

Banko Janakari

A Journal of Forestry Information for Nepal

Forests and Biodiversity Conservation in Federal Nepal

Nepal is endowed with rich biological diversity. It shares 1.1 and 3.2 percent of total faunal and floral diversity of the world respectively, while occupying only 0.1 percent of global area. Biodiversity and forest resources are integral component of rural livelihoods and economic prosperity of Nepal. Nepal's Constitution 2015 has explicitly mentioned to maintain certain portion of the land of the country as forest land for environmental equilibrium. The essence of the Constitution has been later incorporated in Forest Policy (2015) emphasizing to maintain at least 40% of the total land as forest cover with equal importance to biodiversity. Undoubtedly, Nepal has been able to maintain the given target to date.

For the conservation of Forest and Biodiversity, Nepal has formulated various policy documents and action plans which are underway. However, these documents were made under the framework of unitary system. The new constitution of Nepal has led the country towards federal system from its long unitary system. The federal system has given opportunities to share power among different levels of government. Annexes from 5 to 9 in the constitution have clearly specified three tiers of government *i.e.*, federal, provincial, and local to exercise their individual and shared rights over the different resources including forests and biodiversity within their political boundaries.

Political boundary and forests ecosystem services boundaries are not mutually inclusive. They are completely independent to each other. Ecosystem services and externalities from forests and biodiversity spreads beyond the political boundary. The management of such widely spread services and externalities is difficult to restrict within territorial decision-making approach after long experiences. Now, new paradigm shift of landscape level forests and biodiversity conservation has been in existence worldwide irrespective of political boundaries. Conservation forest resources and biodiversity beyond the political boundaries in the newly formed federal system in Nepal is quite challenging.

In the federal system, different aspirations of different governments either horizontally or vertically might bring conflicting interest among themselves for the conservation and management of forests and biodiversity. However, the model of Forest and biodiversity conservation has already been decentralized to settlement levels in Nepal but has very limited acceptance of political devolution on forest resource governance. The Community-based forest management

practices, community managed conservation areas, the community based-seed and genome conservation practices, and buffer zone resource conservation are exemplary participatory resource management practices developed within unitary system of government. Transforming the existing decentralized model to a more strongly devised political devolution model need an innovative planning and strategic intervention.

Adoption of ecosystem approach in the federal system can be a strategic point of intervention to address gaps in forestry and biodiversity sector. The widely accepted ecosystem approach in conservation science and popular power devolution in political science need to be blended to secure optimum benefits for people and nature. The benefits sharing among governments should need trade off while maintaining well-established system of ecosystem structure and functions. Ecosystem structure and functions should not be detached by territory based political decision rather they have to be restrengthened in the process of federal restructuring of forestry sector.

Federal restructuring of forestry sector should follow a different course rather than a general administrative, legal and basic infrastructure development model. It should begin with mapping forest and biodiversity, outlining services flow pattern, mapping economic potentiality of different level governments and devising a sound and resilient management structure. At the end, the model should appear as ecologically sound, economically viable and socio-politically acceptable.

While devising this kind of model *i.e.*, governance model, the forestry sector should neither be reluctant on constitutional rights of different tiers of governments nor it should forget the ecological integrity. Despite some challenges, we have no option to ignore any of these. Therefore, it is high time for the forestry sector to start designing a governance model with wider consultations. The model should be able to optimize forest and biodiversity services, benefits sharing and integrity of the ecosystem with well recognized and accountable institutions in all tiers of governments as envisioned by the constitution of Nepal.