

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Justification for the Research Problem

In Myanmar, forest resources are owned and strictly controlled by the State under a scientific system introduced in 1856, and under this system, local participation in the management of forest resources is limited. According to an FAO report, about 52.3% of Myanmar is covered with forest (State of the World's Forests, 2001; FAO), but recently the degradation of forest resources has become a serious issue. Forest resources have been decreasing due to population pressure and the rising demand for forest land and products. The lowlands in central and southern Myanmar have been largely deforested since the turn of the twentieth century as a result of agricultural conversion, the collection of firewood and charcoal production. The main causes of deforestation in Shan State, in the eastern part of the country, have been the carrying out unsustainable farming practices such as shifting cultivation combined with an increasing population, while in the Irrawaddy Delta, the main reasons have been rice cultivation, as well as charcoal and fuel-wood production - for making bricks. Commercial logging has also been an important factor in the destruction of the remaining forests, particularly in the mountainous border areas.

In Myanmar, pine forests are one type of forest that exists in the hilly regions of the northwest, north and eastern parts of the country. These forests are mostly found across Shan State, in the eastern mountainous area of the country. The original, natural pine forests near Kalaw Township in southern Shan State have undergone a process of gradual depletion; most of them have been degraded and some have even disappeared due to the slash and burn cultivation methods practiced by the local people over hundreds of years, due to their being used for fuel wood and also due to the improper use of land (FREDA, 2000). Due to such deforestation activities, soil degradation and a loss of soil fertility have occurred, and as a result, crop cultivation

is no longer economically feasible in many areas. The Forest Department has banned the practice of shifting cultivation and farmers are now not allowed to expand their cultivation areas into remaining forest tracts - but only on sloping land where there is no forest cover. In this way, the Forest Department plans to manage both the residual forest and secondary growth on the old land - as community forest. Since forests are a source of livelihood support for rural people, especially for the poor, forest-based livelihood options have become severely limited along with the forest degradation. As a result, the people, and especially the poor and landless people, have gradually shifted to alternative means of earning a living, while still being dependent on the degraded forests for whatever they can provide in terms of fuel-wood and a host of seasonal forest products.

The Forest Department does not have specific laws in place to manage the pine forests, though they are regulated under the current Forest Law. Myanmar's forest resources were administrated for over a hundred years by the Forest Act of 1902, though this was amended several times to accommodate changing political and socio-economic conditions. The Forest Act was replaced with new forestry policies in 1992, and these new policies also pay attention to the environment, and to economic and social aspects such as the conservation of biodiversity and the establishment of commercial forest plantations designed for sustainable production by both the State and private sectors.

Since the 1990s there have been many economic, political and social changes in Myanmar. In one of the most dramatic policy reforms in the history of forestry in the country, the Government outlined the importance of environmental conservation, participatory forestry and international commitments as part of its promulgation of the Forest Laws in 1992 (Bryant 1997, Lwin 1996, State Law and Order Restoration Council, 1992). The 1992 Earth Summit on Sustainable Development, as well as international pressure, have played a significant role in changing forest conservation policies in Myanmar and in the development of community forests in the country (Bryant, 1997). One remarkable outcome of the new policies has been the systematic introduction of community forests since 1995, with the help of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

The Forest Department has been instrumental in the community forestry initiatives (CFIs) which have taken place - as an integral part of the rural development program. Since 1995, community forestry has been introduced in the form of either natural forest management or new plantations, as undertaken by the local communities (Johannesburg Summit, 2002), and new regulations have been issued throughout the country (Tint, 1995). During the process of restructuring and institutionalizing reforms within the Forest Department, a key political focus has been the promotion of local participation in forest conservation activities (Lwin, 1996). This is a significant policy shift, as forest interventions in the past were always focused on geographical boundaries and never considered the local community as an important stakeholder. Now, the role of local communities is seriously considered; they are recognized as virtual forest land managers - at least in the patches of forests close to their villages.

According to the CFIs issued by the Forest Department, community forests are neither regional development forestry operations nor large-scale forest operations, but are focused on a flow of benefits to the communities that participate in forest management activities (Forest Department, 1995). If the communities are willing to participate in the protection and management of the nearby forests, they can be valuable partners to the Forest Department, and the costs of managing the forest estate can be reduced through less need for patrolling and law enforcement (Ohn, 1995). As a result, in severely degraded areas the Forest Department has promoted CFI in pursuit of a more effective and sustainable alternative to the formal state-owned woodlot plantations, stressing the need to stop deforestation and fulfill local socio-economic needs.

In the resource-based economy of rural Myanmar, access to land and land resources creates power. Local forest staff employ the power they have to protect state land and resources, issue forest production permits, collect forest levies, impose penalties and undertake legal action. These activities have made the field staff not only powerful but also socially distant from the local communities, whose livelihoods depend heavily on forest resources (Lin, 2005). This social tension is especially obvious in resource-scarce regions of the country, and bribery is a common and unavoidable solution for locals to use if they wish to gain access to the resources.

Under this conventional institutional arrangement, and as resource scarcity has increased with population growth, so social tensions between communities and forest staff have developed, as well as illegal activities intended to gain access to restricted resources - leading to deforestation.

During implementation of the community forestry initiatives, problems have also emerged as a result of the centralization of control over forests and a lack of understanding regarding local issues among forestry staff. The CFIs state that community forestry is a forestry operation which should be carried out by the local community itself - establishing wood lots, planting trees and exploiting forest products in order to obtain food supplies, consumer products and income at the farm level (Forest Department, 1995). Thus, it is designed to promote the participation of local communities and empower them, granting them 30-year land tenure. It is meant to demonstrate the sharing of forest management responsibilities among rural communities through user group activities and efforts, with in-kind and technical assistance coming from the Forest Department. As a result, the idea is to transfer conventionally managed forest to community control. However, this means that the local forest staff in theory lose power and opportunities; their role shifts from being the center of authority to the center of a partnership, and this requires more social and facilitating skills. As a result, in reality many CF initiatives have received little cooperation from local staff and ended up making little progress. Although the claim is that decision-making is to be decentralized, many local communities, especially in remote areas, have had difficulties and experienced delays when dealing with the bureaucratic mechanisms at the township and district levels (Lin, 2005).

The Forest Department provides seeds and seedlings to the local villagers, plus the expertise on planting techniques required for the establishment of community forestry plantations. Community forestry involves activities such as the selection of appropriate plantation locations, the collection of suitable seeds, raising seedlings and providing labor in order to plant seedlings. Local people participate in CF initiatives when they are motivated and encouraged to do so by outside actors such as international organizations and NGOs.

To some extent, the State's forest conservation policies and regulations have faced difficulties in terms of implementation at the local level under market

competition conditions. Without full considering local people's economic interests, outside conservation ideas and top-down forest protection initiatives have often been misunderstood by and thus received no support from the local villagers. The conservation discourse from outside, with top-down participation, has not fitted so well with the local reality. Forest degradation and the implementation of community forests have had an impact on the livelihoods of local communities; their social relations, traditional cultivation and livelihood practices. A lack of understanding regarding the complexity of dynamic local livelihoods, has been one of the key problems encountered during the implementation of community forests.

In 1998, the Japan Overseas Forestry Consultants Association (JOFCA) and the local forest conservation NGO – the Forest Resource Environment Development and Conservation Association (FREDA), initiated a project on community collaboration for reforestation and forest conservation in the Pa-O community of Peyintaung village, in southern Shan State. These organizations helped to establish a community plantation, planted multi-purpose trees under an agro-forestry system, formed community forests and created income generating activities for the local community, with the objective of developing the community-based management of reforestation - to reduce shifting cultivation and improve the lives of the local community. With support from FREDA coming in the form of cash and in-kind benefits such as technical expertise, community forest plantations were established with the participation of local people from eight villages (including my research village). During the three-year project period, a total of fourteen community forest plots (covering a total of 165.67 acres) were established.

The focus of my study is how the local community has responded to the state-initiated community forest, that is the externally imposed idea of a community forest, and how they have developed negotiating strategies in order to secure their livelihoods. I will also study the local forest management system, local perceptions on the term 'community forest', and under what conditions the villagers have participated in order to achieve sustainable livelihoods.

1.2 Research Questions

In order to clarify my research problem, I developed the following research questions:

1. How has the State's community forestry policy impacted on the local community and their livelihoods?
2. In what ways have the local community responded to the state-initiated community forest and developed their livelihoods in the context of forest degradation?
3. What kinds of negotiating strategy have the local community used within the externally-imposed community forestry program, and under what conditions have they participated in CF?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To develop a greater understanding of the existing community forest initiatives in the research area
2. To investigate the process as to how the forestry NGO has implemented community forests with local peoples' participation
3. To examine how the local community has adapted local knowledge and cultural practices when negotiating livelihood security with the forestry NGO, and
4. To analyze the ways in which the community forest has been interpreted in the local context, and to explore the local politics, social structure and implications of the community forest.

1.4 Review of Theories and Concepts

In recent years, community forestry and people's participation in forest management have both become increasingly common due to an appreciation of the conceptual basis behind community forestry, since forests are a valuable resource yet the control of forests is often strongly contested. In some countries, community forestry is essentially a government program through the forest bureaucracy, and which attempts to manage forests with some level of cooperation from local people, like; for example, in Myanmar. In other countries like Thailand, community forestry has emerged as a people's movement, one to challenge the State's decision-making control over forests and forest management.

In this chapter, I will run through the theoretical background to community forestry, carrying out a literature review of different scholars, plus will look at the

state of knowledge on community forestry in Myanmar - examining the conventional models and the fallacies that have developed out of these. After that, I will review the local responses to state forest policies and the local perceptions regarding the community forest, in order to understand how the local community has adapted to the changing conditions in terms of forest degradation, plus will examine how local livelihood strategies are linked with the villagers' participation in the community forestry program. This chapter therefore covers the relevant theoretical debates and also the following concepts: (1) the state of knowledge on community forestry in Myanmar, (2) the contested meaning of community forestry, (3) local responses to state policies, and (4) local participation as a livelihood strategy. This chapter will also describe the conceptual framework of the study.

1.4.1 State of Knowledge on Community Forestry in Myanmar

Myanmar has a total land area of 676,553 square kilometers, of which 50.2 percent is still covered with many types of forests and forest resources (FAO, 2009), and over the years, forest resources have played a key role in improving the socio-economic lives of people in the country, especially as about 76 percent of the total population lives in rural areas. The forestry sector provides goods and services for both domestic consumption and for export, and forests are a vital source of food, shelter, fuel and income for the rural poor.

The Forest Department is the caretaker of the forests across the country, taking overall responsibility for environmental conservation at the national level. Myanmar's forest policy was formulated based upon the forestry principles adopted at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. The Forest Law (1992) stresses the importance of forest protection, along with environmental and biodiversity conservation, and extends the establishment of permanent forest estates and the protected areas system. This legislation, which promotes private sector involvement in reforestation, represents a shift from the concept of revenue generation and restriction, to one of motivation and the sharing of management responsibilities. A participatory, community approach to managing forest resources is encouraged, in order to satisfy the basic needs of rural people.

Designed to balance both top-down and bottom-up approaches, the Community Forestry Instructions (CFIs) of 1995 have created the conditions for local people to establish community forests on a manageable scale in village woodlots. The Forest Department itself, or NGOs, cooperate within the initiative, one which has so far brought about the establishment of a number of community forest plantations. In this way, a participatory forest management approach has been initiated with two main purposes: (1) to change the role of forest dwellers from forest destroyers to forest protectors, and (2) to obtain a win-win situation for both sides (local people and the authorities) in terms of resource management (Kaung and Cho, 2003).

Community forestry represents a significant policy shift in Myanmar, as forest interventions in the past were always focused on geographical boundaries and never considered the local communities as important stakeholders (Lwin, 1996). Being a strongly state-controlled country, forest management in Myanmar has over the years lacked elements such as transparency, accountability, the rule of law, an independent judiciary system and the mechanisms needed to encourage local participation with regard to environmental decisions. Ohn (1995) advocates community forestry, saying that local communities should be considered de-facto forest managers, at least in those patches of forest in the vicinity of villages. If communities participate willingly in the protection of the nearby forest, they can be valuable partners to the Forest Department, and the cost of managing the forests will be less than when carrying out patrols and law enforcement measures (Ohn, 1995). In light of these arguments, community forests have been established by the Forest Department, as an integral part of the rural development program, and in the form of either natural forest management or new plantations, both to be undertaken by the local communities (Tint, 1995).

According to the CFIs, existing forest land and government plantations can be separated out as community forests. Community forests can be established, with the permission of the Government (1) in reserve forests, un-classified or public forests; protected forests and land retained at the disposal of the State, (2) on village owned fuel wood plantations established with the permission of the Director General of the Forest Department, or (3) with the permission of private owners on privately owned land.

A local community that wishes to establish a community forest can participate as a user group or as community forest members. In the study area, a management committee was formed by the members of the local user group, which then had to prepare a management plan upon advisement from a responsible forest officer or forest NGO. Local NGOs then assisted the leading community members in preparing the management plan, and after the plan was confirmed, they had to submit it to the local authorities in the guise of the District Forest Officer (DFO). The responsibilities and duties of the user groups had to be explained clearly, including how they were going to protect and manage the plantations, harvest the forest products, price and transport their products at reasonable rates.

When the application was approved, the District Forest Officer issued a certificate for the establishment of the community forest under those forest laws, rules, institutions and restrictions relevant to the CF. If the user groups neglected to use the existing forest laws and rules, the CFI rules and management regulations, the District Forest Officer had the right to revoke the certificate. After this, the relevant land was handed over to the user groups of the village. The Forest Department then provided substantial inputs, such as seedlings and technical assistance. The duration of the community forest land lease was initially set at 30 years, though the lease can be extended if desired, and with the satisfactory performance of CF members.

According to the CFIs, the duties and responsibilities of the user group are: to establish forest plantations in barren areas, to use natural regeneration in the rehabilitation of forest areas, to offer fire protection, to carry out the required cultural operations in the development of both plantation and natural forests, to protect against indiscriminate felling, girdling or removal of bark, to prevent illegal land use or systematic extraction and utilization of forest products so as to avoid wastage, and to protect against soil erosion and environmental deterioration. As part of their duties, the user groups have to engage in site preparation, seed collection, sowing, planting and tending operations, all under the supervision of the Forest Department. Agroforestry methods can be used to establish a mix of commercially valuable forest trees and cash crops in the community forests, and the local people can benefit economically both from their farms and from growing in the forests.

These community forestry initiatives are designed to promote the participation of local communities and empower them by granting 30-year land tenures. As a result, some conventionally managed forest areas have been transferred to community control (Lin, 2005). A community forest is a forestry operation managed by the local community itself, establishing wood lots, planting trees and exploiting forest products in order to obtain food supplies, consumer products and incomes at the farm level (Forest Department, 1995). With the sharing of forest management responsibilities within the communities, plus with in-kind and technical assistance from the Forest Department, the benefits are meant to flow to the local community. Community forests seek to supply local needs, but not from the core, commercially valuable forests. In other words, CF is a forest management activity whose purpose is to regain environmental stability and address the basic needs of local communities through the active participation of the local population (Ohn, 1995).

In Myanmar, community forestry programs have recently been implemented across the country, as a strategic tool for the sustainable management of forests. A total of 33,070 hectares of CF had already been established across the country by the end of 2003 (Maung, 2004). Community forest implementations have varied in the various parts of the country, according to ecological conditions, management strategies and the level of participation from local people. However, despite the progressive laws and policies, the actual rate of establishment of community forests throughout the country has been remarkably low in terms of the number of forest user groups and acreage. It is thus quite rare to find success stories.

1.4.2 Contested Meanings of Community Forest

Almost every term used in social science is contested; for example, the term 'community forest' has different meanings according to different ideologies and theoretical perspectives – it can mean different things in different social, political, geographical and ecological contexts. The term 'community forest' can be explained in various ways, such as in terms of the social relations of production, changes in state policies on management, markets and development, or a mixture of these simultaneously. As scholars we need to understand the ways and meanings that

different actors give to community forestry and forest use, through the discourses that have taken place over community forests.

In order to understand the contested meanings of community forest, at first we need to understand the different notions of the term 'community'. According to traditional approaches, a community consists of people who live together in a specific territory, such as in a rural village and urban neighborhood, and the members of each community can gain benefits from the shared norms and collective institutions that exist for managing resources. In sociology, the term 'community' has traditionally designated a particular form of social organization based on groups, towns or another form of spatially bounded locality; whereas anthropologists apply the term to culturally defined groups. The term can also refer to a political community, in which the emphasis is on citizenship, self-government, civil society and collective identity.

Agrawal and Gibson (2001) mention that it is better to look at the multiple interests and actors in a community; we cannot just generalize by ignoring the differentiation in processes around resource management that exist, the differential access levels of the actors or the multiple political layers. Multiple actors with multiple interests that make up communities; therefore, understanding the process through which these actors interrelate, and especially the institutional arrangements that structure their arrangements, will lead to a better understanding of the factors critical to the success or failure of efforts aimed at local conservation. As a result, we need to know how those actors perform in terms of their decision making and how outsiders shape the decision making in the community.

A local community may often be more heterogeneous than the state portrays. One household may live off cash crop income while the next may subsist on crops grown in swidden fields, whilst others still may earn a living from the forest. Villagers are not just foresters or farmers - they may have other kinds of work such as in construction workers, as maids or casual labor. Some may be poor and marginalized, whereas others may be relatively, rich or powerful in terms of village affairs. Men and women, older and younger people in the same household may have different interests in terms of how resources are used and managed; for example, women often have a greater role in terms of collecting and managing non-timber forest products including medicinal plants, those often seen as shared common property at the village level. As

a result, community members are mutually interdependent, though there are always different groups of people with different interests within and among communities. The focus of community development projects should therefore be on the divergent interests of multiple actors within the target communities.

Different social actors use varying social discourses to mobilize social power as and when they try to convince people to support a change, and/or when they use statements to maintain a shared identity. Foucault (1984) argues that the regime around truth is a system of procedures set up for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements, and that the truth is linked in a circular relationship to a system of power which produces and sustains it. On the other hand, it also means that discourse gives meaning to things. Further to this, different people at the same time, give different meanings to natural resource locations that are often contested among those involved in accessing them. This is the way in which they interpret their personal set of relations and agree upon to which areas they have access and why this is so. At the macro level, discourse over access to natural resources may be influenced by political economy forces, whilst at the local level, culture and beliefs are usually part of the discourse, one that gives meaning to places.

Different social actors have different views of the community forest plus use various types of knowledge, different judgements and everyday practices in order to gain access to forest resources and maintain this access. The state produces discourse on conservation and rationalization for the development or commercialization of the resources based on its official form of language. Local people with local knowledge, as well as customary laws, values and beliefs produce their own discourse over the control of access to specific land or forest resources, and this helps constitute group identity and cope with the domination of powerful actors. The forests and trees possess different meanings depending on the context. Trees felled to make way for commercial agriculture were viewed by the colonial authorities as either largely worthless or simply standing in the way of progress; swidden farmers burning small forest patches were often castigated as “robber farmers” - with greater outrage from observers if the trees happened to be marketable species (Potter, 2003).

A community forest is a kind of forest conservation project that communities can engage in, but the state-created idea of a community forest does not always settle

well in the local community, because this community may have its own perception of what a community forest should be. A local community may also have different views and ideas about the community forest - they may have different local names for it that pertain to their perceptions or beliefs. According to Puntasen (1996), a community forest can be defined as an area where people from local communities agree to protect and grow trees, and then to collectively maintain these trees and the other flora and fauna that they support (cited in Hirsch, 1977). The organizations involved (or forest user groups) must have full authority to decide on the rules and regulations set for common usage; forest land areas must be clearly demarcated and acknowledged by all other communities living in the area. The main purpose of community forest management is to respond fairly to the survival needs of the community while managing the forest resources efficiently and sustainably; thus, utilization goes hand-in-hand with conservation. The incentives for community members to conserve these forests for the long-term benefit must be sufficiently strong or attractive, otherwise, the project will fail.

The future development of community forests depends on the legal recognition of customary land tenure and the strengthening of local organizations into legal bodies with rights to control forest resources. This process may involve complex watershed management processes with the full participation of all those involved, especially the forest communities or forest settlers (Anan, 2000). Anan argues that a forest is for the people who live there and that the people living in the forest should be the first to have the authority to take care of it. However, he also points out that a community forest cannot simply be left to the local people, who are so poor that they cannot manage it themselves. If everything is left to them, it is likely that loggers will come and that the local people will have no way to protect themselves. By highlighting the community forest movement in Thailand, Anan (2008) argues that community forestry is a movement that provides a kind of knowledge space for people, so that they can actually engage in negotiation and generate different kinds of institutional arrangements; thereby managing the forests. According to him, community forestry is a form of multiple management framework involving different people with different rights – it is not just about forests being managed only by local people (Anan, 2008).

1.4.3 Local Responses to State Policies

My third concept looks at how the local community has responded to State policies regarding the community forest. Articulating local people's views as compared to those of the administrators or scientists is an important aspect of political ecology, and these 'views' may articulate themselves as violating or ignoring forest 'rules', transgressing forest boundaries, theft and arson (Peluso, 1992, Bryant, 1997).

In conditions of natural resource scarcity coupled with environmental degradation, the state tries to deny customary laws and move people away from near their resources, but instead of finding a solution in terms of environmental conservation and social equity, these policies often have negative impacts for both local people and the environment. The state's point of view on property is also reflected in its policies and legal systems, and these usually operate at the expense of local people's benefits, bringing disadvantages to the lives of these people. As a result, local people are often left with no option but to resist the policies of the state by maintaining their own resource use strategies. State laws are allegedly intended to protect great tracts of land and resources, or reserve them for the exclusive use of certain individuals or groups. A loss of resource access means losing the capacity to maintain a basic subsistence for the local people - threatening their survival, and as a result, local people often protest against this loss of resource access.

In theory, resistance can be carried out in many different ways. Geographical resistance theories indicate that acts of resistance take place within specific geographical locations such as nations, land areas, world spaces, rainforests or other kinds of geographical area. Resistance opposes power, and the resistance of local people can vary from peaceful methods such as negotiating, tactics of public defense or even using rituals, to more violent methods such as protests or contests; resistance, rebellion or breaking the law. Pile (1997) uses the term resistance to refer to any action, imbued with intent, that attempts to challenge, change, or retain particular circumstances relating to societal relations, processes, and/or institutions. Scott (1985) identifies everyday resistance as a form of resistance, through encroachment on to

plantations and state forest land, plus other public invasion of land that openly challenges state organized property relations.

In Indonesia, resistance to forest policy has occurred at all stages of the country's history, from the pre-colonial, to the early colonial and on to the late colonial periods (Peluso, 1992). In Indonesia there have been several forms of peasant resistance: the long term expression of discontent through migration, actions against plantations, an increase in the level of crime and messianic movements, explosions of sudden rebellion and the rise of special sects with different social and religious views of society. Such movements - violent and non-violent, and as reactions to specific policies or circumstances, have not always involved all of society, but represented broad-based discontent with structural changes that affect everyday life.

In Thailand, local resistance to the expansion of state property has taken the form of everyday acts of resistance (Vandergeest, 1995). Here, villagers have been able to organize demonstrations to protest against the exclusion of land for rubber plantations, and in northern Thailand, the Karen people have used rituals to fight against logging by the State, tying yellow cloth around trees as a symbol of the spirit of Buddhism. This has proved an effective method in protecting the trees against the Thai loggers (Anan, 1998). In other cases, resistance has sometimes coalesced into broad-based peasant organizations, and such organizations with the help of NGOs and academic scholars, have tried to influence national policies.

In Myanmar, during the colonial and post-colonial periods, there was popular peasant resistance and conflicts with the Forest Department regarding access to the forest. Bryant (1997) describes the ability of everyday forms of peasant resistance that take place in order to frustrate state forest control, stating that forest politics in Myanmar reflects the political conflicts engendered by state forestry policies. The State's policies exclude local people from access to and control of resources, and this has led to resistance.

Another form of local response to the state policies has included local people's traditional practices regarding the management of land and forests. Communities have their own customary laws in place for governing access to natural resources, including land tenure arrangements, and their traditional practices and customary institutions play an important role in managing the resources. Local customary systems depend on

indigenous knowledge and practices, as well as beliefs and customary institutions, in order to provide equitable access to natural resources. They may differ from government institutions but can serve as a sound model for forest conservation at the community level. As a result, local people's everyday practices as livelihood strategies play an important part when wishing to examine how they respond to political-economic regimes and to domination.

Generally, when local organizations set up rules and customary laws on how to utilize the forest, they place more emphasis on communal benefits rather than individual ones. For example, villagers may be allowed to cut trees for communal use, both not for individual use such as when building a house. Although rights and duties are informally practiced, they are often made effective through the work of local organizations, which may exist in various forms. This enables the local people to protect their forest against outside encroachment.

In general, the Government in Myanmar has not paid enough attention to customary practices and the rights of local communities, something reflected in the failure of and contradictions contained within several development projects carried out by the State, outcomes that are a direct result of the conflicts between local customs and national laws. The local communities may think they already have effective traditional laws in place, but these are seen to differ from state laws because state laws are frequently violated, not only by villagers but also by the state law enforcers themselves. The villagers also believe that in using their traditional tree cutting methods, based on customary laws, the forests will continue to exist from generation to generation. Under customary laws, only human labor, not chainsaws, is allowed to cut down trees, and this attitude reflects a consciousness on the part of the villagers in terms of conserving the forests that is aimed at preserving the benefits to be derived from them. Villagers thus believe they have a greater consciousness regarding forest protection than outsiders, who themselves are the main cause of deforestation through their use of chainsaws (Anan, 2000).

According to Santita (1996), in an effort to defend their customary right to control and protect forest resources for their own community, and to assert this to the bureaucrats - that people and forests can coexist, local people use two strategies: first, they start to translate their customary regulations regarding forest resource

management into written form, and in parallel, informal groups are transformed into more formal organizations, such as village councils, and second, confrontations with outsiders prompts villagers to adopt scientific techniques in order to enhance their customary rights defense strategies. Anan (2000) also points out that villagers have begun to increasingly rearrange their cultural and moral values into more formal practices, in order to defend their customary rights and protect their forest resources. In light of this, they tend to rely on formal organizations such as village councils, and sometimes even set up special conservation organizations as an attempt to transform their customary rules into written regulations and safeguard their forests against outside intruders.

I consider local responses such as these as a reaction by local communities to new conditions (such as the establishment of a community forest). For my study area, I will analyze the socio-economic situation before and after the establishment of the community forest plantations. The various behaviors of the local community can be understood as an adaptation, and these behaviors include efforts to develop better economic conditions, complaining and stealing wood from the community forests, as will be highlighted in this paper, in which I intend to examine what the local Pa-O community think of the state program community forest, and their response to the social and livelihood changes it has brought-about by participating in the forest project.

1.4.4 Participation as a Livelihood Strategy

Community-based natural resource management and participatory development are seen as alternatives to top-down development plans. It is broadly accepted that actions carried out by local people can bring success in conservation and development projects, and that successful forest management initiatives cannot be achieved without participation from the local community (Xu Jianchu et al., 2000). Both state agencies and NGOs regularly seek the support of communities for their development and conservation programs (Morris et al., 2004), and public participation is an important instrument to use for gaining public acceptance, legitimacy and commitment to ideas and policies at the local community levels.

Participatory approaches to development and conservation projects focus on the need to listen to the target population and to understand the reasoning behind local knowledge in order to strengthen local organizational capacity and develop alternative development strategies from below. Participatory discourse places the emphasis on local communities, who are asked to share responsibility and take part in the management of a particular aspect of the project. However, in practice, participations rarely pass real decision-making power to local communities within development projects, within their planning, management or implementation activities, as is promoted in participation discourse (Bliss, Remagn and Neumann 2001).

Hobley (1996) states that the term 'participation' requires careful assessment and use, since it is broadly defined and most widely used in development interventions, and according to him, the level of participation ranges from the lowest manipulative participation to the highest self-mobilization. Thus, the term 'participation' should be applied in a general sense as "the involvement of a significant number of persons in situations or actions which enhance their well-being", rather than defining it more closely (Cohen and Uphoff, 1980). Bruce (1989) argues that the term 'community' should be clearly defined as part of community forestry initiatives, because the definition can vary considerably depending on geographic, political and cultural perspectives.

Local communities employ different livelihood strategies to maintain or improve their livelihoods whenever they are faced with changes in their ecosystem. These livelihood strategies are linked to their cultural practices, languages and biodiversity, which are developed through their daily activities. Depending on the conditions in their locality, local people develop diverse livelihood strategies to produce subsistence goods and earn an income, so livelihood is not something that has always existed; it is constructed and reconstructed in the ways the local people synthesize their practiced experiences by combining livelihood resources.

Conway (1991) argues that a livelihood comprises of "the capabilities, assets and activities required [for] a means of living." In order to create livelihoods, people must combine the assets that they have access to and control over, while access is the opportunity in practice to use resources or to obtain information, materials, technology, employment, food or income (Chambers and Conway, 1991). Ellis (1999)

says that the concept of access is based within the context of social relations, institutions and organizations, which mediate household capacity to develop their livelihoods. Livelihoods are more sustainable when families have secure ownership of, or access to resources and income earning activities in order to offset risks, ease shocks and meet contingencies. In other words, a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, whilst maintaining or enhancing its capabilities and assets and not undermining the natural resource base.

According to Ashley and Carney (1999), a livelihood system consists of livelihood resources that are combined in pursuit of different livelihood strategies. They state that the livelihood of each household depends on five types of capital, including natural, human, financial, physical and social capital. Natural capital includes the natural resource stock from which resources useful for livelihoods are derived. Physical capital is the basic infrastructure (transport, communication, markets and hospitals), as well as the production equipment and means. Social capital consists of social resources such as networks, the membership of groups and access to wider institutions of society upon which people draw in pursuit of their livelihoods. Human capital is the skills, knowledge, ability to labor and good health of people; they are important in terms of their ability to differentiate livelihood strategies. Financial capital refers to the financial resources available to people, including savings, supplies of credit, regular remittances or pensions, and which provide them with different livelihood options. There are close relationships between these assets and they constitute a system of livelihoods; therefore, livelihood itself is a dynamic system. Each livelihood system consists of livelihood resources, and these resources differ across households - each household has its own advantages in terms of livelihood resources and not all households have sufficient levels of the above types of capital. As a result, in order to survive, farmers have to choose livelihood strategies appropriate to their own resources.

In order to improve the livelihoods of local people, government development efforts often emphasize physical capital over other types of capital; economic aspects rather than the sustainable livelihoods of the people. Communities engage in conservation for a number of reasons, including the continuation of traditional practices that happen to be low impact or sustainable, to maintain access or control,

as an adaptive response to a degradation or decline in a critical resource, in response to project funding opportunities, because they are coerced and forced to, and as a strategic positioning to secure other rights (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). External threats may drive communities into conservation efforts because of the benefits they provide in terms of alliances at higher levels, and communities may also respond favorably to requests by state agencies for their participation, in part, because of the side-benefits that come with the bargain. Cooperating or negotiating with local government or NGOs can result in state agencies providing useful public services like schools, health facilities and a road or telecommunication infrastructure. As a result, participation in government development programs itself becomes one of the livelihood strategies used by local people, in other words, local people use their participation in state forest conservation projects as a negotiating strategy to improve their livelihoods.

Negotiation is a form of everyday practice. With different goals and interests, people establish different forms of negotiation accordingly, and this involves all sorts of tactical and strategic maneuvers that affect outcomes in terms of changing, transforming or solidifying a resource claim. In everyday life we constantly negotiate, even when we do not know that we are negotiating, because people everywhere are competing for resources in order to meet their needs and wants, and to assure or improve their livelihoods (Juil and Lund, 2002). These processes shape local practices; local people have to continuously change their everyday practices to legitimize their access to livelihood resources, but in reality, their ability to access these rights is one important factor that ensures livelihoods. However, rights are not merely granted to people through political reform by the state; on the contrary, people always acquire, trench and conquer rights through confrontations and alliances with other people, institutions and the state. Under various policies and reform efforts, local people tend to put tremendous effort into vindicating, asserting and securing claims to their livelihood resources (Juil and Lund, 2002).

Negotiation represents a form of contestation for changing power relations between various actors in terms of access to resources. Each household, as well as each community, has its own way to negotiate; it can cooperate with powerful actors to negotiate their benefits or fight against these same agencies to ensure survival. In

everyday life, contestation takes various forms – it can be embedded in everyday songs or gossip (Scott, 1985), through language or silent resistance, through body representations or through religious beliefs and ritual practices.

In order to reduce local resistance with regard to natural resource use and management, the terms community-based resource management or co-management are used within state conservation policies; however, communities are not homogenous social structures, but complex entities containing individuals differentiated by status, political and economic power, religion, social prestige and intentions (Agrawal and Gibson, 2001). Each member in a community has their own interests and strategies for development and conservation. At different times, local people may be urged to change their cultivation methods, as well their survival and resistance strategies, in order to improve their control over the utilization of natural resources. As a result, negotiation occurs at different levels – between people and people, and between people and state agencies. This is a constant process aimed at changing power relations; resolving conflicts and securing survival.

The negotiation methods used by the Pa-O community are flexible; they create different goals on different levels depending on their capabilities and resources. For instance, in order to resolve food insecurity issues, the poor who cannot live on agricultural production establish good relations with the better-off households in the village and work as day laborers on their farms or carry out other off-farm activities such as working as laborers on construction sites. In a rural community like the Pa-O's, social relations are very important during their everyday lives, especially the poor who rely on relations with neighbors and relatives for their survival. Some households who possess land and enough manpower participate in the State's development activities such as agro-forestry, as a negotiating strategy to improve their livelihoods. When the NGO in the area persuaded the villagers to participate in upgrading the local road to a highway, they willingly participated, as an act of compliance, as a way of negotiating to improve their way of life. Juul and Jund (2002) argues that in any social situation involving opposition, acts of subversion or compliance, opposition or support, evasion or confirmation, and transgression or inculcation, can all be seen as ways of negotiating a specific order. This means that the perceptions of local livelihoods and development are flexible and meaningful, not

static – as is the general assumption of outsiders. The livelihoods of local people constantly change depending on changes in policies, ecology systems and social relations, and when these conditions change, local people look for appropriate forms of negotiation. As a result, applying the concept of participation - as a negotiation strategy to improve livelihoods - will help me to analyze the different levels of local participation and livelihood complexity in the Pa-O community.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

In my conceptual framework, I aim to look at the State's community forestry initiative in a holistic way, to illustrate its impact on the local community and its livelihood structure. There are two main areas of focus for my inquiry: (i) how has the local community's livelihood strategy changed since the community forest project was introduced? and (ii) how have they participated at different levels in the community forest project?

Local people who depend on forest resources have had their livelihoods adversely impacted by forest degradation, and as a result, the State has introduced the idea of a community forest, in the form of new plantations, to the local communities – to be managed by them. As a result, one of my questions addresses how the local NGO has implemented state-created community forests, with local participation, and how the local people have responded to it.

The local community has created and practices different types of natural forest management, based on its own values and meanings in terms of forest resources. The community also has its own version of 'community forest', so the local mechanisms already exist, but represent a complex, multi-dimensional natural resources and minority culture framework.

In my conceptual framework I consider state policies as an external factor (conservation and development) that has changed the livelihoods of people in the local community, and I will thus analyze how this factor has influenced the local community in terms of forest management and local economic activities, as well as the changes to livelihood strategies that have occurred over time. I will also examine how the government forest conservation policy and community forestry initiatives are

proceeding at the local level and how the local people have participated in varying ways to establish the community forest plantations, as a way of negotiating for their livelihood security.

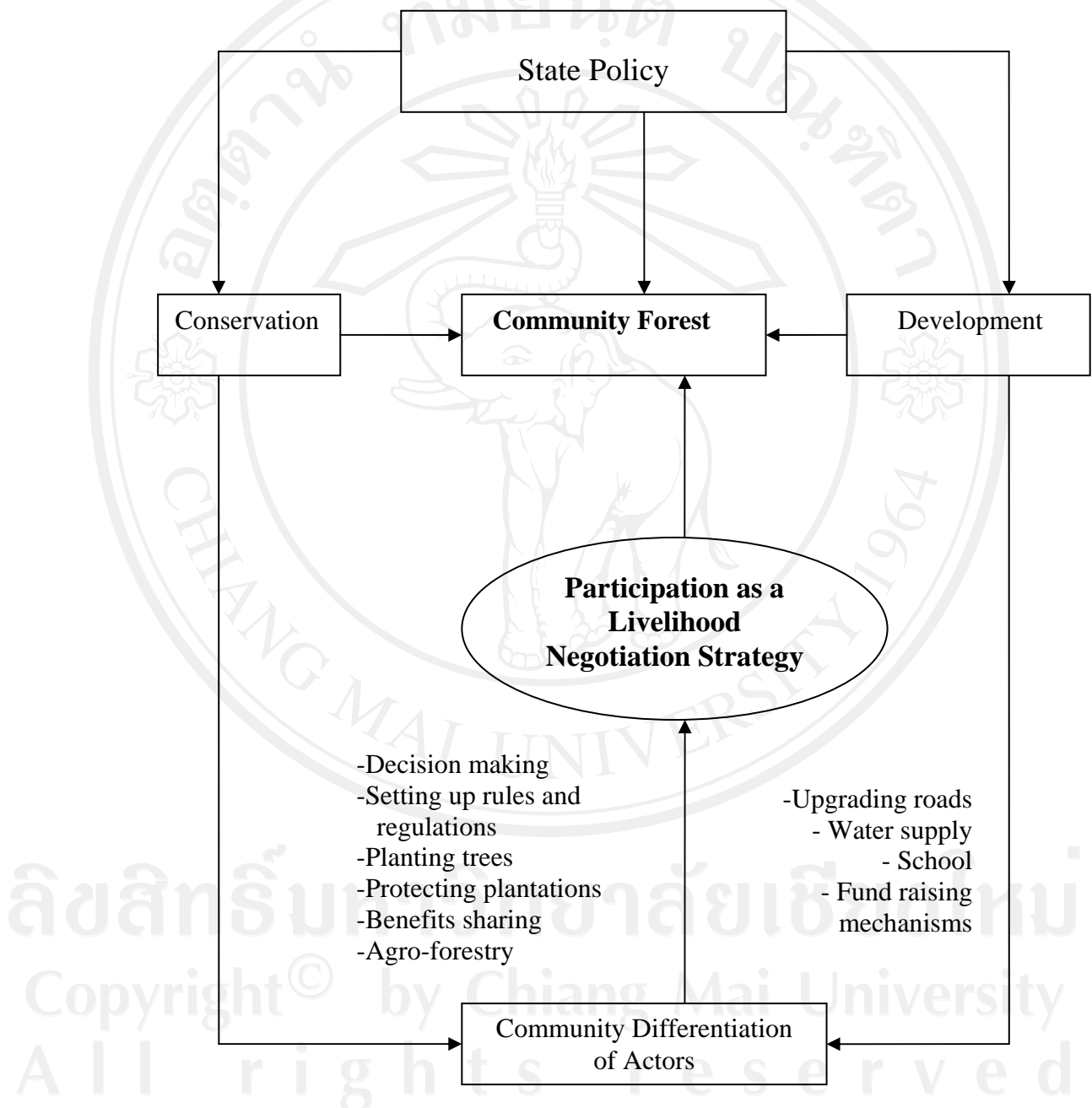


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

1.6 Research Methodology

1.6.1 Research Site Selection

My study will explore how forest degradation has impacted on livelihood strategies within the local community, the local response to the State's intervention in terms of the community forestry initiative, in what way the local people have participated in this initiative, and how they perceive the term 'community forest'. When choosing my research site, I developed a set of criteria as follows: (1) the community must have been dependent on forest resources for their subsistence over a long period, and (2) the community must have been involved in the State's development projects related to forest conservation, and in particular, the community forestry initiatives (CFIs).

In light of this I chose an upland Pa-O village named Tingyikyat, which is located to the northeast of Kalaw Township in Shan State, in the eastern mountainous area of the country. Based on conversations with my forester colleagues and a preliminary visit to the village after my first academic year (March 2007), I decided to choose Tingyikat as my research village - an old upland Pa-O community within which all the people are from the Pa-O ethnic group and which has 53 households. The livelihoods of the community depend mainly on crop cultivation by means of shifting cultivation, while some villagers utilize forest products. Since participating in the community forest, as initiated by a local NGO, their livelihoods have depended more on agricultural production than forest products, due to strong linkages with the local market by means of the upgraded road.

I decided to carry out my study in that area for three main reasons: first, to understand how the State's community forestry initiative has affected the lives of the local community, two, to assess the level of participation of the local people in this community forest project, and third, to assess how the local people's livelihood strategies, everyday practices and social and economic situation have changed since the project was introduced.

1.6.2 Data Collection

Field research was the main source of data for this study, and I undertook both primary and secondary data collection. I carried out documentary research in order to

provide background information, and employed the usual techniques including interviews, participant and non-participant observation, group discussions, a household survey, secondary data reviews, plus some PRA tools such as wealth ranking, seasonal calendars and transect diagrams of the community forest plantations.

A secondary data review was used to obtain information related to the research issues, such as general socio-economic conditions in the study area, and documents were obtained related to forestry policy, laws and state policies regarding local organizations and NGOs. Secondary data was collected using the annual reports of the forest NGO - FREDa, from announcements by the Pa-O National Organization (PNO), using papers from the research centers, plus documents related to the community forest from township and district officials. I also obtained a map and lists of the trees planted, plus the prescribed forest rules and regulations and data on forest conservation and community forestry initiatives from the Forest Department and Township forest staff officers - with the help of a friend who is an experienced forester. Throughout the research, I paid close attention to information regarding conflicts over policies, laws, regulations and the Forest Department's forest resource management and conservation practices, in order to understand previous development efforts such as policies, rules and regulations, and how the government has accessed forest resources and carried out its resource management activities.

During my primary data collection exercise I employed both formal and informal interviews with key informants. The interview is one of the most important data collection tools, and is a great way to access people's perceptions, meanings and definitions of situations, plus their constructions of reality. To obtain the primary data I selected key informants from the village, including village leaders, a monk, knowledgeable elderly people and members of the Community Forest Management Committee in the village. From the key informant interviews I was able to glean information about the local history, the local community's view of the forests and its land use practices over time, social relations and the community's perception of the impacts on livelihood activities. I used both types of interview - semi-structured and in-depth interviews, and used open-ended questions in both, these being more

informal, but with a few predetermined topics such as their level of participation, their ideas on community forests and their daily livelihood strategies.

I visited my research village four times in order to undertake data collection, within a three-and-a-half year period. The first time I visited was at the end of my first academic year, to see if the village would be appropriate for my research. During my second visit I carried out in-depth data collection, staying at FREDA's camp outside the village during mid-2007, while for my third visit I travelled with my thesis advisor: Dr. Anan Ganjanapan - during June, 2008. However, due to some confusion over my research findings, I had to undertake another site visit in February 2010 with my friend - an experienced forester, who is also a RCSD student.

During my second one-month stay, I repeatedly went around the village, talked with the villagers and learned about their daily lives. The villagers were friendly and answered any questions I asked. My first conversations were with the monk, after which I spoke with the headman, having been introduced by FREDA field staff. The headman is not old - just 45 years old, but was one of the initiators of the Forest User Group for the community forest, as implemented by FREDA. He explained to me the real situation in the village regarding the socio-economic status and the villagers' daily livelihood activities, plus what they think of the government-sponsored community forest initiative. From my interviews with the Pa-O monk at the monastery, I gained information on the village's traditional culture, religious affairs and beliefs, and during my last site visit, I interviewed two school teachers, in order to gather information about child education in the village.

From my interviews with the elderly villagers, including one man of 90 years of age, I was able to gain a brief history of the village and the Pa-O community in the area, and from the other key informants I obtained information related to the local history of the area, relationships in the community, the villagers' organization, cultural practices, traditions and customs, and the villagers' perceptions and opinions regarding the community forest, and also how the villagers have accessed the pine forest, both in the past and currently, plus how they perceive the pine forest. Overall, I learned how the villagers changed their livelihood strategies in light of forest degradation and how they now perceive the community forest set up by the State. I used structured interview methods to investigate how and to what level the local

community has participated in the community forest project, and from these interviews and group discussions, I was able to understand the roles of the different community members in the village, as well as examine their social and economic statuses and the difficulties they face maintaining a livelihood. I also conducted interviews with the local NGO field staff, those who understand the village lives of the Pa-O people, whilst planting trees with them during the project.

I employed a household survey in order to gain a holistic understanding of the village's socio-economic characteristics, including household sizes, ages, sex, education levels, occupations, religion, the consumption of forest products, health services and access to resources. To understand the different participation levels of the household groups, I selected 40 percent of total households based on wealth rankings within the village, as identified during group discussions. I chose this sample from six villager categories: committee members, better-off, medium-income and poor households, plus women, based on their different livelihood strategies. I also used a wealth ranking tool to assess the economic status of the households, and using this tool, I was able to obtain information about the villagers' cultivated land, their houses, level of food security, and home garden and livestock activities such as the keeping of buffaloes, cows, pigs and chickens.

I also had several informal discussions with villagers in their homes, during cultivation activities, on the way to the market to sell their crops, and often when joining-in with their night-time discussions in their homes or at the monastery. All the villagers welcomed me warmly and answered my questions willingly, and in this way, I was able to better understand their way of life, behavior, traditional practices and livelihood strategies, as well their attitudes towards the state agencies and their level of participation in and perceptions of the 'community forest'.

1.6.3 Data Analysis

My data analysis followed the conceptual framework. All data collection, both primary and secondary data collection plus field observations, were classified to reflect the research questions and the objectives of my research. The gathered data was analyzed and interpreted qualitatively and quantitatively, though most of the collected data was qualitative in nature. In order to answer the research questions, my

analysis of the collected data was combined with a theoretical debate. Finally, I analyzed the different levels of participation in the state-led community forest - the primary unit of analysis for my study. All of the findings will be presented in narrative form, but with other tools such as tables, graphs, diagrams, maps and photos used in order to illustrate the existing situation and the research findings.

1.7 Thesis Organization

My thesis consists of six chapters, starting from the wider context then narrowing down to more specific situations and conditions based on the different levels of participation of the villagers, followed by a statement of the main findings of the study and concluding with the study's significance. A summary of the content of each chapter is as follows:

In Chapter I, I will briefly discuss the general background to forest management in Myanmar, the degradation of the forests and the introduction of community forestry initiatives (CFI) by the Forest Department, as well as the current situation regarding CFI throughout the country. I will then present the related concepts and the conceptual framework of the study, followed by a discussion of the research questions, research objectives and research methodology, plus the thesis organization. The second part is divided into the four concepts used: the state of knowledge on community forestry in Myanmar, followed by the contested meaning of community forestry, the local responses to State policies and finally, community participation as a livelihood strategy within the local community.

Chapter II reviews the historical development of forest management and forestry policy in Myanmar over three distinct periods: (i) commercialized forest management under the British colonial regime, (ii) centralized management under the socialist program, and (iii) forest management in order to maintain state power and the initial period of people's participation, and this is followed by a discussion of the Taungya forestry program and other community forest initiatives which have involved local people in forest management activities, but with different objectives.

In Chapter III, I will present the history of the Pa-O community in the study area, and will discuss how the community members have adapted their household livelihood strategies to changes in the upland agro-ecosystem due to forest

degradation, followed by the changes and improvements in livelihoods brought in since implementation of the community forest by the forest NGO, and the community's links to the outside world since the road was upgraded.

Chapter IV will present the types of community forest implemented by FREDA, and the different levels of participation that local communities have had in helping to establish the CF plantations. I will then discuss the lack of local governance within the community forest project due to the centralized management structure of FREDA, plus the complexity of the community forest as seen by the local people based upon their local perceptions and customary laws, as well as the use and management of land and forest by the local community.

Chapter V presents the local people's perceptions of property relations in the community forests, and explains how people in the community feel about the rights they do or do not have over community forests, something which has led them to reject the ownership rights given. I then analyze the role of the different actors involved in the community forest process as developed by FREDA, and how the villagers have participated in the income generation activities created by FREDA, as a way to negotiate improvements to their livelihood security.

Chapter VI is the concluding chapter of the thesis, and presents the main findings of my research, such as the tensions between the NGO and the local community, between the local authorities and the villagers, plus between the NGOs and the Forest Department, as well as the social impact the NGOs actions have had on the local community. I will then also hold a theoretical discussion of my research finding and give my comments and suggestions for further study.