RURAL DEVELOPMENT FORESTRY NETWORK

Rural Development Forestry in Scotland: the struggle to bring international principles and best practices to the last bastion of British colonial forestry

Andy S. Inglis and Susan Guy

Network Paper 20b **Winter 1996/97**

Andy Inglis is a freelance consultant and trainer based in Edinburgh, providing expertise to facilitate local peoples' participation in environmental planning and management. He has worked in forestry development in over thirty countries worldwide, including in the UK for the Forestry Commission, in Sierra Leone as a rural development forester, and, based in Italy, for the FAO on the Tropical Forestry Action Plan. He now specialises in adapting the experience of participatory environmental research and planning approaches in the 'south' to northern countries. He helped to initiate the SRDFP and is a technical adviser to its NGO partners.

Susan Guy is an independent researcher and facilitator using participatory approaches to identify and involve stakeholders in research and analysis. She has worked for national and international agencies and has been a facilitator in several SRDFP local events. Her professional background is in landscape planning and government administration in Canada.

The authors may be contacted at 16 Cassells Lane, Edinburgh EH6 5EU, UK.

ISSN 0968-2627 (formerly Social Forestry Network ISSN 0951-1857)

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Summary

This paper describes the present forestry and rural development situation in Scotland. It argues that the issue of land tenure is paramount to the future wise use and management of forests. The paper shows how the state forestry agency, the Forestry Commission, as a major landowner, is an influential player with respect to rural development in Scotland. It puts forward the view that despite international agreements and stated government policy, the Forestry Commission is not allowing forestry to fulfil its rural development potential because it retains many of the features of a British colonial forestry service which have been jettisoned elsewhere in the world. The emergence of new forces in the Scottish forest sector are illustrated through the work of three Scottish NGOs which are assisting the government to follow up the Rio Forest Principles (agreed at the UNCED Earth Summit, 1992) through the initiation of a rural development forestry programme. This NGO-assisted programme has been a catalyst for recent forestry policy change which has met with some opposition from the state forestry agency.

The authors argue that the state forestry agency should be a proactive, positive force in rural Scotland and analyses how and why it is failing to be such a force. Finally, they put forward their view that the UK is in a weak moral and political position to advise and admonish other countries to follow international principles to pursue participatory approaches to forest management whilst it is still following policies in the UK that alienate local people from forests and forestry.

Rural Development Forestry Network Paper 20b, Winter 1996/97
ODI, Portland House, Stag Place, London SW1E 5DP, UK

Introduction

Over the past two centuries, British colonial forestry could be described as exhibiting the following characteristics:

- forestry officials accountable to people in capital cities (and often London) but unaccountable to local politicians or citizens;
- a heavy reliance on plantation forestry with non-native species;
- a preoccupation with exporting forest products (especially timber) from where they were grown to supporting the British state economy;
- little or no encouragement given to developing opportunities for adding value locally;
- an emphasis on state ownership with little local control or ownership of forest resources allowed or encouraged;
- an ignorance of or even disregard for local socio-economic conditions;
- top down (expert) management styles;
- little or no development of local professional forest management capacity;
- state forestry officials building alliances with local elites.

If it is agreed that these are some of the features which characterised British colonial forestry, then the authors of this paper argue that because of the UK Forestry Commission, Scotland is one of its last bastions.

In Scotland the state forestry agency (the Forestry Commission) is the major landowner and therefore an influential player with regard to rural development issues. However, many commentators have observed that forestry, as a fundamental component of rural development, is in crisis where the interests of large landowners often run counter to the needs of people living in rural areas. In response to this situation a rural development forestry (RDF) programme run by three Scottish NGOs was established to assist the government to follow up the UNCED Forest Principles.

This programme has been one of the catalysts for recent forestry policy change which provides more scope for RDF in Scotland. The Forestry Commission is now faced with activating this new policy. Although it is well positioned to be a proactive, positive force in rural Scotland, as yet it is failing to fulfil this potential. It is the authors' view that the UK is therefore in a weak moral and political

position to advise and admonish other countries on international best practices for rural development forestry when its own practices still need substantial change to meet the commitments made by the UK government when signing up to the Rio Forest Principles.

It should be noted that the Forestry Commission has recently been divided into agencies and departments with different remits. However, except when specifically referencing one of its component parts, we have used the single term 'Forestry Commission' throughout the paper.

Scotland's Forest Cover

Just over one thousand years ago forests extended across most of Scotland, especially the whole of the Scottish Highlands. There are a number of historical accounts of what happened to the forest cover of Scotland. One account (Scottish Green Party, 1989) reports that great tracts of natural forest existed until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this period large areas were cleared for livestock (mainly sheep) husbandry, and tracts of land were given to those who had supported the English effort in suppressing the 1745 rebellion by some Scots (the Jacobites). Although offset by some planting in the early nineteenth century the total area of woodland cover continued to fall and was only 5% of total land area by the end of the second decade of this century (HMSO, 1994).

Today, after large plantation establishment programmes, woodlands cover 15% of Scotland's land area. Of this, 1% or less is covered with native forest (SANGEC, 1995). The main reason for the dramatic increase in woodland cover this century has been an extensive land acquisition and exotic species plantation establishment programme of the UK Forestry Commission. The Forestry Commission was set up in 1919 with the overriding objective of building a strategic national reserve of timber, but also with a rural development mandate (Callander, 1995).

The Scottish Rural Condition

Over 1.4 million people (almost one third of the population of Scotland) live in rural Scotland (Scottish Office, 1992). Recent research has found that two thirds of rural households have incomes below the Low Pay Unit Poverty Threshold (Clark, Black and Conway, 1994). This research identified several underlying general

problems which included:

- a lack of local employment opportunities and low income jobs and in particular a shortage of the types of jobs that would persuade young and ambitious people to remain in rural localities; and
- rural people have little access to natural resources and little or no say as to how these are managed. This is because a high percentage of the land is typically owned in large units by a small number of individuals or corporations (Wightman, 1996, estimates that over 80% of the land is owned by 600 proprietors).

In many areas of rural Scotland, large landowners play a crucial role in local development and are, in effect, the rural planners (Wightman, 1996). Drawing on work by Prof. Bryan McGregor (the first John McEwen memorial lecture, 1993), Wightman (1996) makes the point that the Scottish land tenure system gives landowners influence over far more than just land use and resource management issues. The system allows major landowners to have influence over the following areas (further illustrated in Box 1):

- the size and distribution of an area's population;
- the labour skills and the entrepreneurial experiences of the population;
- access to employment and thus migration patterns;
- access to housing;
- access to land to build new houses; and
- the social structure, notably the distribution of power and influence.

State Forestry in Scotland

Forest development by the Forestry Commission has resulted in the single greatest transformation of the Scottish countryside this century (Wightman, 1996). Contrary to many other countries, where the role of the state has been reduced in many aspects of rural life and resource ownership, in Scotland the state forestry agency is still the largest single owner of land in the country. As Wightman (1996) wrote,

> 'Whilst the state has never consciously sought through forestry policy to encourage community forestry or farm forest cooperatives which are so common in many other countries, it has nevertheless substantially influenced land ownership patterns'.

Box 1 The power of land ownership

This can lead to people, both landowners and non-landowners, having a perception that if you don't own land you are not entitled to have a say or a role in local affairs. We recently encountered this ourselves. During a recent participatory forestry appraisal (PFA) event in a remote rural settlement on the north coast of Scotland, we were challenged by a (non-landowning) water bailiff[1]:

> "Wait a minute, what do you own? You don't own anything? What right do you have to be involved in anything to do with the Scottish countryside if you don't own any land?"

Things then went a bit quiet as both he and we realised that everybody else at the table, all local people, were not landowners and that the implication of what he was saying, "How can you have an opinion that is worth anything if you don't own anything?", applied to them all.

It has done so by becoming a major landowner itself. Even though, under pressure from the British Treasury (the UK Department of Finance), it is selling parts of its huge Scottish land holding (known as the Forestry Disposals programme), it still continues to acquire new land in Scotland (Wightman, 1996; SRDFP 1996a; Richardson, pers. comm., 1996).

The Forestry Commission owns 8.71% of Scotland and together with other large landowners (including members of the British Royal Family and the Scottish and English aristocracies) has a powerful influence on *all* rural affairs and constitutes an impressive and articulate lobby for the maintenance of the status quo of the land tenure system (Wightman, 1996).

Thus in common with many state forestry agencies throughout the world, but particularly in countries which were previously British colonies, the Forestry Commission has immense political power that comes as a result of being a major landowner with strong links with powerful elites. In Scotland, as in countries previously or still under British colonial rule, this political power is accompanied by little accountability to the electorate or elected representatives at local or national levels.

[1]Paid person responsible for fisheries management on privately owned rivers.

As far as political control is concerned, the Forestry Commission's British headquarters are in Edinburgh (the capital of Scotland) and not London, the seat of the British Government (just as the national headquarters of the Forestry Department in Zambia are in Ndola and not the seat of government, Lusaka). This provides headquarters officials with some respite from the lobbying and 'political interference' they would have to face in London. The Minister responsible for forestry in the UK is the Secretary of State for Scotland (see Figure 1), who has no real British power-base or mandate.

As a result, many people, including officials from other British government agencies, feel that the Forestry Commission has been operating in a political power vacuum which has not helped to facilitate the development of the necessary systems of public accountability.

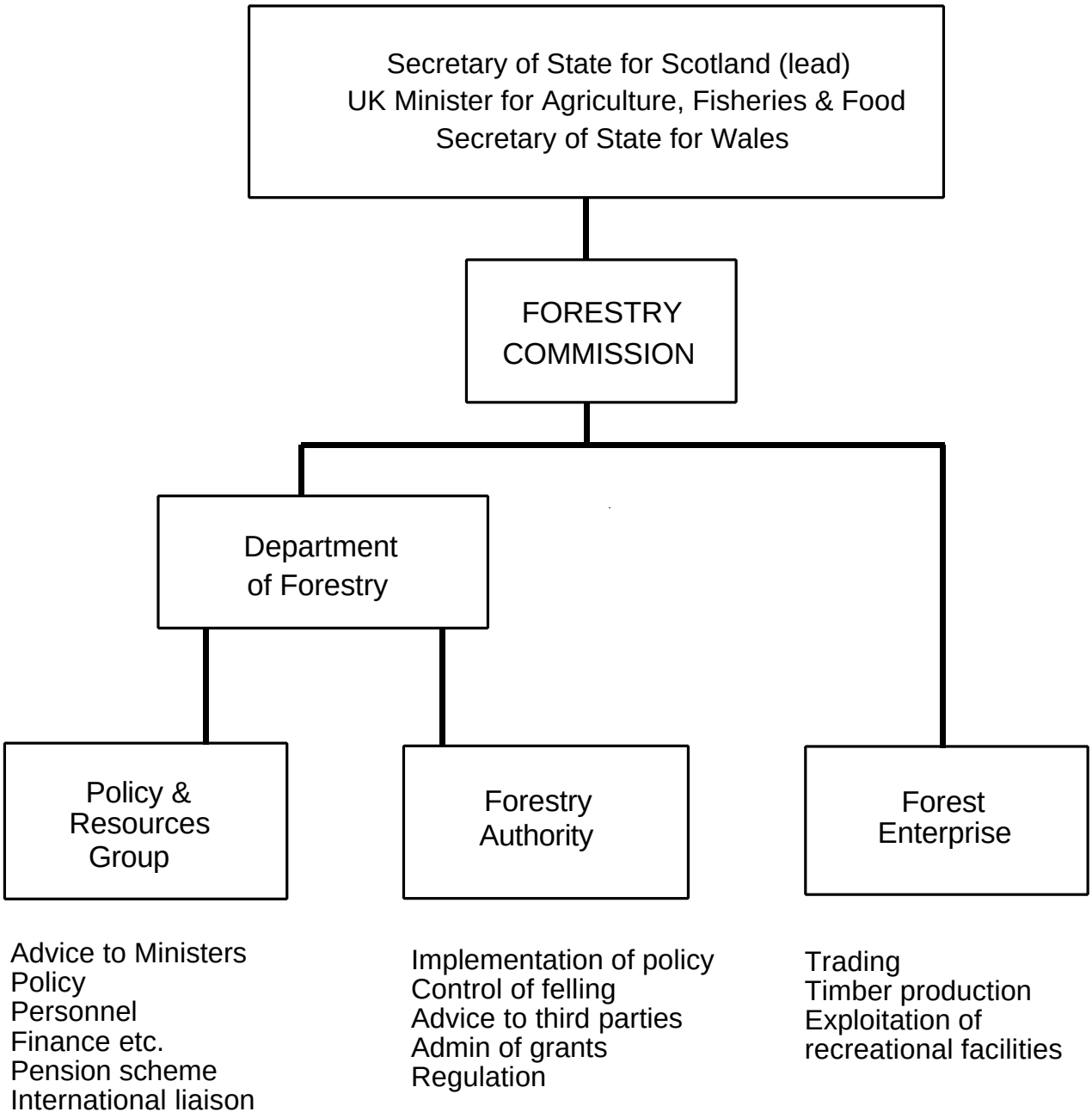
In 1992, the Forestry Commission was reorganised to make 'a clear distinction between the Commission's policy, regulatory and forest management roles' (HMSO, 1994b). The division of responsibility between component parts (Figure 1) was intended, amongst other things, to increase transparency and accountability. However, from the citizen's and politician's point of view, it has led to obfuscation and a further reduction in its public accountability, whereby officials in each agency are able to pass responsibility between themselves when it suits them. As Stewart and Saltiel (1996) put it, 'this combination of bodies attests to the confusion.....in its role as regulator and as landowner'.

In addition Forest Enterprise, the main land owning part of the state forestry agency and therefore the most influential at the local level, can operate in less transparent ways. The commercial nature of its mandate enables its officials to conduct negotiations with other landowners, estate agents, contractors, forest product industrial concerns, etc., at arms length from the government, elected representatives, and people living in the locality by claiming that because these dealings are commercial they are 'confidential'.

In all these ways, the Forestry Commission is presently unaccountable to the citizens of rural Scotland and can continue to build relationships with a few local elites and use its influence as a major landowner unhindered. As a result of these and other factors (see next section) the state forestry agency continues to fail to meet its rural development mandate.

Figure 1: Forestry Commission Organisation Chart

Source: Adapted from Stewart & Saltiel, 1996 (and based on Annual Report and Accounts of the Forestry Commission, 1994-95, London, HMSO 1995).



Forestry and Rural Development

A cursory glance at maps of Scotland show that many rural people live within a 50 km radius of a Forestry Commission plantation. But forestry, including the haulage and primary processing of timber, only employs around 15,000 people in Scotland (Scottish Office, 1992) – less than 1.1% of the rural population. (This begs the question of how much of the rural population could have forestry contributing to their livelihoods if more work went to those living nearby state plantations. It is disappointing and surprising that no official figures from the Forestry Commission or Scottish Office are available on this, but from field work carried out in the past few years [SRDFP 1995a and 1996b], we estimate that it could easily be two or three times the present figure.)

The Forestry Commission's policy of no thinning or maintenance in plantations and its tendency to increasingly mechanise forest harvesting operations have meant that there are now very few forestry jobs available to rural people in Scotland. In addition, over the years, there has been a trend to move from direct employment by the Forestry Commission, to the use of self-employed contractors who tender for the work through a competitive system. Work is usually allocated to the lowest tender in the name of achieving economic efficiency. This has, however, tended to favour distant workers employed by large companies as opposed to local workers operating as individuals or in small companies. It means that forestry contractors generally live far from the forests in which they are employed to work, and are thus required to spend frequent periods working away from home (Box 2).

Sadly, over the years the Forestry Commission have not trained local people in forest management. Usually training has been restricted to the development of practical skills such as fencing, planting, fertiliser and pesticide application, tractor driving and basic chainsaw operations (SRDFP 1994a; 1996a; 1996b). Some feel that this is an example of the Forestry Commission's enduring colonial attitude where only a certain level of skills are imparted to local people, with the major areas of expertise retained by forest service staff who generally only stay in one forest area for a relatively short period of time. This effectively ensures that local people are kept at a distance from the forest and will not develop a sense of long term ownership or care for its future well-being. As Wightman (1996) comments,

> 'Whilst forestry has the potential to play a constructive role in rural development, it can also be hugely destructive of rural economies and communities if badly handled'.

Box 2 Moniaive forestry contractors

In Moniaive, a Scottish village close to three large mature Forestry Commission plantations, no local people (even, apparently, those directly employed by the Forestry Commission) have ever harvested any timber in them (SRDFP, 1996b). In the village there are six forestry harvesting contractors who have never had any work locally and, in common with most Scottish forestry contractors, have to travel all over Scotland, North England and Ireland to work. These forest contractors typically spend most of the year living in caravans as they move from contract to contract (*ibid*).

As a forestry contractor in Moniaive said, some of the contracts let are carried out by 20-30 men full time for three to four months (the nearest coming from Carlisle in Northern England). This same work could be carried out over a 20-30 year period providing regular seasonal work for 2-3 local harvesting contractors and for local haulage contractors (SRDFP, 1996c).

Most, though not all forestry contractors, live in rural areas themselves, which they have to leave to work elsewhere (Dhubian, pers. comm., 1994). Under this system, both rural communities lose out. In one community the contractors have to leave their families for long periods of time and have very uncertain economic futures; in the second, the local people gain no employment from the forest and see the work going to contractors distant from the area who have little or no stake in the local economy or in the social and cultural life of the area.

In May 1996 a Forestry Commission official explained to a group of international RDF experts that it is not possible to develop RDF approaches on a significant scale in rural Scotland because, 'less than 1% (of the rural population) are engaged in forestry' (Forestry Commission, pers. comm.). The implication of this statement is clearly that since rural involvement is currently so limited there is little reason to try to be proactive in the development of rural development forestry. From the Forestry Commission perspective, the current low levels of involvement are an indicator that local people are not interested in forest-related work.

This is in contradiction to the views of local people who have clearly stated that they are interested in forest-related work (SRDFP 1994b; 1994c, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c). However, at the moment, they consider the Forestry Commission to be just the same as many other absentee landowners: insensitive to and even taking active steps to thwart local aspirations (Herald, 1995). They feel there will be few opportunities to obtain forest-related work near their homes (SRDFP, 1994d) and,

as a consequence, they put their individual and collective mental energies into other, more certain local enterprises.

International Commitment and Government Policy Background

At Rio and other international gatherings, the British government has declared its support for sustainable development principles – but Britain's own forestry practice, as witnessed in Scotland, demonstrates very few of the characteristics of internationally agreed good practice. The Forest Principles include specific reference to having (or creating) a land tenure system that encourages sustainable development and meeting local aspirations (if necessary by changes to national laws), utilising local knowledge, promoting local livelihoods and enhancing local enterprise through forestry (Box 3). The Forestry Commission's response to these agreed outcomes of UNCED have been disappointing.

Box 3 Two UNCED Forest Principles which are of direct relevance to the Scottish RDF situation (HMSO, 1994a)

Forest Principle 2d: 'Governments should promote and provide opportunities for the participation of interested parties, including local communities and indigenous people, industries, labour, non-governmental organisations and individuals, forest dwellers and women, in the development, implementation and planning of national forest policies'.

Forest Principle 5a: 'National forest policies should recognise and duly support the identity, culture, and the rights of indigenous people, their communities and other communities and forest dwellers. Appropriate conditions should be promoted for these groups to enable them to have an economic stake in forest use, perform economic activities, and achieve and maintain cultural identity and social organisation, as well as adequate levels of livelihood and well-being, through, *inter alia*, those land tenure arrangements which serve as incentives for the sustainable management of forests.'

None of the major aims of these Principles have yet been fulfilled by the Forestry Commission, which has effectively downgraded the UNCED Forest Principles to recreation and amenity issues in Britain (Kennedy, 1994). The Forestry Commission provided most of the inputs to the British Government's description

of how it is meeting its UNCED commitments (HMSO, 1994a).

There was a complete lack of analysis or commitment to enhancing local social, economic, or cultural (other than inanimate objects) benefits from forests, or altering land tenure arrangements (Inglis, 1994). The only place these aspects were specifically mentioned was in the international section of the document, inferring that the Government was meeting its commitment to implementing these aspects of the Forest Principles through its Overseas Development Administration (ODA) led bilateral aid and technical assistance programme (Inglis, 1994).

This is completely contrary to the spirit of Rio where Southern governments were adamant in the lead up to UNCED that Northern countries would be agreeing to the same set of principles for their domestic situations, and that none of them would only apply to the North or South. In fact, the then Secretary of State for Scotland said at the time,

> 'It is not enough to exhort others; we must set an example in our own forestry policies and practices' (HMSO, 1994a).

On the other hand, another British government department with a mandate for rural development in Scotland, the Scottish Office, has been more positive in its support to RDF in general, and to specific local forestry initiatives. In 1992 it produced a ground-breaking publication, 'The Rural Framework', which stated,

> 'The Government remains committed to ensuring that forestry plays a full part in the future of the countryside, not just for its economic worth in terms of timber production but also for its social and environmental values.'

Despite pressure from the Forestry Commission to leave *all* forestry matters and statements to them (Forestry Commission, pers. comm.), the Scottish Office provides financial and political support to some of the organisations and people in rural localities who are willing to challenge the *status quo* in their quest to manage local forests for more local benefits. In contrast to the Forestry Commission, it has responded with vision and flexibility to help support a different future for rural Scotland, and has taken notice of the UNCED Forest Principles. A recent Scottish Office publication noted (albeit 'without comment or other indication of the Government response to these issues'),

- 'that there is limited local added value in forestry and that there had been

significant closures of local sawmills'; and

- 'that the land tenure pattern in the Highlands and Islands was said to have a constraining effect on economic diversity'. (Scottish Office, 1995).

Perhaps more significantly, since 1994, the Scottish Office has helped to fund the Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme (SRDFP), which seeks to develop international best RDF practice to suit the particular social, political and ecological contexts of Scotland. As Fisher, an independent public policy researcher, recently wrote,

> 'the SRDFP is one of the few initiatives in Scotland which is meeting the participatory principles of Agenda 21 and the UNCED Forest Principles and ...is playing a leading role in moving toward an outcome which the government has supported in an international forum but, as yet, has not acted upon' (Fisher, 1995).

A Recent Attempt to Bring International RDF Experience to Scotland

The SRDFP, a partnership between three Scottish NGOs (the Highland and Islands Forum, Reforesting Scotland and the Rural Forum Scotland), was initiated in 1994. From experience from other countries, it was clear to the NGO partners that the most effective forms of forest resource management are based on the careful development of local participation at all stages of planning and implementation and that one of the best ways of achieving this was through the use of participatory rural appraisal (PRA). As a result, participatory appraisal events with realistic specific objectives were designed to facilitate the involvement of local people in both local forestry planning and wider policy formulation.

The aim of the SRDFP was, and still is, to involve local people both in the analysis of their current situation and in developing their ideas into plans and action. The approach the SRDFP has employed has become known in Scotland as participatory forestry appraisal (PFA). Although adaptations of PRA approaches are widely used in many countries, there were few examples of this or similar approaches being adopted in Scotland. What public consultation in natural resource planning and management there had been in Scotland had been just that: consultation, rather than participation.

The Programme has had to adopt a phased approach as funding has only been made available on a one year basis. The activities of the SRDFP are aimed at achieving the stated goal of the Programme,

> 'to enable local individuals and groups to realise the potential of forestry as a land use with environmental, social and economic benefits'.

The Programme received financial support from: the British Government (the Scottish Office Environment Department and Scottish Natural Heritage); an international forest conservation trust (Fondation Audemars Piguet in Geneva); and national NGOs (the Network for Social Change and WWF-UK). In addition, local authorities also made some financial contributions for specific events.

Several interlinked activities (Box 4) were undertaken as part of phase one (i.e. the first funding year) of the SRDFP. The sequence of these activities was important, as each built upon the experiences and/or results of the previous one. All these and subsequent SRDFP field activities (Box 4) have been in places where the Programme was invited in by a local person.

The localities visited by SRDFP already had some local people who had an interest in forestry and/or saw the potential of RDF – thus fulfilling the mandate agreed with its funders: to work all over Scotland wherever some interest already existed (SRDFP, 1994a). Such situations have been few and far between, as most of the forest cover of rural Scotland is industrially orientated and the management regimes have generally resulted in the exclusion of local people from the forests (Beck, 1996). Because of this, and negative experiences when dealing with Forestry Commission officials (SRDFP 1994b, 1996a), few people in rural localities have had the opportunity to see or discuss openly the potential local benefits that forestry could offer them.

A great diversity of local interests and aspirations are presented in the reports of the events described in Box 4. The NGO partners are of the view that the SRDFP has come a long way to meeting its objectives of developing a methodology which assists people in a locality to develop their own ideas for forestry. However, it was recognised that although the bottom-up process of assessment using PFA formed the main thrust of the SRDFP, it was important also to involve other agencies if long term, meaningful change at the local level was to be initiated and sustained.

Box 4

Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme Local Activities

To date, the Programme has run events in the rural locations outlined below.

1. Participatory Forestry Appraisal (PFA) pilot local workshops for the analysis of four rural forestry situations produced between March and July 1994: Laggan (north central), Borve (on Skye, an island off the north west coast), Carsphairn (south west) and Tomintoul (north east). The aims of these were to enable people in rural localities to express their own ideas and opinions on their general situation, including how, or if, forestry could enhance their social, economic and environmental conditions. They also provided an opportunity to develop and refine the PFA approach which could be used in the later stages of phase one and later phases of the Programme.

2. A national seminar held at Laggan village hall in November 1994. A participatory appraisal approach was also used at this seminar, which involved both government and non-government agencies and local people. The PFA reports from Laggan and the other pilot workshop villages in Scotland were discussed at this seminar and analysed in working groups. An important outcome was the first bringing together of government officials, national NGOs and local people to produce a draft national level action plan. This action plan was aimed at helping community groups and agencies to 'take the process a step further than useful discussion and tackle some barriers to community forestry'(SRDFP, 1994d).

3. Local PFA analysis and planning events between May 1995 and October 1996: Achnamara (west coast), Cannich (north east), Douglas Valley (west central belt), Knoydart (a north west peninsula), Kyle (north west coast), Skerray (north coast), Moniaive (south west), and Wallyford (east central belt). These PFA events have been conducted in areas all over Scotland with very different forestry backgrounds, and assist local people to assess their own situation, with a focus on what forestry could offer their area. The outputs from each PFA event are different and include: forest action plans for the locality; informal visual reports of local people's analysis of their present situation and future options; and two videos, one illustrating and discussing the important issues identified by local people and the other, parts of the PFA process.

Thus official organisations (including the Forestry Commission) were involved at a number of stages during the Programme, most notably in the national seminar, but also at a presentation after the first two pilot PFA local workshops which illustrated the PFA approach. Additional meetings with other concerned agencies (local authorities such as East Lothian District Council, the FAPIRA partnership agencies, including Scottish Natural Heritage, Highlands and Islands Enterprise) were arranged. This represented a substantial cost to the Programme, but one which was

considered necessary. Not only did these meetings reflect the importance of informing and listening to the opinion of agencies, but they enabled the SRDFP partners to gain the necessary information to feed back to local groups and individuals on the activities and policies of local and national agencies.

In general, the PFA approach has been effective in positively engaging with a wide cross-section of people in a locality. The PFA events generated interest and discussion, and allowed local analysis. The use of the PFA approach also ensured that different priorities could be identified with large groups of local people.

Public consultation meetings have tended to be very unpopular throughout Scotland. They have a reputation for being based on speeches by outsiders (usually agency officials or politicians), being dominated by one or two vocal individuals and are usually attended only by a core of community activists. They are regarded as being predictable, boring and futile and are rarely attended in large numbers. In contrast, the PFA approach has been praised by many people who have experienced them (Scottish Participatory Initiatives, 1996).

The PFA pilot workshops and subsequent local events have demonstrated that there is local knowledge of, concern about, and scope for more local benefits from forestry in rural Scotland (SRDFP, 1994b). This was clearly expressed by local people whilst analysing their own situations and potential future scenarios. The PFA events also had the effect of raising local awareness of the amount of interest within each locality, in a way which has started the process of discussion and sharing with a wider cross-section of local people (Scottish Participatory Initiatives, 1996). This represents a fundamental change to local consultation, and has effectively brought a new group of stakeholders to the forest planning forum.

Experience to date has strengthened the resolve of the SRDFP partners to enhance the opportunities for local people to be meaningfully involved in the Programme's activities in the future. Although this will probably increase the time scale over which a number of events must operate in order to achieve results, it is recognised that patience and careful support to people in localities where SRDFP has worked is an essential feature of these approaches.

Box 5 The PFA approach used by the Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme

The PFA approach has been guided by setting realistic, pertinent objectives for each event, and uses visual methods to enable full participation of individuals within groups. The methods employed were generally considered to be both useful and enjoyable. The diagrams and other materials produced by local people were left in, or returned to the localities, to encourage ownership by the people of the process and the outcomes.

The specific strengths of the participatory forestry appraisal approach included:

- assisting local people to analyse their own situations, with emphasis on:
  - natural resources;
  - land ownership, tenure and management;
  - historical changes in resource management;
  - social change and local institutions;
  - past, present and future livelihood changes; and
  - including the opinions of those who would not normally have the confidence or interest to become involved in local initiatives.
- enabling local differences of opinion to be better understood and the analysis of constraints and opportunities regarding local involvement in forestry in a neutral, structured forum;
- generating an opportunity for a large number of people living in the locality to share their ideas for forestry in the area; and
- allowing different priorities to be identified, shared and understood, providing a basis for participatory planning. (SRDFP, 1995)

On reviewing the programme to date, it was agreed that the local PFA events have been the most important component (SRDFP, 1995). The development of the initial two day workshops into a series of PFA events, implemented over a period of several months, has allowed the process to evolve further and encouraged the development of local forestry action plans. Since these will be developed by local people, they will reflect not only their diverse needs and wants, but also the different circumstances within which local people find themselves, and the variation in forest and other natural resources.

The local pilot workshops, the PFA events and the other local forestry initiatives which were identified by the Programme and discussed during the National Seminar, indicate that there is a considerable amount of local interest in forestry in

Scotland which is currently dormant and untapped. There is also a great deal of local knowledge of forestry issues, and concern over current forestry practices and policies. What the SRDFP has developed is a process which brings to the surface latent local interest in forestry issues where it exists. As Fisher (1995) concluded,

> 'The unresolved tensions amongst stated policy commitments on one hand, and the (SRDFP) bottom-up initiatives on the other, indicate considerable unfulfilled potential for community development in rural Scotland.'

Official Responses

The official responses from the Forestry Commission to the attempt to bring RDF international principles and best practices to Scotland have been disappointing. A recent research paper report commissioned by the Forestry Commission's Policy Studies Division (Forestry Commission, 1994) reveals a lack of deep understanding of the actual and potential use of RDF in both developed and developing countries,

> 'The development of RDF in developed countries must differ markedly from RDF in developing countries. Although in both cases RDF will enhance local employment prospects, the markets for forest products will differ significantly. Whilst in developing countries markets will be exclusively local, in developed countries the markets for both mainstream and minor forest products are much more national. Thus, local economic development activities, even in remote rural areas, if they are to succeed, must be rooted in an understanding of national as well as local markets. Only where RDF is based principally on the satisfaction of locally based demands for amenity, can national factors be ignored.' (Slee, Clark and Snowdon, 1996).

This statement illustrates the Forestry Commission view that if national markets are involved and have to be served, then RDF is not appropriate. Is RDF in developing countries only to supply local markets? Certainly this has not been the experience in countries as diverse as Nepal and Mexico (Carter, 1996; Hobley, pers. comm., 1996). It is also contrary to evidence from other northern countries, including Scotland's more progressive neighbour, Norway, where it is clear that products from locally managed forests can meet both local and national markets (Reforesting Scotland, 1994).

In other parts of the world, local communities are already successfully managing their forests, and some are negotiating supply contracts. The large scale co-operative agreements reached by small scale Norwegian producers show that communities and industry can work together to overcome any difficulties presented by industry having to negotiate with a wider range of producers (Beck, 1996). Some local groups could begin to contract in additional labour, if it is not available locally, to ensure that they are able to manage larger contracts, and the profit made by local enterprises from their forests can be ploughed back into local development. This ensures that people living in rural localities take control over the type of development they want, and achieve it in a more timely fashion than would be the case using the normal channels. In addition to serving the national market, there could be new opportunities for locally adding value, enhancing biodiversity, introducing more flexible silvicultural treatments including thinning and cheaper, more responsive, more flexible maintenance procedures.

It is clear from Norway and elsewhere that local RDF enterprises can be actors in the national market, and are able to negotiate supply contracts with industrial forest product users. The larger forest product companies may initially be challenged by the emergence of new forest managers and forest product producers. However, there is no reason to suppose that their supplies of forest products will be threatened. Indeed, if the hoped for local employment criteria are included in the forthcoming Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification scheme, local RDF enterprises may become a preferred source of timber – as indicated by wood product retailing companies recently refusing to buy charcoal originating in Forestry Commission forests because of certification difficulties (Beck, pers. comm., 1996).

However, the developments outlined above may necessitate negotiation with a wider range of suppliers than is currently the case. Such an approach would allow the dispersal of forest benefits to a wider range of stakeholders. The role of the state as the mediator between industrial forest product processors and the producers is being contested in many countries, and perhaps in Scotland too it is time for the role of the state in land ownership, forest management and product processing to be more closely questioned (Stewart and Saltiel, 1996). As some SRDFP reports on PFA (1994a, 1996a, 1996b) are showing, Scottish rural localities already have local people available who possess real world business acumen and experience, more so than most Forestry Commission civil servants who are rarely exposed to the rigours of the non-cross-subsidised, unsalaried and unpensioned economic

realities of the market.

Another reaction from officials is that they are being asked to take responsibility for too many of the action points identified at the SRDFP national seminar that are required to allow RDF to fulfil its potential in Scotland. Concern is expressed, as is heard in many countries, that the state forest service is being asked to expand its mandate in times of increased economic stringency and reduced financial and human resources. However, the emphasis of the action points is not solely on the forest service's day to day functions, but on completely new approaches to the state forestry agency's land tenure arrangements and forest management practices, which may in fact release financial and human resources.

The emphasis on the need for macro-level change which emerged from the SRDFP National Seminar reflects the fact that without institutional change and support for land tenure reform from government and large agencies (especially those agencies which are major landowners themselves), meaningful RDF in Scotland will remain a dream. These can only be achieved through dialogue between many stakeholders – from local people to NGOs to forest service staff.

Change is slow and often difficult, and met with resistance by those who feel threatened by it, or perceive that any power they have will be reduced. This is understandable. What is more worrying is that key Forestry Commission officials have also revealed themselves to have:

- a lack of empathy with the Scottish rural condition in general;
- a lack of understanding of how the Forestry Commission has helped to create some of the underlying problems of rural Scotland;
- a lack of a capacity building strategy to increase the level of forest management skills in rural populations; and
- signs of retaining very blinkered views of 'economic efficiency' and the possible range of local and national end uses and end users of the outputs of plantations. (Forestry Commission, pers. comm. 1996)

At a recent meeting the Forestry Commission's community forestry policy adviser stated that in his opinion, the scope for RDF in Scotland is very limited because,

> 'The rural economy is dead.... there is no such thing as the rural economy.....our economy is urban based.....the government's policies are all geared to the urban way of life.' (Forestry Commission, pers.

comm. 1996).

Despite this very negative stance from some top officials, there has been progress at the macro-political and policy level. First of all, the Secretary of State for Scotland (i.e. the lead UK Forestry Minister, see Figure 1) announced that he had, 'decided to let the people of Laggan take over the 3,500 acre Strathmashie Forest and run it as Britain's first community forest' (Herald, 1995). However, the Herald newspaper also reported that,

> 'he [the Secretary of State] is having to overcome stiff opposition from the Forestry Commission, which is reported to be using every trick in the book, and some very influential friends, to frustrate what will be the boldest move yet in his campaign to allow local Highland communities to take control of their land.'

Almost one year later, the people of Laggan have yet to see come to pass what the Secretary of State offered them. Senior officials of the Forestry Commission who advised against the initiative have been trying every obstructive and diluting tactic available to them (including the revaluation of the forest at an astronomically high figure) (Richardson, pers. comm., 1996). It has taken the direct intervention of the Forestry Commission's new Director General to make any progress. He has made several personal visits to Laggan, and has arranged for a representative of the Laggan Forestry Initiative to work at the local Forest Enterprise office to draw up, with officials, a new management plan for the Strathmashie Forest (Campbell *et al*, pers. comm., 1996).

Following on from the Laggan decision, a major forestry policy change, with significant positive RDF implications, was announced by the government (see Box 6).

Until now the Forestry Commission has been very reluctant to sell land to local people, and in the case of Laggan were obstructive and refused them access to technical data (SRDFP, 1994b). It has preferred, as the Herald (1995) reported, 'to deal with the commercial sector' (typical buyers have been investment and pension companies, private forestry companies and the forest products companies).

Box 6 Recent RDF policy change

Hailed as 'the biggest reversal of forest policy in a generation' (Scotsman, 1996), the policy change meant that local communities can now prevent plantations being sold by the Forestry Commission (known as forest disposals) from being placed on the open land market if a case can be made for local economic or social development (FAPIRA, 1996). As a result, people living in rural localities now have a means of preventing Forestry Commission disposals from being sold on the open market. The policy effectively gives local people first refusal (FAPIRA, 1996) – a radical departure from the previous policy which restricted the criteria allowing local people such rights to recreation, amenity and biodiversity.

For the new policy to achieve the benefits hoped for by politicians, it must be advertised widely to all local people, and the mechanisms for taking advantage of the changes and overcoming legal constraints made clear (for instance how feudal superior agreements with previous landowners which give them first refusal to repurchase can be contested). In addition, new skills for forest management will be required, as will information about forthcoming forest disposals. Despite the obvious need for information concerning the changes, the Commission maintains that it sees no need to prepare or issue any guide for rural communities to inform them of the policy change and how they could benefit from it (Forestry Commission, pers. comm. 1996).

For the 'first refusal' option to be a realistic one, there should also be a mechanism for local people to hear of forthcoming disposals before they go on the open market, so that they have enough time to consider things openly and thoroughly before being pressured by other bids and sale closing dates. In the past, when local groups could apply for preferential bidder status arrangements (for conservation and amenity only), the Forestry Commission has not been transparent or helpful about notifying people in advance of forthcoming disposals. According to arrangements made under the earlier scheme, the Forestry Commission was to inform Local Authorities and the Crofters Commission of intended disposals in advance. In the case of the Crofter's Commission, this has only amounted to them being on the circulation list of the government's Estates Gazette (Crofters Commission, pers. comm., 1996), which estate agents and hence potential buyers from all over the world can obtain at the same time. The Crofters Union tried but do not receive the Gazette or any other notification (Crofters Union, pers. comm., 1996), and neither

organisation was aware of the new social and economic criteria (*ibid*), more than six months after the new policy was announced.

Immediately after the new policy announcement, and giving the impression that this was to be their contribution to helping the new policy succeed, the Forestry Commission launched a new document 'Involving Communities in Forestry' (Forestry Commission, 1996). Despite a stirring speech and foreword from their new internationally recruited Director General, it turned out to be no more than an adequate, if dated and uninspiring, guide to organising tree planting projects in urban and peri-urban areas, and on the use of urban fringe communities as a source of volunteer labour for conservation and amenity work. Subsequently, senior Forestry Commission officials admitted that the guide was only meant to be for urban tree planting projects (Forestry Commission, pers. comm. 1996).

It is an open secret that the Forestry Commission advised against the policy change and some of their senior officials (ironically the ones charged with implementing the new policy) seem to be hoping that the initiative will die a quiet death. This will allow them to say to politicians in a few years time that there is no demand for more local ownership or management of forests, and thus there was no need for the policy change.

If this new policy is to be implemented and be successful, it will require changes in attitude and working practices for the Forestry Commission and for local people. It will require new approaches which will result in having open and transparent dialogue with as many people as possible living near forest disposals. The kind of approaches used by the SRDFP are already achieving this. The SRDFP local PFA events have already assisted a wide cross-section of people living in a locality near to a Forestry Commission forest disposal to assess if the forest for sale could play a role in their future local economy (SRDFP, 1996b). Although the Forestry Commission is aware of the SRDFP (Forestry Commission, pers. comm. 1996), to date they have given it no financial support or political recognition (for instance, SRDFP was not invited to make a presentation at the recent government Forests and People in Rural Areas [FAPIRA] Conference), and there has been no move from the Forestry Commission to ask SRDFP for any advice or assistance in operationalising the new policy. The SRDFP will continue to try to encourage the Forestry Commission to work pro-actively and effectively at the local level by showing officials and politicians evidence that if given a chance, people in rural localities are prepared to take advantage of the new policy change.

The Future

The local SRDFP participatory forestry appraisal events will become even more important, as at present they are the main way by which local communities can obtain supportive external assistance to help them to benefit from the recent policy change. The Forestry Commission has recently stated that it wants to set up 'surgeries' in localities interested in forestry to answer any questions people may have about forestry (FAPIRA, 1996). In our view, there is a risk that these surgeries may only be used by local elites, and not the wider public because they tend to have so little trust in the motives of the Forestry Commission. In any event, these surgeries are no substitute for meaningful, open-ended dialogue on local people's terms.

The SRDFP's activities have caught the attention of international rural development professionals, PRA practitioners and participatory forestry and public policy academics and journalists. Interest in the Programme from both the economics editor and the environment correspondent of the Scotland on Sunday newspaper led to several articles about forestry, rural development and land tenure in Scotland. There has been great interest in the individual local pilot PFA workshops, particularly Laggan, and information about them has been disseminated worldwide.

Back in Scotland, however, there are officials of the state forestry agency in the field and in headquarters, who, when pushed, admit they have heard of the SRDFP (Forestry Commission, pers. comm. 1996), but have yet to show any real interest in learning about it or co-operating with it. We are not sure why. Is it that like many state forestry agency officials around the world they are worried about what the implications will be for the future of 'their' resource and status?

Unlike most other countries where state forestry officials have been concerned about the future of forest resources they feel they have been protecting, the concern in Scotland is about the future of a resource the state forestry agency has created. However, the end result is similar, where worried officials perceive that 'their' valuable assets are being transferred to local people who have not owned anything before, who are not trained professional foresters, and who may mismanage or squander them.

Just as the British ODA is advising state forestry agencies in other countries, the Forestry Commission should be playing a positive role and fulfil the rural

development mandate given to it by government (Callander, 1995). It could discharge its responsibilities by becoming a major provider of training in forestry skills and technical advice to local forest management enterprises, with the land being held in trust by the state, local authorities or local trusts. In doing so the Forestry Commission would be assisting the government in making as many citizens as possible stakeholders in the local economy and environment, and thus starting the process of land reform and rekindling democracy in rural Scotland.

Is such a fundamental change possible? Evidence to date suggests not if Forestry Commission officials are left to do it themselves. Despite the UNCED Forest Principles and all the debate in the media and in other government publications about the social dimensions of forestry, in the recently published 'UK Forestry Standard: a benchmark for the sustainable management of forests in the UK' (Forestry Commission, 1996b), there are only four 'social aspects' mentioned in the 28 page document. These are:

- application procedures for grants and felling licences;
- safety regulations;
- encouragements to owners to discuss their intentions with those who are likely to be affected by them; and lastly
- public rights of way must be kept open or be legally diverted.

Given the title of the document, it is surprising that there is absolutely no mention of trying to achieve sustainable management through assisting sustainable rural livelihoods and local forest based enterprises, or through changes in land tenure structures. There is also no discussion about the importance of the participation of local people in planning and sustainably managing local forest resources.

As well as the Forestry Commission's technical outputs being dated and narrow in their focus, their recent behaviour over Laggan and during the rural development policy debates has led officials in other government agencies to say privately that the Forestry Commission see themselves as 'prima donnas' and 'untouchables' (i.e. as being immune from external influences such as democratic control). This corresponds with our recent experience, where one senior Forestry Commission policy official said, in a scolding fashion to one of us (S. Guy) in a recent meeting, "Don't communicate with politicians if you want to deal seriously with civil servants" (Forestry Commission, pers. comm. 1996).

If there is to be substantial and sustainable change, it is also going to require politicians to take more interest and develop a deeper understanding about the role of forestry in rural development. Only in this way is it possible to ensure that the Forestry Commission becomes more accountable to the representatives of the people. Similarly, better informed politicians will lead to more careful analysis and development of policy and to a more enquiring and challenging approach to the conventional wisdom as it may be expressed by members of the Forestry Commission. The level of political understanding and leadership being displayed by the current Secretary of State for Scotland has in the past been sorely lacking. Forestry civil servants have had a free rein for decades and have simply not delivered the social rural results that were asked of them. Even now, senior officials are making statements which show that they question the wisdom of the recent policy change made by elected representatives (Forestry Commission, pers. comm. 1996).

One person at the Forestry Commission who is now taking the RDF aspects of its work seriously is its new Director General (David Bills), an Australian who appears to be aware of his country's own British colonial experience – he described himself recently as 'a colonial boy' (FAPIRA 1996). His recent personal interest in the Laggan situation has encouraged people in rural areas all over Scotland to think that despite the Forestry Commission's track record, there may be some scope for meaningful change in the future.

In the meantime, and to speed things up, perhaps David Bills (and the Scottish people) would be better served by ODA's technical advisers than his Forestry Commission officials for rural development policy guidance and the development of sustainable forest management guidelines and standards. Today, visitors to Scotland from ex-British colonies are surprised to see and hear some familiar features of their state forest agencies of the 1970s and 1980s when they meet with Forestry Commission staff (University of Reading short course participants, pers. comm., 1995-6). Their observations about the Forestry Commission include the following:

- office-bound, out of touch officials and policy makers who have superficial and patronising interactions with the few local people they meet on their rare visits to the field;
- field staff with pseudo-military uniforms, vehicles and staffing structures;
- an endemic external professional officer/local worker divide;

- the state forestry agency has operational boundaries which rarely coincide with any national or local electoral boundaries;
- field staff see remote rural areas as being postings to be endured before going somewhere 'more civilised';
- its officials treat the state forestry estate as their own property, in some cases under threat from local citizens;
- its officials attempt to inhibit and stifle local enterprise;
- its officials see local people's needs as obstacles to 'proper' forest management;
- dialogue with local people other than self-appointed representatives, if it occurs, only does so when there is a conflict to resolve between the Forestry Commission and local people; and
- all in all, the Forestry Commission retains a dated, imperial working ethos which the observers themselves have been trying, with Britain's assistance, to get away from in their home countries.

Conclusions

This paper has focused on the state forestry agency's role in rural Scotland and its response to international principles and best practice, for several reasons. These are:

- it is common for state owned forest resources to be the starting point for the development of RDF in other parts of the world;
- the state is by far the most influential and single largest owner of forest land in Scotland;
- it is in the Forestry Commission's official mandate to be a positive player in rural development in Scotland; and
- the potential for RDF is not being realised, and in fact being thwarted, by the state forestry agency which, in our opinion, is operating in a fashion and with an ethos which is more appropriate to a colonial resource management regime than that of a mature organ of a democratic society's government.

The SRDFP has developed an approach to engage in a meaningful and positive way with local people, and the outcomes have provided an indication both of local interest in forestry and of the way forward for rural development forestry in rural

Scotland. Instead of embracing partnership with the movement, the state forestry agency has been less than supportive of a process that will provide many social, environmental, economic and cultural benefits.

Despite the many negative experiences that we have had with Forestry Commission officials, it still remains that the Forestry Commission is uniquely positioned to facilitate a successful RDF programme in Scotland and spearhead a new beginning for the rural people and forests of Scotland. The Forestry Commission has a massive cadre of technically qualified staff with valuable and relevant expertise, and there is a functioning trade in forest products and (in the medium term at least) guaranteed markets for such products. In addition the Commission has great expertise, which it could pass on to local enterprises. There are favourable macro- and micro-political environments to support the development of local enterprise and the extension of ownership of natural resources to a broader array of stakeholders. Furthermore, there is already an awareness amongst local people in rural areas that forestry can provide a positive input to their local economy. It is a situation that many RDF professionals around the world would envy and welcome. This is one of the ironies of the Scottish RDF situation.

There are some other ironies that we would like to highlight. The British government correctly considers that it has learnt much from its experience with RDF/participatory forestry through its overseas technical assistance programme, and is constantly improving its overseas performance. Yet the British government has somehow neglected to tap into this experience for its own domestic situation. As a result, in our view, both the agencies' (the Forestry Commission and ODA) international standings are undermined, and the rural people of Scotland are the poorer for it. Can the Forestry Commission continue their parochial, negative views towards RDF? Its recently internationally recruited (and presumably internationally ambitious) Director General has indicated that he does not. Surely the ODA's insistence that recipient governments have policies and practices in place which enhance local democracy and empower rural people should be brought to bear in the UK, too?

A final irony is that thousands of unemployed and under-employed Scots living in rural areas surrounded by forestry plantations which are owned and managed by the British state are helping to finance (through their taxes) innovative, successful ODA RDF programmes which empower and provide sustainable livelihoods to hundreds

of thousands of rural people living near forests previously owned and managed by the British state elsewhere in the world.

Acronyms

FAPIRA	Forests and People in Rural Areas
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
PFA	Participatory forestry appraisal
RDF	Rural development forestry
SANGEC	Scottish Academic Network for Global Environmental Change
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SRDFP	Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

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Please send comments on this paper to:

Rural Development Forestry Network
Overseas Development Institute
Portland House
Stag Place
London SW1E 5DP
United Kingdom

Credits

Editors of this paper: Jane Carter & Mary Hobley
Layout: Joanne Burrell
Printed by: Russell Press Ltd, Nottingham
on recycled paper

RDFN logo by Terry Hirst
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Rural Development Forestry Network
Overseas Development Institute
Portland House
Stag Place
London SW1E 5DP
UK
Telephone: +44(0)171-393 1600
Fax: +44(0)171-393 1699
E-mail: forestry@odi.org.uk

The Rural Development Forestry Network is funded by the EUROPEAN COMMISSION