



Photo: Rik Thijsen

Villagers from hill tribes in northern Vietnam. The communities are often isolated and therefore lack market information.

Tools for influencing policy

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Natural resource management problems are power problems. Many people manage and use natural resources daily, but never get the chance to contribute to the definition of policies and institutions that govern this management. Farmers also face difficulties getting policy makers to listen. Persuading decision makers not just to listen but to change how things are done is even more of a challenge. This article describes the tactics used by farmers to influence government policy in two very different situations: vegetable growers in Grenada, and producers of timber, bamboo and cinnamon in Vietnam.

Linking farmers with policy processes

Grenada is a Caribbean island state with about 100 000 people. The small size of the country means there is plenty of scope for communication between citizens and policy makers. But it also means that the government is influenced strongly by outside investment and international policy. At present the country does not have a national land policy to determine the best spread of land uses and division between local and international ownership.

The 320-hectare Chambord estate in northern Grenada was divided up in the 1960s. The government sold about 170 hectares to a private development company owned by expatriates. This company failed to implement plans for high-cost residences and much of the land remained under small-scale tenancies (0.2 – 2.4 ha) with over 100 local farmers. These Chambord lands include around 50 hectares of ‘good’ and 20 hectares of ‘prime’

agricultural land; one of the few areas in Grenada where tractor ploughing is feasible. Farms here produce a wide range of crops (maize, peas, potato, cassava, sorrel (*Rumex* spp.), melon), which make a significant contribution to national agricultural production.

Arrangements worked well until 1993, when the owners sold the property to a new group of developers who planned to use the property for tourism and commercial development. This made farmers uncertain and reluctant to risk financial outlays. They saw threats to their land tenure and livelihoods and sought help from the government and from the Grenada Community Development Agency (GRENCODA), an NGO working in the community. Since then, this organization has worked with the Chambord farmers to secure their long-term rights to use the land. Their joint strategy is threefold: to build a strong basis of evidence for farmers’ continuing effective use of land; to widen both farmers’ and officials’ picture of how Chambord farming fits into the national food system; and to communicate effectively with a wide range of groups, from TV stations to members of parliament.

Building farmers’ evidence

“We want to plant many types of crops because as long as we are doing that, they can’t take the land” said a Chambord farmer at a women’s meeting in 2003. Demonstrating active land use is central to the Chambord strategy. With GRENCODA’s help, farmers quickly attracted national media (TV and radio, as newspapers are less popular in Grenada) into investigative

journalism. The government tractor, used just once a year for ploughing, became a resonant symbol of land use debates in Grenada. Behind this publicity is a strong and growing body of evidence. The NGO paid for cadastral mapping of individual farmers' plots at Chambord. Farmers used this formal map as a starting point to agree on field boundaries, to report oral histories of local land title for GRENCODA staff to record, and to keep records of farm practice. Farmers have used the cadastral map as a basis for working out local development preferences: which sites are best for agriculture and which could go to other development, where should irrigation and roads be, and how land ownership and tenancies affect these and other options.

Widening the picture

The arguments of the Chambord farmers to retain land in agriculture gain strength among policy makers when placed in the context of national policies and concerns. The crops produced at Chambord are by and large those promoted by the government's Food Security Programme. Several farmers in Chambord volunteered to participate in the Food Security Programme as a way to reinforce the point that they have good, nationally important, agricultural land for food production. Food sovereignty and self-sufficiency are key issues in Grenada, to avoid too much dependency on international imports and food dumping. So was there a food crisis in Grenada when shipping was curtailed after the September 2001 attacks in the United States, while for example cheap battery-farmed chickens from the same country are time and again dumped on the local market.

Communicating effectively

The media have proved an effective means of building a national profile. But Chambord farmers have also used other channels. They raised their land security as an election issue, inviting each candidate in their constituency to a public meeting to spell out their vision for Chambord. The incumbent Member of Parliament failed to attend and did not get re-elected. GRENCODA has supported farmers in their dealings with government and helped them prepare for potential future negotiations with developers through training in negotiation techniques, such as working out beforehand different possible outcomes of the negotiation and what kind of compromise would be acceptable for each of these.

To date, the Chambord farmers have not lost their land to the proposed tourism and commercial development. But their hard work and imaginative tactics have not yet made their land tenure more secure. In September 2004, hurricane Ivan, confirmed to be the sixth most destructive hurricane in recorded human history, devastated the island. National policy attention quickly turned from long-term land and agricultural issues to short-term reconstruction, and developers delayed investment decisions. Although the Chambord lands were relatively unharmed, Chambord farmers are not isolated from the wider Grenadan community, so they have also put their campaign on temporary hold. The future will tell if they are able to defend their land use for their own good and for the benefit of Grenada's food security.

Linking farmers, traders and policy makers

In contrast to Grenada, Vietnam is a vast country with more than 75 million people. Rural areas can be roughly divided into the lowlands, which mainly grow rice and are populated by the majority Kinh people, and the uplands, where crops are diverse and the inhabitants come from many different ethnic minorities. Farmers in the uplands are disadvantaged by poor access to markets and little market information. Unlike the Chambord

lands in Grenada, which are of national agricultural importance, most marketed products from the Vietnamese uplands are of high economic value to local households, but insignificant nationally. Farmers in these areas grow and collect a diverse mix of food crops (cassava, maize), cash crops (cinnamon, cloves, fruits), bamboo, timber and products like mushrooms and medicinal plants.

The Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) Research Centre, based in Hanoi, has been working for several years with farmers in upland areas to improve their marketing strategies. Farmers, helped by trained facilitators, use a locally adapted version of the Market Analysis and Development tool, to prioritize which crops to concentrate on and how to get the best prices and most reliable outlets. This usually involves a full investigation of the market chain in which farmers travel to meet and question processors, traders and retailers. Work with farmers in upland districts of Quang Ninh province showed that market opportunities and prices were constrained by poor flows of information along market chains, ineffective implementation of policies to support upland farmers (such as farmers and traders having to pay taxes from which they are officially exempt), and lack of feedback to policymakers regarding the impacts, use and misuse of policies. Farmers often lost market opportunities because of the dominance of large-scale State Forestry Enterprises, which have sole or preferential rights to produce, purchase and process certain products such as timber and pine resin. Space to develop options for market development was limited because farmers, traders and regulators did not have any forums for discussion.

Assembling all stakeholders

The NTFP Centre consequently organised a series of district-level and province-level workshops to bring together farmers, traders, state forestry enterprises, the tax department, police and government policy makers, to share information and raise policy concerns. The one-day workshops were organized around specific products: bamboo, timber and cinnamon. Small-scale farmers and traders operate at the margins of profitability – at stake was a unique chance to raise grievances and influence policy implementation. Police and government departments were keen to hear grassroots reports since corruption and performance of the public sector are vital matters in Vietnam. Each workshop gave time for farmers and traders to talk together, plus broader plenary sessions to raise policy issues with officials. These plenary sessions resulted in identification of market constraints and recommendations for addressing these. Experienced facilitators from the NTFP Centre were on hand to manage conflict and give everyone a chance to speak.

After a year the NTFP Centre assessed the effectiveness of the workshops by interviewing officials to find out how many of the nine recommendations arising from the workshops had since been implemented by the various agencies. The outcomes of these interviews were checked with producers and traders. The table overleaf shows how six out of the nine recommendations were acted upon by government agencies in Ba Che District.

A need for broad alliances

The experiences from Grenada and Vietnam share some of the clever tactics that farmers can use to influence the policies that matter to them. In both cases there was help from the outside, but the strategies used were not especially expensive or complicated. What is encouraging is that relatively localized efforts by determined farmers can make a difference. On the other hand, farmers and their allies are frustrated that their hard

Results of policy recommendations

Recommendation	Positive action after one year
No more monopoly of the State Forestry Enterprise on control of timber, bamboo and cinnamon market.	All traders have the right to buy products directly from producers. The function of Ba Che State Forestry Enterprise is restricted to its roles assigned by the national regulations.
Faster and simpler licensing procedure to buy and transport forest and agricultural products.	Licensing process reduced to one day for all products except timber. Better control on "informal fees".
Reform land ownership under the State Forestry Enterprise.	The district is reviewing the land ownership of forestry enterprises, plus its financing and management capacity. There is a new central government decision to change the function of State Forestry Enterprises to providing services to farmers, so land owned by the forestry enterprise will partly be reallocated to households that have no land. But the process is very complicated and will require a long time to put in place.
Control unsustainable and illegal harvesting of wild bamboo.	A meeting of all relevant government agencies in 2004 released the following detailed regulations: bamboo harvesting should follow the technique developed by District Agriculture and Rural Development Department; no harvesting young bamboo is to be permitted; the Forestry Inspection unit should be responsible for checking at the gate of the paper factory; if product is found to be immature, the factory should pay a fine.
Confiscated illegally harvested timber should be sold on a bidding basis, not just to the State Forestry Enterprise.	This has been fully implemented and confiscated timber is now sold by auction.
Better access to credit for small-scale producers and traders.	The Agricultural Bank now provides loans at national bank interest rates. The terms of the loan are negotiable, based on the loanee's needs.
Recommendation	No action after one year
Government departments should supply marketing information to local producers and traders.	This is too difficult as there are insufficient funds, skills and staff in the relevant departments.
Tax reform: the "buy-from-afar" tax should be scrapped because it reduces the district's ability to compete with other districts in agricultural products; households should not have to pay a "resource" tax on trees they plant themselves; multiple payments of value-added tax should be cut.	There has been no change in tax collection. Explanations from the head of the Tax Department include: the "buy-from-afar" tax is collected because traders do not have business licenses; "resource" tax cannot be exempted as no household can prove which trees they plant themselves; value-added tax is required because the traders buy products through middlemen, not directly from farmers.
Full implementation and publicity for the national policy on transport subsidies.	Many still do not know this policy, even powerful people such as the District Secretary of the Communist Party. Only the State Forestry Enterprise appears to be eligible, receiving 260 million dong (Euro 14 000) of subsidy in 2004. Small-scale traders have no access to the fund because it is "difficult to control their traded volumes".

work has not led to outcomes that are more widespread (Vietnam) or more sustainable (Grenada). Lasting and accountable policy change might need broader alliances with stronger lobbying power.

Importantly, these experiences have shown that policy influence is not a simple bottom-up process and nor is policy formulation and implementation a simple top-down process. In Grenada, farmers realise that relevant policy change needs to be achieved by negotiating with the private sector, specifically foreign developers, and not just with government agencies. For the farmers in upland Vietnam, where transport and communication are major problems, the market chain workshops turned out to be equally useful for exchanging information with neighbouring farmers and traders as for talking with policy makers. Change happens in many different ways, so it's a good idea to connect not just with formal "policy makers" but with all those others in the policy circle, including fellow farmers, processors, traders, investors and the media.

These two cases were part of an international initiative to develop policy tools for disadvantaged natural resource managers and their allies. Readers can find other experiences with tactics and techniques for engaging in policy processes at the website <http://www.policy-powertools.org>

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