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**Communities in flames:
proceedings of an international conference
on community involvement in fire
management**

Edited by

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Foreword

Decentralisation and devolution are dominant concepts in contemporary discussions on natural resource policy and management throughout the world. In forestry, decentralised governance and granting greater decision-making authority to local people has a long history. Recently, innovative and progressive policies and legislation have strengthened and formalised what in many locations were previously informal institutional arrangements for managing local forests.

There are several factors driving these trends toward increased participation of local stakeholders in forestry. In some cases, greater decentralisation and devolution is arising from a realization that central governments often lack the capacity to manage forests effectively. In many places, governments are themselves advocates of increased partnership with local people, recognising that their own forest management resources are inadequate. In other areas, local stakeholders are simply asserting their roles more aggressively than in the past. In nearly all instances, when local people are given a meaningful stake in forest management decision-making, there is a demonstrated improvement in the way forest resources are managed.

As global concern over the fate of the world's forests has grown generally, so too has specific concern over the frequency and intensity of forest fires, which have increased dramatically as a result of human activities in recent years. The major forest fires of 1997 and 1998 in Asia and elsewhere around the globe inflicted enormous ecological damage and human suffering. A positive result, however, has been an awakening of world attention to the challenges of fire management in the modern era. To some, the massive fires of the 1990s were viewed not just as a local emergency, but rather as a human-induced planetary disaster that should never to be allowed to occur again.

Since the widespread fires of the late 1990s, numerous agencies and organizations have supported various fire prevention, suppression and management initiatives. These efforts have indicated that no single actor, whether government or civil society, can independently solve the serious social, economic and ecological challenges associated with uncontrolled forest fires. Importantly, it is now increasingly recognized that, in many countries, local communities can play significant positive roles in fire management, particularly when working in close collaboration with formal forest and fire management authorities.

In developing appropriate community-based forest fire management systems, much can be learned from the lessons gained in decentralising and devolving forest management. Nevertheless, important differences between managing fires and managing forests exist, and care must be taken in adopting institutional arrangements, approaches, tools and methods designed for different purposes.

Information on involving communities in fire management is still scarce, widely scattered and only slowly emerging. The *Communities in flames* proceedings provides long-awaited and first-hand insights into community-based forest fire management. The strength of the publication lies in the diversity of the contributions and the recognition that the role that communities can play is not overstated. Other stakeholders, including the government and the private sector, must also play a substantial role in forest fire management.

We hope that this publication will prove useful to those responsible for formulating and implementing fire management policies and programs in better understanding the key issues and challenges of involving local people as effective partners in managing forest fires.

He Changchui
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Preface

Large-scale fires throughout the world in recent times have demonstrated the social, economic and ecological costs of uncontrolled fires and have received unprecedented coverage in the international media. To combat the negative impacts, national and international agencies have called for improvement in controlling forest fires.

Unfortunately, government responses to forest fires have tended to focus on suppression and costly technological solutions to fight fires. Contrary to alleviating forest fire problems, they have often increased the scale and magnitude of forest fires, and ignored the positive dimensions of fire including the social and ecological benefits of smaller, prescribed burns. These conventional measures are increasingly being questioned as the number of forest fires increases.

In addition, decreasing governmental budgets to sustain suppression management regimes have led many agencies to explore more proactive approaches in combating fires before they occur. Over the last decade, there have been calls to revisit traditional forest fire management regimes, which emphasise prescribed burning and prevention. These have been seen as more effective in tempering unwanted fires, more beneficial to local ecosystems and less costly in the long term.

In December 2000, Project FireFight South East Asia and the Regional Community Forestry Training Center (RECOFTC) organized a regional workshop on community-based fire management (CBFiM). The workshop concluded that successful CBFiM strategies and experiences should be shared with government agencies to combat the persistent paradigm that suppression and enforcement are the only effective ways to manage fires.

The *Communities in flames* conference was organized to serve that purpose. The objectives of conference were to:

- ◆ expose forestry departments/fire control agencies to alternative approaches to forest fire management, which promote the participation of local communities in planning, and managing their own forest fires regimes (within the context of past/traditional practices and their socio-economic needs of local communities);
- ◆ examine the approaches and elements for promoting these alternatives to civil society (including identifying fire research needs, forest policy amendments, legal and regulatory structures and appropriate strategies for socialising CBFiM); and
- ◆ collect examples of the approaches taken by communities worldwide to manage and use their fires as a resource, and to further clarify and analyse the potential to capture the opportunities which these alternatives have to offer.

These objectives were pursued through the presentation and discussion of high-quality case studies and analytical papers from around the world. The conference was targeted to present a synthesis of lessons learned from CBFiM and its benefits in mitigating fires. Among the 120 participants were individuals and representatives of organizations that have extensive knowledge and experience of CBFiM, including a strong local non-governmental organizational presence. Representatives from forestry departments and other governmental agencies involved with land-use planning, disaster management and fire control also participated in large numbers. Academics and researchers, directly or indirectly involved in fire management-related issues such as land-use planning, shifting cultivation and air quality, were also active participants.

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Abbreviations

BMG	Badan Meteorologi dan Geofisika
BPS	Badan Pusat Statistik
CBFFM	Community-based Forest Fire Management
CBFiM	Community-based Fire Management
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research
CVA	Capacity and Vulnerability Analysis
DEPHUT	Departemen Kehutanan
DoF	Directorate of Forestry (Namibia)
ENSO	El Niño Southern Oscillation
FFPMP	Forest Fire Prevention Management Project
FMUs	Fire Management Units
FPAs	Fire Protection Associations
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FSC	Forest Safe Council
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GFMC	Global Fire Monitoring Center
GGFP	Gambian-German Forestry Project
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Geographic Positioning System
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Co-operation
HLS	Household livelihood security
HPH	Hak Penguasaan Hutan
HTI	Hutan Tanaman Industri
ICRAF	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry
IFM	Integrated Fire Management
IFFM	Integrated Forest Fire Management
IGB	Integrated green belt
ITCs	Information and Training Centres
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
JFM	Joint Forest Management
Kanitab	Kader Tani Menetap
KBDI	Keetch Byram Drought Index
KWNP	Kiang West National Park
MPTS	Multipurpose tree species
NFFP	Namibia-Finland Forestry Program
NFTs	Nitrogen-fixing tree species
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
NOAA	National Oceanic Atmosphere Administration
NTFPs	Non-timber forest products
PCA	Participatory Communication Approaches
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PMDH	Pembangunan Masyarakat Desa Hutan

PULK	Pertanian Usaha Lahan Kering
R	Rand
RECOFTC	Regional Community Forestry Training Center
RFD	Royal Forest Department (Thailand)
RMT	Rangeland Management Team
Rp	Rupiah
RT	Rukun tetangga
SA	South Africa
SALT	Sloping Agricultural Land Technology
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
USFS	United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service
VFDs	Volunteer Fire Departments
VFFPC	Village Forest Fire Prevention Committee
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

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