

Participatory resource monitoring as a means for promoting social change in Yunnan, China

JEANNETTE VAN RIJSOORT^{1,*} and ZHANG JINFENG²

*1*Department of Environmental Sciences, Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group, Wageningen University, P.O. Box 342, 6700 AH Wageningen, The Netherlands;

*2*Research Institute of Economic Forests, Yunnan Academy of Forestry, Heilongtan, 650204 Kunming, P.R. China;

*Author for correspondence (email: jvanrijsort@planet.nl; fax: +31-317-478078)

Abstract. Recent international forest policies stimulate involvement of communities in forest management as a strategy to improve biodiversity conservation and the quality of local livelihoods. Increasingly, the role of local people in monitoring forest resources is also acknowledged. This paper presents a participatory resources monitoring (PRM) system developed and implemented by representatives of 12 villages, six each within and adjacent to two nature reserves in Yunnan, China. The short-term objectives are to monitor resource and wildlife abundance, resource use, wildlife damage to crops, and land use. Main methods used by the village monitoring team are: (1) observation through forest walk, (2) village interview, and (3) market survey. Monitoring is implemented throughout the year to fit in the daily work of villagers. Staff from the nature reserve or forestry bureau provide support by visiting the villages several days per year. Results indicate that participatory monitoring is a valuable tool for villagers to engage in self-owned management actions. We discuss how monitoring is also a process which could lead to social change. Based on narratives we suggest that participatory monitoring builds trust between stakeholders, changes perceptions and attitudes and leads to more democratic and transparent decision-making. In discussing accuracy, we argue that all stakeholders perceive and interpret nature differently based on different worldviews, knowledge systems, values and beliefs. We argue that if participatory monitoring is to be sustainable, community-based monitoring – preferably linked to scientific monitoring and patrolling – should be designed as a discursive institution where the process of building social capital and inter-actor learning is extremely important. Finally, we briefly reflect upon efforts to scale up participatory monitoring.

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