



Broom grass harvesters in Mafungautsi State Forest, Zimbabwe. (Ravi Prabhu)

Looking to the future

Thinking about the sort of future you'd like is one thing; working out how to get there is quite another. That's why some form of structured learning process, involving the use of models, can be helpful. *Realizing Community*

Futures, by Jerry Vanclay, Ravi Prabhu and Fergus Sinclair, provides a practical guide to helping communities develop a collective vision of the future and a road map of how to get there. The book focuses on research conducted by CIFOR and its partners in India and Zimbabwe.

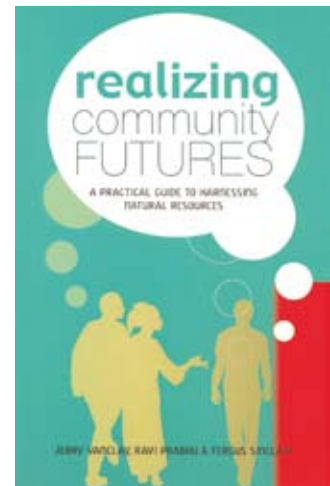
In arid Rajasthan, Rajendra Singh and a group of colleagues have helped to bring the desert back to life by reviving traditional methods of water engineering and better farming methods, supported by the collective action of local people who shared their vision. In Batanai, Zimbabwe, a group of women have changed the way they harvest and use broomgrass, and changed the way they make brooms. As a result, they have significantly increased their earnings, and begun harvesting broomgrass more sustainably. In Rajasthan, environmental and social change came about without the use of structured models. In Zimbabwe, in contrast, CIFOR's Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM) programme helped the broomgrass collectors to develop a vision and use a modelling process to map out how they could achieve their goals.

"Encouraging people to define a collective vision is always useful," explains Ravi Prabhu, formerly of CIFOR and now with Alliance of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural

Research (CGIAR), "but using models to explore the various options and strategies for improving livelihoods or managing resources can add real value to the process." The book describes how models were used in Zimbabwe to help the broomgrass collectors, and a wider range of individuals living around Mafaungutsi Forest, to define their goals and how to get there. "The modelling process made a tangible difference for the broomgrass collectors, as far as improving incomes and sustainability was concerned," explains Prabhu, "and it helped to change people's attitudes to their resources in Mafaungutsi."

However, if Rajendra Singh achieved so much in Rajasthan without the sort of structured learning used in the Zimbabwe case studies, why are the researchers so keen to promote the modelling approach? The answer is simple. Singh faced strong opposition from government officials and the rural élites, who were concerned that more water in the landscape would lead to the economic empowerment of the poor. As result, he was severely beaten. He told co-author Fergus Sinclair that if he had had a model of the sort used in Zimbabwe, he would have been able to explain precisely what he and his colleagues were doing, and use logic to refute the criticisms – and defuse the anger – of those who opposed him.

The book – there is also a CD, which provides interactive guidance to the models – is primarily aimed at policy-makers and conservation and development practitioners. "We hope it will arouse their interest in modelling sufficiently to encourage them to use it in their future work," says Prabhu.



'The book's real strength comes from the integration and synthesis of lessons and approaches that can apply to local management of any natural resource in any country.'
Neil Byron,
Productivity
Commissioner
to the Australian
Government.