

The Push-Me-Pull-You of Forest Devolution in Scotland

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Forests

*homes to folk with leaves in their eyes
(and mushrooms in their pockets)
who dream of chasing animals among branching shadows,
for whom the future is a tree-root that presses open rocks of the past,
with whom all stems intertwine,
in whom all saps and bloods and rivers mingle,
under whose power a single bud
becomes an eye, a wing, a soul,
becomes the whole
breathing planet.*

Abstract

The 'push down' of power through the process of devolution and decentralisation and the 'pull down' of power through action on the ground are reaching an exciting stage in Scotland, especially in relation to the national forest estate. This is happening within a political context of devolution in the United Kingdom, with the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and control of Scotland's forest estate passing to the Scottish Executive (government in Scotland). This paper outlines both the political 'push down' and the people's 'pull down' of power and tells the story of the people's movement to get access to land and natural

resources, including forest resources. This movement has led to a Land Reform Act giving communities the right to acquire ownership of land, including woodlands, and to the establishment of over 100 community woodland organisations. It has also strongly influenced cultural and organisational changes within the national forest and rural development institutions. The paper shows how local (sometimes radical) efforts to pull down power can shape the decentralisation process at the national level.

1. Introduction

This paper tells the story of how the people of Scotland have brought about a sea-change in forest governance over the past couple of decades, shifting power increasingly away from a centralised nationwide state body towards the local communities for whom forests are part of their home environment. It demonstrates how revolutions at the local grassroots level can make a real difference to the way decentralisation is implemented by national government. They do this by creating new possibilities, proving that 'impossible' things can really be achieved, thereby feeding the collective imagination of the country, building confidence in particular new forms of change and generating political will to create enabling conditions for such changes to be replicated.

The story of Scotland's forests is told twice. First, it is narrated from a 'central' perspective, describing how various processes of institutional change and legislation have produced a 'push down' of power from national government to community level. There are two main strands to this 'push down': increasing community involvement in forestry planning and management; and reforms giving communities increased rights to acquire land. The participatory forestry strand is part of a national trend giving people more say in governance.

The land reform strand is a Scottish phenomenon responding to Scotland's uniquely inequitable land ownership pattern.

The story is then retold from a 'local' perspective, through a series of case studies of community revolutions and 'pull down' of power. There are six of these. Assynt, our home, was the ground-breaking first example of a community of crofters (small tenant farmers) who collectively bought-out their land and set about establishing forest on it. Treslaig was the first community to try to buy the state forest land near to them, and Abriachan was the last community to do so. Laggan wanted to acquire their forest, but settled for co-management with the state. In Cairnhead the state wanted to sell the forest, but the community did not want to buy, and again co-management was the result. Finally, Culag woods, which are privately owned by an individual, are leased and managed by the local community. Together these six cases provide a range of examples of how Scottish communities are taking control of their forests. This paper examines how their struggles have shaped decentralisation at the national level.

The paper begins by giving a brief historical and political context for the decentralisation of forest governance in Scotland, tells the story once from the top and then again from the bottom, and concludes with a summary of lessons learned. And now, if you're sitting comfortably, we shall begin...

2. Background, Context and Rationale

Once upon a time, Scotland was almost entirely covered by forest in which bears and wolves roamed, but over several thousands of years this forest was destroyed, degraded and converted to agricultural and pasture lands. By the end of the First World War in the early part of the last century deforestation was all but complete, and efforts began to reverse the

process with a massive state-run industrial afforestation programme. Today the emphasis has shifted towards a vision of forests that includes environmental and social benefits as well as economic ones, and towards a model of reforestation and forest management that involves rather than alienates local communities.

This section of the paper gives a whistle-stop tour of this history, putting the management of Scotland's forests into its historical and political context and thereby providing a rationale for the current process of decentralisation.

Political Context

Scotland is a nation of 5 million people that occupies the northern part of the island of Great Britain, the southern part of which is made up of Wales and England. These together with Northern Ireland form the United Kingdom (UK). Since the Labour Party took control of government after a landslide victory in 1997, the UK is undertaking a major devolution process and thereby fulfilling a long-standing political promise.

In 1997, the Scottish people voted for devolution in a referendum, and in 1999, after nearly three centuries of centralised rule from London, the Scottish Parliament was established in Edinburgh and the bulk of domestic issues (such as health, education, justice, transport, local government, agriculture, environment and rural development, including forestry) were devolved to the new government in Scotland, the Scottish Executive. Ownership of Scotland's national forests passed to Scottish ministers.

Similar processes are underway in other parts of the UK with the establishment of a Welsh Assembly and ongoing negotiations for a Northern Ireland Assembly¹. In England devolution is slower and more regionally oriented.

Until recently, despite devolved forest ownership, the national forest estate was still managed by a centralised Forest Enterprise (FE) as agent for the UK Forestry Commission (FC).

Following a review of the post devolution experience, the management of the UK national forest estate was decentralised in 2003, with the creation of the Forestry Commission Scotland, Forestry Commission England and Forestry Commission Wales each answerable directly to the ministers in their respective countries.

Brief Forest History

Original (post-glacial) forest cover in Great Britain about 7000 years ago is estimated to be around 80 percent. By 1000 years ago, land cover is estimated to have been reduced to 20 percent. By the beginning of the 20th century less than 5 percent of the land remained under tree cover, and only 1.4percent retained 'ancient semi-natural woodland' (ASNW)². Recent estimates, which include recently established semi-natural woodlands, put the total figure of semi-natural woodlands at around 2.5 percent of land cover. In terms of biodiversity, most of the ASNW areas are intrinsically very important, and some are unique due to their relative isolation from mainland Europe and the strong oceanic influences of the North Atlantic, especially in the north and west of Scotland.

¹ Northern Ireland's forestry was already devolved to the Northern Ireland Office's Agriculture Department in 1922, and has therefore not been a concern of the UK government since then. As a result, most of the references to the UK national forest management are actually only about Great Britain.

² All of the existing native woodlands in the UK have been modified, many severely, by human activity. The term 'semi-natural woodlands' is applied to woodlands composed of a mix of native species which as far as can be determined have not been

The Forestry Commission (FC) was established in 1919, with a remit to develop a national timber reserve and, in particular, enough timber to supply coal mines with pit props, without relying entirely on imports. Since then afforestation has steadily increased tree cover to its current level of 10 percent (16.4 percent of Scotland, 12 percent of Wales, 8.4 percent of England). Total forest area (state and private) is now approximately 2.8 million hectares (ha): 1.5 million ha in Scotland; 1 million ha in England; 0.3 million ha in Wales. As a result of the timber-orientation of the afforestation programme, the forests are mostly industrial plantations of non-native species. Now, however, the FC has a strong commitment to make further increases in forest cover with native woodland.

Historically, in order to achieve its afforestation programme, the FC purchased large tracts of rural uplands and terminated hundreds of agricultural tenancies. In spite of the continued expansion of the national forest, estate employment in the forest sector dropped considerably over the years, largely as a result of the mechanisation of forest operations, expensive labour costs and the availability of cheap imports. Rural communities that depended on employment in the forest sector were affected resulting in many 'ghost' villages.

During the 1980s, UK citizens were increasingly concerned over the equity of the government's incentive schemes to private landowners, which included grants and tax breaks, as well as concerns over the impact of the subsequent increased planting on areas of high natural heritage value, especially the peatlands. Between 1979 and 1997, over 100,000 ha of the UK's public forest was sold to the private sector. There was substantial public and private investment in the paper pulp industry. Up to this time planning and decisions on forestry were made by people living far away from the forests and by landowners from a different social

planted but have arisen through natural regeneration. 'Ancient semi-natural woodland' is the term applied to similar woodlands which are known to have been in existence for several centuries.

and economic class than the rural population most affected by the decisions. It can be argued that the forest landscape we see today has been imposed upon rural communities rather than developed from within them.

Focusing on Scotland, we see one of the most deforested countries in the world with currently only around 2 percent of the land covered by native woodland, and all of the land heavily modified by centuries of (mis)management. Scotland also has one of the most skewed and inequitable land ownership patterns in the world with nearly 60 percent of the land owned by as few as 1250 people, much of it in the ownership of foreign nationals and institutions. Thirteen percent is owned by 110 members of the British aristocracy³. The Scottish national forests cover 667,000 ha (8.5 percent of Scotland's land area) forming Scotland's biggest landholding and representing 36 percent of Scotland's woodland and forests. The remaining 64 percent is privately owned.

The National Forest Programme

The global discourse on governance has a strong influence on UK policies. With respect to forests these include Agenda 21, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the proposals for action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). In 1994, the UK responded to its international commitments by publishing *Sustainable Forestry: the UK Programme* and three other separate but linked plans—*Sustainable Development: the UK Strategy*; *Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan*; and *Climate Change: the UK Programme*. *Sustainable Forestry: the UK Programme* brought together various elements from government policies and programmes and set them in the context of

international principles and guidelines. The government prepared an updated statement on sustainable forest management for the Earth Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.

The UK's national forest programme consists of:

- ? three country-level forest strategies and a statement of forest policy for Northern Ireland;
- ? UK Statement on Sustainable Forest Management;
- ? UK Forestry Standard, which incorporates criteria and indicators and is supported by a wide range of documents giving specific guidance.

The strategies, statement and standard cover all forests including exotic plantations. However there is now an increasing emphasis on the conservation, management and expansion of semi-natural native woodlands. A series of policy statements and guidelines have been issued since 1985 to conserve and extend broadleaved woodlands and native pinewood. These have been accompanied by targeted financial incentives for the creation of new native woods and for the removal of exotic species from existing native woodlands.

In 1999 the Forest Commission's forest service was certified under the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS), the UK specific certification scheme that delivers the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification requirements. This makes the UK one of the leading countries world-wide in terms of percentage of total forest certified to FSC standards: 100 percent of the state forest and over 40 percent of the total UK forest estate. The Forest Commission has recently been awarded the 'Gift to the Earth' award by WWF. The award recognises the key role that the FC has played in encouraging independent certification and sustainable forest management in the UK. It is worth noting, however, that currently under

³ See Wightman, 1996 and Wightman, 1999.

the UKWAS, the requirement for community involvement in forest management is limited to consultation. There are moves to change this.

The *Scottish Forestry Strategy (2000)* is the Scottish Executive's forestry policy. It sets out five strategic directions for Scottish forestry. These are to:

- maximise the value to the Scottish economy of its wood resource available for harvesting over the next 20 years;
- create a diverse forest resource of high quality that will contribute to the economic needs of Scotland throughout the 21st century and beyond;
- ensure that forestry in Scotland makes a positive contribution to the environment;
- create opportunities for more people to enjoy trees, woods and forests in Scotland;
- help communities benefit from woods and forests.

Underpinning these strategic directions are five principles: sustainability, integration, ensuring positive value, securing community support and recognising local diversity and distinctiveness.

The overall strategy recognises that the environmental and social benefits sought from forestry do not necessarily generate cash income for the owner. Since Scotland's national forests are managed in the public interest, the Forestry Commission is expected to deliver such social and environmental benefits as a key part of its job. In recognition of the role of national forests in the provision of public benefits, the Scottish Executive has allocated an average of £66.2 million per year over three years (2003-06) towards the cost of running the national forests. In order to address the 'market failure' in the delivery of public benefits from

private forests, owners of private forests have access to grants through the *Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme* to help meet the costs of providing non-market benefits.

3. The Scottish Experience of Forest Decentralisation

This section tells the story of forest decentralisation in Scotland from two points of view: first, from the perspective of government at the national level and its efforts to 'push down' power to enable local communities to have more say in decision-making about forests and to put in place some reforms of the land tenure regime; and second, from the perspective of six local communities that have struggled to achieve control over their local land and forests ('pull down' of power). These case studies demonstrate the range of different institutional models for community involvement in forest management and decentralisation that have been achieved in Scotland.

3.1 The Push Down of Power

The push down of power over forests in Scotland is driven by the devolution of selected political powers by the UK government to the newly created country governments (the Scottish Executive in the new Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Executive in the new Welsh Assembly) and by the decentralisation of UK forest management to three country agencies (Scottish Forestry Commission, Welsh Forestry Commission and English Forestry Commission). The agencies effectively act as the forest departments of each country government. International commitments have played a role in influencing the decentralisation agenda. In parallel with the changes in UK forest governance, the government has begun to address historical inequities, particularly with respect to land tenure.

Scotland has implemented the decentralisation of power over natural resources primarily by making forest governance more participatory and by the land reform process.

3.1.1 Participatory Forestry

Timeline of key events in the 'push down of power' over forests in Scotland

- 1992: UK signs up to *Agenda 21* and the *Forest Principles* at the World Summit in Rio.
- 1994: Forests and People in Rural Areas Initiative (FAPIRA) established.
- 1996: Forest Commission (FC) report on *The Scope for Community Participation in Forest Management*.
- 1997: Government announces moratorium on sale of state forests.
- 1999: Devolution. Ownership of Scotland's national forests passed to Scottish Ministers.
- 2000: Forestry for People Panel established to advise FC on community participation.
- 2002: FC report on *Community Involvement*, the 'Hobley' report.
- 2003: Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) created.
- 2003: Local Forestry Fora announced.
- 2004: Scottish Executive announces a major review of the national forest estate.

The World Summit in Rio in 1992 and the Council of Ministers meeting in Helsinki in 1993, focussed attention on the non-timber benefits of forests, notably their 'environmental, cultural, spiritual, economic and social benefits' (UN 1992). The UK government signed up to the *Forest Principles* and *Agenda 21* thus committing to recognise the full range of forest benefits and to engage with and empower communities to enjoy them. In 1992, the

government launched its *Rural Framework* for Scotland in which it committed to 'returning power to the people' with respect to rural development (Scottish Office 1992).

In 1994 the UK Forestry Commission hosted a multistakeholder meeting on Forests and People In Rural Areas and set up a Forests and People in Rural Areas Initiative (FAPIRA). In 1996 it commissioned a study on *The Scope for Community Participation in Forest Management*⁴. This showed commitment to exploring publicly the options for increasing community involvement. At the same time the FC began entering into a variety of formal agreements and concordats for co-management of some state forests with local communities.

In 1997 there was a change in the UK government with the Conservative Party being replaced by Tony Blair's New Labour Party. The new government immediately began a political process to develop 'community planning' as a methodology, across all sectors, for involving communities in the decisions that affect them. Another immediate impact was a cessation of the privatisation programme that had begun in 1989, with a moratorium being placed on large-scale disposals of state forest.

Ownership of Scotland's national forests passed to Scottish Ministers in the new Scottish Executive in 1999, but the forests were still managed by a centralised UK Forest Enterprise. After wide consultation, a new Scottish Forestry Strategy (FC 2000a) was published in 2000. That same year, a consortium of agencies and NGOs published a set of case studies of rural development forestry along with a 'toolbox' for community participation (McPhillimy 2000). Following one of its recommendations, the FC set up the Forestry for People Advisory Panel to advise on community participation in the management of the Scottish national forest estate.

⁴ Slee, Clark and Snowdon 1996.

The commitment to community participation was deepened when the new advisory panel commissioned a major study on the level of community involvement within Forest Enterprise in Scotland⁵. The response to this study was a recognition of the importance of community involvement and the initiation of a programme of change within the agency to adopt the study's recommendations, including staff training, seminars, networking, pilot studies and performance indicators. Each forest district now is required to develop a prioritised plan for involving communities using a 'menu' of options ranging from better consultation to ownership by communities.⁶

In 2003, the management of the national forest estate was decentralised from the UK level with the creation of the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), which acts as the Scottish Executive's Forestry Department. The *Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme* (replacing the Woodland Grant Scheme) was established, which sets out the financial incentives available to private landowners (including community land trusts) to drive forward the new priorities in the *Scottish Forest Strategy*. These include incentives specifically aimed at community involvement.

In August 2003 the Scottish minister responsible for forests, Allan Wilson, announced the establishment of a review panel to review the long-term role of Scotland's national forest estate; the panel began consultations in December. In November 2003 the Wilson announced that new Local Forestry Fora would be established to advise on taking forward the Scottish Forest Strategy at regional levels, marking the start of a formal process of decentralisation below the country level.

⁵ Hobley 2002

⁶ The option of ownership is currently constrained by the moratorium on the sale of forest land.

3.1.2 Land Reform

Before we can discuss the land reform process over the past decade or so in Scotland, it is necessary to explain one of the unique aspects of land tenure in Scotland: the system of 'crofting' under which the indigenous population in the Highlands and Islands of northwest Scotland were granted security of tenure after a widespread programme of clearing the people off the land in the early to mid 19th century. This is commonly referred to as the 'clearances' and was the forerunner of a programme of colonisation and displacement carried out on a global scale by the UK government for the next 100 years.

Crofting is a form of land tenure in which an individual has heritable rights to dwell on and manage a small area of land, called the croft or inbye, which is typically less than 10 ha. Crofts were originally subsistence holdings but have evolved into part-time agricultural units. The tenure arrangement defines a relationship between the crofter (tenant) and the owner of the land (landlord), in which both have rights and responsibilities towards each other and over the land. The arrangements were originally enshrined legally in the 1886 Crofting Act after a prolonged peoples' protest at the clearances and the failure of landowners to recognise their right to live on ancestral lands. The crofting system is regulated by a government body based in Inverness—the Crofters Commission.

Crofting tenancies are organised into 'townships'. In addition to their personal 'in-bye' land, most crofters also have a legal share in an area of common land, called the common grazing, which is attached to each township and is managed by a grazings committee elected by the crofting tenants in each township. There are about 1000 common grazings across the Highlands and Islands. Typically, 15 to 20 crofters share in an area of common grazing, 400-

500 ha on average, which is usually hill land and unsuitable for cultivation. Each area of common grazing has a set of rules called the grazing regulations, which regulate land use, for example, the number of stock each individual crofter may graze on the land.

There are around 17,000 crofting tenancies occupying 800,000 ha or 20 percent of the Highlands and Islands, or almost 10 percent of the total land area of Scotland. The majority of crofts are worked part-time and the majority of crofters have their main economic activity off the croft.

Timeline of key events in the 'push down of power' over land

1886: Crofting Act gives security of tenure to crofters

1976: Crofting Act reform gives crofters right to buy their croft

1990: Government crofting estates offered at no cost to crofters, but rejected

1991: Crofter Forestry (Scotland) Act gives crofters right to establish and manage woods

1992: UK signs up to *Agenda 21* at the World Summit in Rio

1997: Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Act passed

1997: Community Land Unit set up

1999: Scottish Executive commits to land reform legislation

2000: Community Land Fund established

2000: Scottish Executive sets up Land Reform Group

2003: Land Reform (Scotland) Act passed by Scottish Parliament

As part of a political process to move towards increased individual private ownership, the Crofting Act was reformed in 1976 to grant individual crofters the absolute right to buy their house site and garden ground and a qualified right to buy their inbye croft land. To this day, only 20 percent of crofters have taken up this opportunity. In a further privatisation move, in 1990, the government offered to transfer at no cost the ownership of its seven crofting estates to a single Scottish land trust that would be owned and managed by the crofting tenants. The crofters rejected the plan as having no advantages over state ownership.

While crofters have rights to graze livestock on the common lands, they have no rights to exploit fish, game, minerals, water or other resources of the land that belongs to the landowner, and until 1991, had no rights to manage woodlands.

In the late 1980s the Scottish Crofters Union (now the Scottish Crofting Foundation), a membership organisation representing the interest of crofters, advanced a convincing case for the benefits of crofter forestry on social, economic, agricultural and not least, environmental grounds. Between the two world wars, considerable areas of common grazings had been taken over by the Forestry Commission to develop plantations with the promise of employment to crofting communities. But with increased mechanisation and contract forestry, the number of local jobs had been steadily declining, and nationalised forestry was not able to deliver any social benefits to crofting communities. There was, however, confidence that locally managed crofter forestry schemes would be able to deliver social benefits such as employment and training—both in the short term from new plantings, fencing work and so on, and also for future generations of crofters.

The system of grants and subsidies in the UK deliver significant economic benefits for managing land as woodland, and it was clear that scenic and amenity benefits could also produce economic benefits through tourism, which is an important factor in the economics of crofting areas. Crofters also saw significant agricultural benefits of diversifying land use to include forestry on the grazings, including shelter, soil rehabilitation and fencing.

A notable aspect of the crofters' campaign was their emphasis on native woodland, in contrast to the predominantly exotic softwood forestry, which is the norm in the UK. The environmental benefits of crofter forestry include proper management of existing native woodland remnants on the grazings, many of which are ancient and of great ecological significance, and development of new native woodlands in areas that have long been deforested through neglect and intensive grazing. The knock-on benefits of better protected, and increased areas of native woodlands include benefits to wildlife, soils, water quality and fish resources. These benefits ensured the cooperation with the crofters campaign of vocal environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), government agencies including Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and also with the Scottish Landowners Federation (SLF).

The SLF might have seemed an unlikely ally of the crofters given their history of disagreements and given that the crofters' aim was to increase their rights over the SLF's members' land. However, throughout most of the crofting areas, landowners' interests primarily are the 'sport' on their estate, i.e., shooting deer and fishing salmon, and both deer and fish would clearly benefit from native woodlands.

In 1991 the UK parliament passed the Crofter Forestry (Scotland) Act 1991, ‘an Act to extend the powers of grazings committees in relation to the use of crofting land in Scotland for forestry purposes; and to make grazings committees eligible for certain grants in respect of such use’. In particular, the Act granted three new rights.

1. The right of any crofter to request their grazings committee to pursue forestry activity on the common grazings.
2. The right of the grazings committee, subject to the approval of the landlord, to ‘plant trees on, and use as woodlands, any part of the common grazing’, as long as ‘not the whole of the common grazing is planted with trees and used as woodlands’.
3. The right of the grazings committee to apply for grants for woodland management and afforestation.

Whilst falling short of actually granting ownership of the trees to crofters, this new law enabled crofting communities to become involved in afforestation and woodland management for the first time on a legal basis and to be able to share in the benefits of these activities⁷. The primary financial benefit is in the form of government grants, without which crofter forestry would not be financially viable. These include establishment grants for new woodlands and annual premiums guaranteed for 15 years to compensate for the loss of income from grazing, as the number of animals kept by each crofter needs to be reduced during the establishment phase.

Since 1991 crofters have set up nearly 100 crofter forestry schemes involving 1700 individual crofters and covering 9000 ha mostly with new native woodlands. The total establishment grant has been over £7 million, with management grants of around £0.5 million per year.

In 1995, the Secretary of State for Scotland declared governmental support for a new model of ownership of croftland by locally-based crofting land trusts involving all the crofters within a community. The Crofters Commission also set up a Crofting Trust Advisory Service to provide advice and financial support for expert services to crofting communities seeking to set up crofting trusts. In 1997, this land-ownership model was enshrined in legislation when the UK government passed the Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Act, which allowed the transfer of state-owned croftlands to such crofting trusts. However, to this day, the legislation has never been used and the state still retains ownership of all its crofting estates.

In 1997, the Minister of State also instructed Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), the government agency charged with stimulating business and commerce, to set up a Community Land Unit (CLU) to encourage and support community land purchases with financial support for expert advisors. Shortly after devolution in 2000, the CLU was strengthened by a Community Land Fund (CLF) with a budget of £10 million to support community land purchases.

The process of devolution involved significant commitments by the government to address historical inequities and anomalies and to modernise Scotland's land tenure system within the first term of the new Scottish Parliament. Inequities included the ancient feudal system in which 'feu superiors' could impose 'burdens' on land, such as restrictions on development, and retain rights to the land despite selling the title. In 2000, the Scottish Executive set up a Land Reform Group to consult widely on land reform, and that same year, through the Abolition of Feudal Tenure etc (Scotland) Act, the feudal system of land ownership was abolished in law.

⁷ Currently, legal contracts must be drawn up between landlords and crofters for each crofter forestry scheme in order to safeguard the crofters' use of the land owners' trees. This anomaly in the current legislation is to be addressed in new crofting

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act was passed in 2003, creating the opportunity for all rural communities, not just crofting communities, to have ‘first refusal’ on the sale of any rural land including woodland, and granting all crofting communities the absolute right to buy their croftlands, including any woodlands, on a collective basis at independent valuation even against the wishes of the land owner. This was termed a ‘Mugabe-style land raid’ by opponents to the reforms.

The next step in the modernisation process is a Crofting Reform Bill that will, amongst other things, enable new crofts to be created.

3.1.3 Some questions

It is clear that over the past decade and a half, tectonic shifts in power over land and over forests in Scotland have occurred with a consistent thrust to shift power from central government down to local communities. However, the history of participatory forestry and land reform, as just told, begs some big questions.

1. What drove Forest Enterprise to enter into concordats and co-management agreements with local communities in 1996?
2. Why were crofters given rights over woodlands in 1991, long before the Forestry Commission began talking about forests for people?
3. Why was the government so keen to create legislation to grant communities the rights to buy their land?

These questions concern not just the direction of the shift of power, but how it is shaped. Answers will become clearer when we consider what was happening during the same

legislation expected in 2005.

timeframe, looking from the perspective of six remarkable Scottish communities. But the simple answer is that it was the will of the people!

3.2 Revolution and the Pull Down of Power

The pull down of power over Scottish forests has been the result of a popular people's movement for communities to gain greater control over their local natural resources including forests and woodlands. This movement has ranged from communities demanding greater involvement in government forest departments' decision-making and entering into formal and informal concordats and partnerships to obtaining direct control over forest resources through ownership or long leases. This section presents six cases that illustrate this range and that have been powerful influences on the shaping of political measures to push control over natural resources down from central government. Together they demonstrate the influence of revolutionary grassroots activities on the push down of power. There are other examples of revolutionary communities that we have not had room to include⁸.

Timeline of key events in the 'pull down of power'

- 1987: Highlands and Islands Forum (HIF) *Land Wildlife and Community* conference
- 1989: Treslaig crofters begin the struggle to buy FC land surrounding their crofts
- 1992: Assynt Crofters Trust takes over the North Assynt Estate
- 1994: HIF Community Conference *The People and the Land*
- 1994: Grassroots Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme (SRDFP) initiated
- 1994: Treslaig becomes first community to purchase forest from FC
- 1996: Culag arranges formal lease from private owner

⁸ See for example MacIntosh, 2002.

1998: Abriachan becomes the last community to purchase forest from FC
1998: Laggan agrees formal community partnership with FC
1999: Cairnhead agrees a formal concordat between community and FC
2000: Culag purchases private forest land
2002: Scottish Community Woodland Association formed
2003: Calls for FC to make forest land available for new crofting communities

Injustice, and the desire to put right past wrong-doings, fuels revolutionary activity and increases the motivation to bring about change. In many of the Scottish cases, historical and widely perceived injustices have been the driver of change: injustices including the inequitable land ownership pattern and historically forced relocations or 'clearances'; a history of bad landlords; and tax breaks for game-show hosts and other rich investors to drain ecologically precious peat land and plant non-native tree plantations.

In 1987 the Highlands and Islands Forum (HIF), a network of community activists, held a conference called 'Land Wildlife and Community' that for the first time brought together government agencies, activists, NGOs and community leaders to explore the issues surrounding land ownership and community access to natural resources. Amongst other issues, this brought crofters' lack of rights to manage woodlands into clear focus and spurred the move towards the crofter forestry legislation.

When the forest disposals programme began in 1989, the crofters of Treslaig immediately began what would turn out to be a lengthy and often acrimonious struggle to buy the FC land surrounding their crofts. Then in 1992, Assynt Crofters Trust took over their tenanted land in an aggressive and sometimes acrimonious high-profile action against the foreign private land

owners and created a programme to establish new native woodlands covering 10 percent of their 9000 ha of common grazings⁹. That year a number of other communities (including famous cases such as the Isle of Eigg and Knoydart) also initiated actions aimed at gaining greater control of the land and local forest resources—both private- and state-owned.

In 1994 the Highlands and Islands Forum (HIF) held another highly influential Community Conference, ‘The People and the Land’. Together with Reforesting Scotland (a grassroots NGO) and Rural Forum (a network of rural organisations), they initiated a Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme (SRDFP). The aim of SRDFP was to involve communities throughout Scotland in a bottom-up process to realise the potential for forestry as a land use with social economic and environmental benefits. The SRDFP held a seminar at Laggan to chart a course for the development of community forestry. It agreed to set up 11 local workshops throughout Scotland to examine in depth the opportunities for rural development forestry and develop local community forestry action plans. These workshops were immensely important for building local capacity. Later in 1994, Treslaig achieved full community ownership of forest purchased from the FC.

1996 was an exciting year during which Cairnhead community agreed a formal concordat with the FC, Culag Community Woodland Trust agreed a formal lease of a forest from a private owner, and Abriachan set about buying their forest from FC. Abriachan is notable in being the last community to be able to do so, because in 1997 the political moratorium on disposals of forests closed the door on any further community purchases of FC land. In 1998, Laggan agreed a formal co-management partnership with the FC after a long struggle against an intransigent forest bureaucracy, which failed to gain agreement from the FC to sell. In

⁹ MacAskill, 1999.

2000 Culag became the first community body to make a second land acquisition, achieving full ownership of the Little Assynt Estate after a friendly buyout of private forest land.

Throughout this process, grassroots gatherings such as HIF and Community Woodlands conferences helped the community movement to develop a shared vision, spreading ideas and building confidence. Grassroots networks such as the Scottish Crofters Union, Reforesting Scotland, and the Scottish Community Woodland Association, which was formed in 2002 after four successive annual conferences, and the former Rural Forum helped by sharing information and lobbying.

It is worthwhile to look at some of the local stories in more depth.

3.2.1 Assynt

The first real breakthrough came in 1992 when 120 crofters on the 9000 ha North Assynt Estate in a remote corner of the northwest Highlands seized control of their land. The seizure occurred after a high profile campaign that engaged the imagination and support of people throughout Scotland and beyond.

In 1989, at the height of a buoyant land market, Edmond Vestey, the owner of the huge Assynt sporting estate, sold the largest part of his croft lands (though a small part of his total landholding) to a Swedish-owned property company, SPS Ltd., for more than £1 million. Three years later, SPS was up to its ears in debt and was declared bankrupt. Liquidators and a selling agent were appointed. In a distinctly weakened land market that was shaken by the collapse in the Lloyds insurance market, the selling agent decided to offer the estate for sale in seven lots in order to maximise the sale potential. The crofters were incensed at the

proposal to break up their lands, which was described in the sales brochures not as croft land, but as ‘sporting land’, ‘wildlife paradise’, and ‘where the people are perhaps alien’.

At a June 1992 meeting called by the Assynt branch of the Scottish Crofters Union, the crofters unanimously agreed to try to prevent the break-up and sale of their land. The Assynt Crofters Trust, a company limited by guarantee¹⁰, was established and the crofters made it clear that if anyone bought part of the estate they would one by one set out to exercise their right to buy the land under the terms of the 1976 Crofters Act and nominate Assynt Crofters Trust to take the title. This way the individual crofters tenancies would remain intact but the crofters collectively would own the land. This had never been attempted before but the risk to any potential buyer was real and it would have the effect of suppressing the interest of potential buyers leaving the selling agent with a virtually unsaleable asset and the liquidators unable to realise the asset.

However, rather than wait and see what impact their resolve might have on the interest of potential buyers, the crofters decided to mount a proactive campaign to buy the estate complete with its fishing, game, woodland and mineral rights and so become the first crofting community to have the control, the opportunity and the responsibility of managing their land. They decided to offer a fair price based on a realistic valuation, not one based on the whim of millionaires, which is the usual form of evaluation for these highland estates.

And so began a high-profile campaign that was to last nearly six months, during which the resolve of the crofters was sorely tested as they engaged in a battle of wits with the selling agent, the liquidators and the Swedish Bank. The crofters' campaign received significant

¹⁰ A Company Limited by Guarantee is a legal body that limits the financial liability of the members to a nominal sum. For that reason it is the legal structure adopted by most community woodland groups.

media interest including the national press, radio and TV. Their cause received huge popular support and the support of key agencies.

The people of Scotland were hungry for a revolution and land reform. People sang in the streets to raise money. They sent stamps. They had whip-rounds¹¹ in pubs. Fund-raising ceilidhs¹² were held up and down the country. Crofters and their families dug deep into their own pockets.

The crofters negotiated the support of several agencies who agreed to provide grants to assist with purchase on the back of proposals for development and conservation, including the proposal to establish significant new native woodlands using the FC Woodland Grant Scheme.¹³

On 6 December 1992 the crofters struck a deal with the selling agents and bought the estate for £300,000—less than one third of the price paid by the Swedish speculators only three years before—and so became the first community in modern times to take full control and responsibility for managing their land and its resources.

This event became an inspiration for many other communities and it brought land reform to the front of the national political agenda. There can be no doubt of its lasting influence, as acknowledged in August 2003, by Jack McConnell, Scottish First Minister, when he said ‘Assynt is a lasting inspiration which blazed a trail for the modern land reform movement. The creation of the Scottish Parliament made possible rapid progress on a radical agenda...

¹¹ A whip-round is a spontaneous collection of money for a cause.

¹² A ceilidh is the Gaelic word for a gathering of people to sing, dance and tell stories. By charging an entrance fee they are a popular way for communities to raise funds.

Land reform empowers people to take action... The transformation of Assynt over the last 10 years shows what can be achieved when the barriers to social and economic growth are removed. Great strides have been made in agriculture, tourism and housing and a new company established to explore opportunities in renewable energy’.

The minister responsible for forests, Allan Wilson, emphasised the political desire to enable the Assynt experience to be replicated, saying ‘Many people have learned from the experience in Assynt and many others aspire to their community being able to do the same in the future. That is why the Land Reform (Scotland) Act is so important for future generations of communities throughout rural Scotland. They too should have the opportunity to make their dreams become a reality and enjoy the benefits of community ownership’.

The leading national daily newspaper, the Scotsman, said ‘10 years ago, a group of crofters in north Sutherland took control of the North Assynt Estate. It was a move described by some as bordering on the lunatic. But a decade later, it can be argued that the buy-out changed the shape of land ownership in Scotland forever’.

3.2.2 Treslaig

Treslaig is a small community of 11 crofts, reached by ferry on the opposite side of Loch Linnhe to Fort William in the west of the Scottish Highlands. Together with the neighbouring and even smaller township of Achaphubuil, the crofters of Treslaig wanted to buy the FC-owned woodland adjacent to their common grazings when the FC programme of forest disposals was announced in 1989. When the local councillor, Michael Foxley, expressed this interest to the FC, he was treated 'with disdain'. There ensued a five-year struggle to convince the government agencies that the small group of crofters were credible as the future owners

¹³ By 2004 the crofters have established over 800 hectares of new native woodland on the common grazing land. This amounts

and managers of the 66-ha Camusnagaul and Achaphubuil Woods. Meanwhile the FC tried to sell the woods to a national NGO, the Woodland Trust, without consulting the crofters. The FC even tried to give the woodland back to the descendants of the owner from whom the FC purchased the land in 1961. In 1994, after five years of intense political lobbying, the crofting community finally succeeded in purchasing the woods.

The local institutional arrangement in this case is a company limited by shares, called Treslaig and Achaphubuil Crofters Woodland Trust (TACWT). The members of the company each have shares in it corresponding to their crofts, which can be sub-divided or amalgamated as the crofts change hands. The company makes decisions by one-person-one-vote regardless of the size of the member's share holding, thereby operating as a co-operative. The objective of the company is to maintain the ecological value of the woods, to increase habitat diversity, encourage ecological regeneration, and discourage non-native species.

The ecological orientation of TACWT has had a strong influence on both government agencies and some of the large national environmental NGOs. Prior to their struggle, the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC), the government agency responsible for nature conservation (now called Scottish Natural Heritage), believed that environmental NGOs and the state were the only bodies with the competence and experience to be environmentally-friendly land managers. NCC sponsorship was required for eligibility to purchase through the forest disposals programme, and TACWT became the first community body to achieve this sponsorship. In this landmark case, the national conservation agency gave a clear signal that local communities were valid environmental managers. Scottish Natural Heritage has subsequently played a crucial and supportive role in many other community land buy-outs.

to nearly 10% of the grazing land and more than doubles the area of native woodland throughout the district.

3.2.3. Abriachan

Abriachan is a scattered rural community of about 120 people that sits high above the shores of Loch Ness, half way between Inverness and Drumnadrochit in the central Scottish Highlands. In 1998, Abriachan Forest became the largest community-owned forest in Scotland (although it has since been superseded by Culag, see below). It consists of a mixture of a commercial plantation of mostly exotic tree species, some remnant Scots pines, and a substantial area of naturally regenerating open woodland. The community purchase came about as a response to a fear that it might lose its traditional access to the land. In 1990, Abriachan was included in the forest disposal programme and the community members were asked if they wanted to retain access to the land, which they did, particularly to land that had been their traditional source of peat and wood for fuel. However, in 1995, when Abriachan Forest was actually put on the open market, there was no mention of community access in the sales particulars. The outraged community set about trying to buy the forest. In March 1998 they succeeded in buying a 534-ha part of it.

Like ACT, the Abriachan Forest Trust (AFT) was established as a company limited by guarantee, but unlike both ACT and TACWT, membership is open to everyone in the community. The aims of the trust are environmental, including: to increase the diversity and amount of native species in the forest and restore wetlands for biodiversity; economic, including harvesting commercial timber and encouraging use of the forest for tourism businesses; and most notably, socio-cultural with a strong emphasis on its historical and archaeological heritage and an educational component about forest use and community involvement in its management.

Abriachan has been an inspiration throughout Scotland for its inclusiveness and the community's creative approach to the management of the forest. It has accessed considerable public funds for exciting events such as festivals and the recreation of a bronze-age house as part of a programme to reconstruct their local history. The management has involved the whole community from school children to the oldest people in the village. It is an institutional model recommended for community land ownership by the Community Land Unit and in the Land Reform legislation. Abriachan also has played a critical role in networking with other community forestry groups by hosting meetings and by one of its founding directors becoming the first chair of the Scottish Community Woodlands Association when it was formed in 2002.

3.2.4 Laggan

Laggan is a small community in the central northwest Highlands in an area of intense forestry activity. In 1900 the population was 929; by 1945 it had fallen to about 650, and in 1990 it had sunk to 200. The Laggan Community Association (LCA) was established in 1974 to help stem this population drift. The surrounding 1400-hectare Strathmashie Forest was managed by FE and was planted mainly with Scots pine and Sitka spruce between 1955 and 1964.

In the 1990s, a small number of individuals identified Strathmashie Forest as a potential source of employment, if managed and worked by local people. A little later there were rumours that the forest was going to be sold as part of the disposal programme. A team was assembled to look into the feasibility of community management of the forest with a view to providing jobs. The Laggan Forestry Initiative (LFI) was set up as a sub-committee of the Community Association

From 1992 to 1996, LFI engaged in a number of activities designed to secure its objective of managing the forest. It worked to build local support through a series of community workshops and regular meetings. In the face of intransigence from the local FC offices, LFI lobbied not only FC directors but also to the Rural Affairs Department of the Scottish Office, the local Member of Parliament (and parliamentary candidates), various Highland Councillors and the Secretary of State. All these activities attracted considerable interest from the media. At this stage, the FC refused to consider any arrangement that would allow LFI to manage the forest.

Then suddenly in 1996, the then Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, visited Laggan and announced his support of the Laggan initiative. Later that year, David Bills, the new FC Director-General, personally handed LFI a paper outlining seven options relating to Strathmashie. These were:

- ? community ownership of land and timber;
- ? community ownership of land;
- ? community ownership of timber;
- ? community lease;
- ? use permits;
- ? partnership agreements;
- ? an internal concordat.

LFI's preferred option was to buy the forest, but had to accept that this was not possible after receiving an independent valuation of £1.75 million, almost £1 million higher than it expected. LFI considered making an application to the Millennium Fund, but this was not permitted as the woodland was not being sold by a private owner. LFI then indicated its

readiness to explore the option of partnership, and the Laggan/Forest Enterprise Working Group was created. After lengthy and sometimes acrimonious negotiations, a formal Minute of Agreement was drawn up that allows the community to play an active part in the management of the Strathmashie Forest. In order to be able to sign what is a legally binding document, LFI transformed itself into a new legal entity—The Laggan Forest Trust (LFT), a company limited by guarantee without share capital.

The Laggan experience was very influential as it forced the FC and the FE to have direct experience of co-management and thereby learn from it. Subsequent engagement with communities such as that at Cairnhead (see below), was undoubtedly informed by the Laggan experience and many of the earlier problems and mistakes could be avoided. Laggan also demonstrates that political will is vital in pushing power down, but that there can still be a great deal of institutional inertia even if the political will to change is very strong.

3.2.5 Cairnhead

The village of Moniaive forms the heart of the parish of Glencairn in Dumfriesshire, southern Scotland. At the top of the glen is Cairnhead Forest, a 1347-ha plantation of almost exclusively Sitka spruce planted by the FC in the late 1970s. The forest was put on the market in 1996 as part of the disposals programme. The local community became alarmed at the prospect of having little control over how it would be managed, what impact the harvesting of the timber would have on the village, whether local people would be given job opportunities and whether the traditional rights of access would be preserved. They were reluctant, however, to buy the forest, and instead encouraged the FC to retain ownership. In 1999 the local community signed a formal, legally binding, concordat for co-management of the forest with Forest Enterprise.

The forest is managed by a Forest Management Group that consists of FE staff plus members of two community bodies: the Cairnhead Community Forest Trust (a company limited by guarantee with charitable status) and the Cairnhead Community Forest Members Association (an informal supporters' group that allows people from outside the community to play a role in forest management). The management is business orientated with a focus on maximising employment opportunities for local people and diversifying the economic opportunities generated by the forest and the land. There is also a strong conservation thrust with an aim to increase the biodiversity of the forest including the water catchment. The focus on environmental and economic sustainability was exemplified by the management group's 'opening ceremony' in 1999 when local wee folk (children) planted wee trees (native tree saplings) and released wee fish (salmon fry) into the Cairn river.

The case of Cairnhead is notable, in particular within FE, by being much less confrontational than that of Laggan. The legal framework of the concordat is now one of the menu of options that FE uses to explore community involvement with all the communities neighbouring the forests they manage. Cairnhead built agency confidence that negotiations with communities could be constructive and fruitful without being battles.

3.2.6 Culag

The parish of Assynt is situated in the remote northwest corner of Scotland with a population of around 1100. The principal village is Lochinver with a population of about 600. Culag woods stands on the edge of Lochinver, between the village and the sea, and extends to 36 ha. It is owned by Assynt Estate (Edmund Vestey, whom we met earlier), which also owns the huge sporting estate that covers most of the parish.

Culag woods is stocked with conifers interspersed with pockets of native trees—rowan, aspen, oak, holly, hazel, downy birch and willows. The woods have long been valued by the local community as it gives the village some shelter and has pleasant walks that lead to a rocky shore with quiet coves. By 1990 however, neglect and mismanagement had considerably reduced its amenity value. The network of paths, which had been created when the woods was planted, were overgrown and needed clearance and maintenance. In some areas there was a danger to the public as a result of the hasty abandonment of felling operations a few years before. The abrupt halt to the felling operations left part of the woods susceptible to wind-blow. The local community were angered by this neglect and by the dangers now facing them if they continued using the wood for recreational purposes.

In 1992, the Community Council considered the possibility of taking on the management of the woods. It decided that it needed to prepare a practical plan if it was going to convince the owners and possible funding agencies that it could be entrusted with the task. The Community Council invited Bernard Planterose of North Woods to prepare a brief report, which recommended developing the wood as a Community Woodland. The Assynt Estate and Assynt Community Council came to a verbal agreement that the community could manage the Culag wood.

The Culag Community Woodland Trust (CCWT) is a company limited by guarantee. Membership is open to all residents in the parish of Assynt. In 1996 after three years of sensitive negotiations between land owner and community, the estate and the CCWT signed a 50-year lease, which allows the trust to manage the wood as a community woodland. Since then the CCWT has successfully attracted the support of the FC and other government

agencies to restore the woodland, enhance its amenity value, offer training in forestry skills and create employment.

In 2000, an area of land three miles from the village came on the market. It extended to 1200 ha, two-thirds of which had been recently planted as a new native woodland. This land is adjacent to the Assynt Crofters Trust land. CCWT successfully attracted funding from the government agencies to acquire the land and to manage it as community woodland. It now has ambitious plans to build car parks, trails with all-abilities access and fishing facilities.

CCWT broke new ground by leasing land from a private individual, thereby adding to the menu of options available for those looking for ways of achieving community involvement in the land. The success for CCWT in attracting support for its second land acquisition is unique in the community woodland movement so far and demonstrates the widespread support from the government agencies, including the FC, for community land ownership and the benefits it brings. The CCWT has demonstrated that as a community body builds its capacity, it is capable of taking on increasingly large land holdings.

3.3 Some Impacts of Decentralisation

The events in the case studies described in this report occurred relatively recently, and this study has focussed on process and outcome rather than on social, economic or ecological impacts. However some conclusions can be drawn.

At the national level these early successes have stimulated other communities to enter into negotiations with the FCS and private landlords for a greater role in the management of the local woodlands. They are creating new possibilities proving that 'impossible' objectives can

be achieved and thereby feeding the collective imagination of the country. Each success contributes to a growing pool of options for change and increasing confidence in the political will to create conditions for such changes to be replicated. To date, around 100 community woodland groups have formed, and a Community Woodland Association has been established¹⁴.

One of the impacts within the communities is the establishment of new governance structures that by-and-large are inclusive and give a greater sense of equity in access to forest resources and benefits. This has led to some antagonism between the crofters and those in the community without crofting status and who have no say in the management of the woodlands nor share in any benefits. This is partly addressed in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, which stipulates that any community land purchase made under the terms of the Act must involve governance structures which are supported by the majority and wholly inclusive.

The economic impacts of community ownership or management sharing are already becoming apparent and are now accepted by the FCS as an incentive to community participation. The benefits include giving priority to local contractors, training local people in forest skills, opening up access to additional financial incentives for multipurpose forestry such as access for recreation and health and the creation of local project management jobs.¹⁵

Significant positive environmental impacts have arisen directly from community ownership and community partnership arrangements. Virtually all of the crofter forestry schemes have involved the creation of new native woodlands on degraded grazing lands. In the case of the other community woodlands, all have involved negotiating better management practices and

¹⁴ See www.community-woods.org.uk for details.

¹⁵ See for example Birnie 2003

significant restructuring to decrease the amount of exotic species and increase the native woodland component.

4 Lessons Learned

The overall lesson of this paper is that revolutionary grassroots activity that pulls power down to the local level can shape decentralisation processes. Communities are not the passive recipients of power pushed down from the centre. Power shifts are evolutionary, involving push-me-pull-you interactions.

The combined timeline below demonstrates clearly how the local struggles of communities both set the pace and set the agenda for land reform and community involvement in forest management in Scotland.

Timeline of key events in the 'push-me-pull-you of power' over forests

1886: Crofting Act gives security of tenure to crofters

1976: Crofting Act reform gives crofters right to buy their croft

1987: Highlands and Islands Forum (HIF) *Land Wildlife and Community* conference

1989: Treslaig crofters begin the struggle to buy FC land surrounding their crofts

1990: Government crofting estates offered at no cost to crofters is rejected

1991: Crofter Forestry (Scotland) Act gives crofters right to establish and manage woods

1992: Assynt Crofters Trust take over the North Assynt Estate

1992: UK signs up to *Agenda 21* and the *Forest Principles* at the World Summit in Rio

1994: HIF Community Conference *The People and the Land*

1994: Grassroots Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme (SRDFP) initiated

1994: Treslaig become first community to purchase forest from FC

1994: Forests and People in Rural Areas Initiative (FAPIRA) established

1996: Culag arrange formal lease from private owner

1996: FC report on *The Scope for Community Participation in Forest Management*

1997: Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Act passed

1997: Community Land Unit set up

1998: Abriachan become the last community to purchase forest from FC

1998: Laggan agree formal community partnership with FC

1999: Cairnhead agree a formal concordat between community and FC

1999: Devolution. Ownership of Scotland's national forests passed to Scottish Ministers.

1999: Scottish Executive commits to land reform legislation

2000: Culag purchase private forest land.

2000: Community Land Fund established

2000: Scottish Executive sets up Land Reform Group

2000: Forestry for People Panel established to advise FC on community participation.

2002: Scottish Community Woodland Association formed.

2002: FC report on *Community Involvement*, the 'Hobley' report.

2003: Calls for FC to make forest land available for new crofting communities.

2003: Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) created.

2003: Land Reform (Scotland) Act passed by Scottish Parliament

2003: Scottish Executive announce setting up Local Forestry Fora

2004: Scottish Executive sets up a major review of the national forest estate

How local revolutions in Scotland influenced the push down of power

? — By creating breakthroughs and bringing about something that was perceived to be impossible and thereby firing **the collective imagination of the country.**

- By being revolutionary and creatively challenging the status quo and thereby releasing **energy**.
- By providing concrete examples of how big problems (such as land inequity, bad land management, rural depopulation, loss of access to land, disempowered communities and unemployment in the forestry sector) could be solved and thereby spreading **optimism**.
- By achieving unexpected and welcome outcomes, such as educational innovations, community benefits, social housing, better environmental management, increased tourism and other economic gains and thereby gaining **credibility**.
- By being documented, in case studies and consultants' reports, that could be used as evidence and proof of concept to those in power and thereby developing **confidence**.
- By creating an impact on public opinion by working with the popular media such as newspapers, TV and radio and thereby generating **political will**.

The generation of political will creates a positive feedback loop, meaning that politicians direct agencies to replicate the process, and therefore reinforcing the push down of power.

What agencies need to do to respond

Even if the paradigm of moving power down from the centre is widely accepted, there is still a lot to be done by agencies such as the FC in deciding how to implement decentralisation.

This is where the local revolutions need to be used to shape the process, by listening to local people, and ensuring that there are community representatives on decision-making bodies.

The Forestry for People Advisory Panel is a good example of this.

Despite political will, there may well be institutional inertia, cultural resistance within agencies and lack of skills in participatory and locally driven decision-making. These problems require institutional solutions. There is good evidence, such as the Hobley Report

and the response to it, that in Scotland there are serious efforts underway to overcome this inertia within the Forestry Commission.

The capacity of communities to take more power also needs to be increased and networks such as the Scottish Community Woodland Association are well-placed to help.

Is the Scottish Experience transferable to other peoples and cultures?

It is very difficult for an insider to assess this. Obviously, the ‘push-me-pull-you’ of devolution of forest management in Scotland takes place in a specific cultural and legal context. In Scotland, we live in a post-industrial society where forestry is a small part of the gross domestic product, and there are no forest dependant communities. Forest management for timber and pulp is uneconomic and is highly subsidised. There now is an increasing recognition that forests in Scotland will serve the national interest best if they are managed as multi-purpose forests catering to health and recreation as well as to environmental services and the production of timber. It is this shift in vision that is creating the space for community involvement in the management of the national forest estate and for community ownership—a space that many communities are now willing to occupy.

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