-making processes and validated the project proposals of the community leaders in their negotiations with local government for the annual budget cycle. These products provided tools for community leaders to present their results in front of local government officials. In Bolivia one community prepared a plan to complete a water well that had been left incomplete by the local government. They developed a budget and a plan to finish the well, defined who would be in charge of each step, and defined how much each family needed to contribute (Evans 2006b). After reporting their strategy in the municipal capital, the municipal government was convinced to complete the well once it became aware of how little time and resources were needed and that the community was prioritizing that topic.

Promoting Long-Term Thinking About the Forest

The visioning method can be adapted to focus on specific issues of community forest management or community development. During a visioning exercise in the village of Khe Tran, villagers developed a vision for a long-term sustainable forest management plan that focused on improving well-being and livelihood strategies. The villagers decided that their future was linked to the health of their forest. They determined that controlling and managing the forest was key to the ability of their community to prosper in the context of many changes in the local environment. After they developed their vision of a healthy, rehabilitated forest under a community-controlled management plan, they followed the visioning exercise with a pathways exercise to develop a strategy to implement the plan (Evans 2006a; Evans et al. 2006).

Creative Thinking About Uncertainty and Vulnerabilities

The scenarios exercises generated thinking about dependence, vulnerabilities, and ways to prepare for the future. Bolivian community members had become dependent on the high incomes from unusually elevated Brazil nut prices in 2003. The alternative scenario exercise encouraged discussion about preventative measures that the families and community could take to prepare themselves for economic uncertainty. These scenarios had the desired effect of producing a community dialogue about diversifying their activities and decreasing dependency on a single product. A community participant in Bolivia commented: "We never think about tomorrow. This workshop made us think about what might happen in the future and motivated us to prepare" (Evans 2006b). Thuong Nhat Village 1 was planting acacia trees to reforest eroding hillsides. The community expected to be able to harvest the trees for profit within 20 years. However, many factors influenced that outcome: a possible
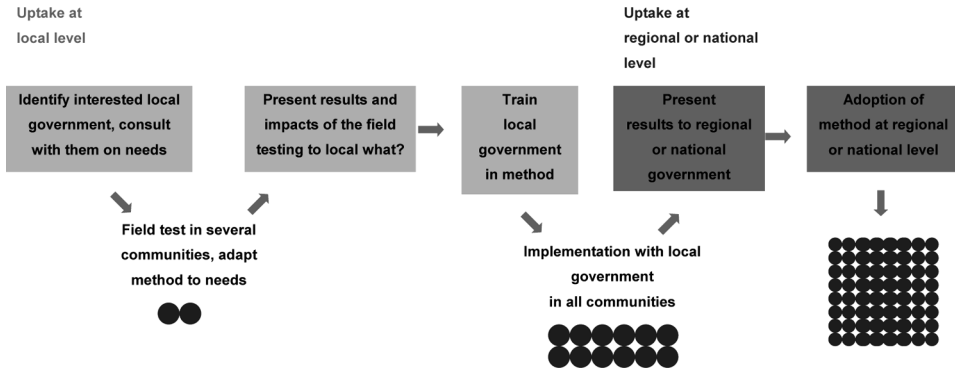
Figure 1. Action research to test four participatory methods for thinking about and planning for the future.

oversupply of the trees because so many communities were planting acacia at the same time, market fluctuations, changes in government harvest regulations, the construction of infrastructure to process the wood material, or land rights changes. By considering each of these uncertainties and the relationships among them, the community was able to understand the array of possible future outcomes that should be considered when making decisions (Evans 2006a; Evans et al. 2006).

A few months after this exercise the Bolivian municipal government where the study took place requested assistance to train government representatives so that they could use scenarios methods in all 14 rural communities in the municipality (Cronkleton et al. 2008). The scenarios experience provided a framework for guiding interactions with their constituents so that a wider range of opinions could be heard and provided tools that can be used for organizing future dialogue. Figure 1 shows how an action research approach can result in institutional adoption of a participatory method. Table 3 compares communal forestry objectives that can be met with the four methods. Based on the testing experiences, Table 4 provides hypothetical situations where the methods can be helpful for forest communities.

Table 3. Objectives identified by participants and observers during the testing of four participatory methods for thinking about and planning for the future

Objectives	Scenarios	Projections	Visioning	Pathways
Planning collaboratively			★	★
Understanding uncertainty and complexity	★			
Identifying possible future problems	★	★		
Envisioning a desired future			★	
Building consensus			★	★
Encouraging participation	★	★	★	★
Developing planning capacity	★			★
Conflict mediation	★		★	
Short-term thinking		★		
Long-term thinking	★		★	

Table 4. Hypothetical situations where four participatory methods for thinking about and planning for the future can be used (adapted from Evans et al. 2006)

Hypothetical situation	Possible contribution of methods
People use natural resources in a new way and need to anticipate the impacts	For instance, market demand for natural rubber encourages community members to cut down forest and plant rubber. Scenarios can stimulate participants to think about possible outcomes and the impacts of increased incomes, price fluctuations, forest degradation, and monoculture dependence on their community. Projections can help estimate production levels or price fluctuations.
People are managing natural resources unsustainably with disregard for future consequences	Escalating timber demand might be prompting a village to deforest its land rapidly. Projections helps the villagers understand the possible scale of the logging. Scenarios will explore the consequences of deforestation for families, the community, and the environment in the long-term.
When designing or initiating a development or conservation project	Development projects should involve community members early in the project design, to consider their aspirations and priorities. Visioning is a way to develop a shared vision for the future and actively participate in project planning. As a result, when the project is in motion, the community will take greater ownership.
A community is heading toward potential problems, but is struggling to recognize them and respond	For instance, upstream deforestation might be affecting the water quality of a river. Scenarios can help the community understand possible health and environmental impacts that might result from the deforestation—and express these concerns to its upstream neighbors. Pathways can facilitate the development of realistic solutions to the problems and strategies for mitigation.
There are conflicts over natural resource access rights	For instance, a community might be hunting illegally in a national park. A scenarios exercise with the park authorities and community members will provide participants with a better understanding of the reasons for the conflict and possible outcomes. Solutions to the problem can then be developed using pathways. Thinking about a shared future is a powerful conflict resolution process.

(*Continued*)

Table 4. Continued

Hypothetical situation	Possible contribution of methods
A community is struggling to articulate its needs to local government	Decentralization in many countries provides communities with new opportunities to participate in local government decision making. Visioning helps a community to develop a single vision, present it to the local government and negotiate more effectively. Leaders of neighboring communities might develop shared visions and then use the pathways method to devise a regional development plan.
When distributing benefits from a natural resource management plan	Often management plans require that common-pool resource benefits be distributed communally. Visioning can help a community decide together on a common dream for the future. Pathways can then be used to reach communal goals using the benefits from the management plan.

Weaknesses and Problems

Participants and observers also identified problems with the methods. While these pitfalls need to be considered, there are also suggestions for managing them.

Reliance on Skillful Facilitation

The success of the methods and the exercise depends on skilled, trained facilitators who can encourage productive, focused discussion without discouraging the free expression of ideas. In one Vietnamese village, trainees from a forestry and agriculture NGO were facilitating the workshops and hoped to apply it to forestry project development. They struggled to maintain the orientation of the workshops on forestry-related issues. In their evaluations, the fieldworkers stated that the method was challenging because it could be too open-ended and difficult for inexperienced facilitators to direct (Evans 2006a).

Public Nature of the Activities Can Exclude Marginalized Groups

Mosse (2001) contends that the public nature of participatory planning methods can actually limit the participation by marginalized groups or members. Women or people of low social standing in communities may be intimidated by speaking in public meetings and workshops and hesitant to participate. Although this can be a problem with the scenarios methods, the problem can be ameliorated to some extent by adjusting the activities to make them more comfortable for personal expression. Examples include anonymous voting, dividing into small groups, separating men and women, and providing nonverbal and nonwritten means of expression through

drawing. These and others are creative solutions for providing nontraditional channels for those who traditionally are more reticent.

Less Effective if Separated from Decision Making

In Vietnam, no process existed to integrate the communities' visions for their community into the development planning that was occurring at upper levels. As a result, the visions and pathways methods generated no uptake on behalf of the local government, which expressed little interest in the communities' visions. When asked whether Vietnam is committed to bottom-up planning, a Forestry Economic Planning Expert of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, replied: "Yes, in theory. But it is not happening yet in practice" (Evans 2006a). This problem can be solved only by reforming the decision-making process to include the communities.

Conclusions

As forest devolution and government decentralization trends in Bolivia and Vietnam continue to empower communities with increased access and control of resources, a crisis has arisen as forest communities are frequently unprepared for their new responsibilities. Communities must develop the capacity to manage those resources fairly, transparently and democratically. They have to learn to plan for the future of their forest and their community and negotiate effectively with other local actors. These are not changes that will occur immediately, and the process is not without its problems.

The scenarios methods presented in this article are effective participatory tools for helping forest-dependent communities prepare for the future, identify opportunities and threats, and make decisions. Through a consultative evaluation process we validated the strengths of the methods, identified several pitfalls, and identified new applications in response to the needs of communities in the sites in Bolivia and Vietnam. Our result indicate that the methods can strengthen decision-making capacity by providing techniques for thinking about the future, developing realistic strategies to reach a vision, and arriving at consensus. The products are useful for recording specific points of view within the process and serve as tools for negotiation between community residents and with local government. The methods stimulate thinking about possible outcomes and how the community might prepare. The methods encourage participation by members of forest communities who have little experience with structured planning methods, including the most marginalized, including women, elderly, and illiterate participants. The activities generate concrete results of discussions, such as drawn or written visions, scenario narratives, prioritized lists of demands, and votes. These types of records contributed to greater transparency in the decision-making process.

The methods were validated in the Vietnam testing primarily as a method for training local people in internal planning and visioning. However, because Vietnam has not devolved decision-making power to the village level, the methods proved to have limitations for bottom-up planning. Simply adopting a participatory method does not reform a process. As Hildyard et al. (2001) observe: "Participation requires wider processes of social transformation and structural change to the system of social relationships through which inequalities are reproduced."

The most important validation of the methods was the adoption of visioning and pathways as its participatory planning method by the local government in Bolivia. The municipal government carried out scenarios workshops in every community in the municipality as a methodology for improving the ability of the communities to think about the future and articulate their needs. It also provided a framework that helped the local government communicate with, listen to, and understand residents of rural communities in their jurisdiction.

Our testing was limited to a small number of communities in Bolivia and Vietnam. Every context is unique, and we cannot assume that methods have the same impacts in different sites. Additionally, there are many adaptations of the methods that we were not able to test. However, we believe that the results of this study will provide development professionals, researchers, local government, and local people with useful insights into the possibilities and pitfalls of these methods for thinking about the future in forest communities.

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