Transforming Agency and Structure for Facilitating Pro-Poor Governance in Community Forestry

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Abstract: Nepali society is differentiated by hierarchical and discriminatory social structures struggling for transformation. This culture is also reflected in the practices of Community Forestry. Community Forestry is expected to contribute to improved livelihoods within communities through forest management, ensuring social justice through the provision of better spaces and positions to poor and disadvantaged groups. Based on the lessons of nine Community Forest User Groups of seven districts of the hill and *Terai* regions of Nepal, we propose a more inclusive and interactive process, known as 'Social and Transformative Learning' or 'Action and Learning', which has greater ability to transform both agency and structure to ensure deliberative and pro-poor governance.

Key words: agency and structure, pro-poor governance, transformative learning, community forestry

INTRODUCTION

Nepalese society is struggling for transformation in multiple dimensions (Banjade *et al.*, 2004). Patriarchy, religious norms and traditions, geographical isolation, economic class and culture have all contributed to social stratification, inequality and oppression. The Hindu religion is based on a fatalistic culture wherein subordinated and powerful castes and ethnic groups would consider unequal power relationships as ordained by the almighty. In this cultural context, the higher castes have developed rules, norms and practices that oppress other castes, of which the lowest caste category suffers the most. Ethnic minorities have also been excluded from the mainstream of state politics, bureaucratic positions, and proportionate representation since the distant past (Bista, 1991). Regional imbalances and gender disparities are considered to be a bottleneck, impeding economic growth and development. The state has not paid adequate attention to the economic promotion of the poorer sections of society. Government's policies and practices have not addressed these issues, despite the fact that discourses and debates have indicated a need to have strong fiscal policies and instruments to provide space to the lower castes and ethnic minorities, liberating them from economic hardships and social injustice.

After the reinstatement of democracy in 1990, especially just after the promulgation of Forest Act 1993, Nepal witnessed a rapid handover of forest areas to Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) as a primary forest management program of the country. The Community Forestry (CF) program has resulted in the reversion of deforestation rate and contributed to increase in greenery and biodiversity, particularly in the middle hills. The main goals of the CF program are to manage forest resources and contribute to rural livelihoods. However, contributions of CF to livelihoods, particularly those of the poor and marginalized, have been limited (Neupane, 2000; Pokharel and Nurse, 2004; Malla, 2000). At the same time, most of the community forests are managed within a protective orientation. Moreover, social inclusion and equity issues are far from being resolved.

A key factor responsible for the limited livelihood impact is the poor self-governance and institutional capacity of CFUGs, resulting from the historically constructed ethnic and gender relationships, compounded by issues of economic class (Banjade *et al.*, 2004) and transformed into unequal power relationships conceptualized as the patron-client relationship (Malla, 2001). This relationship is reflected in the procedures of CF, including planning and implementation processes. Planning

processes at the CFUG level are more rigid and impractical and do not encourage the full participation of forest users (Malla *et al.*, 2001; Neupane, 2000).

We see that CF or any other type of collective action initiatives face the challenges of sub-ordination, poor self-governance, culturally- and economically-embedded discrepancies and elite domination which symbolize a stratified and oppressive society. To achieve transformation in a society, we need to transform the agencies associated with it (e.g. individual members, organizations and community groups, their competencies, attitudes and commitment) as well as structures they have been operating within (e.g. state policies and laws, community rules, values, norms and traditions). The complexity of transformation has increased with the increased influence of market forces, increasing numbers of stakeholders showing interest in CF and the dynamic and complex interface of social and bio-physical systems.

The actions of elite members of CFUGs, specifically the leaders, are reproducing the institutions and structures that reinforce the *status quo*, if not contribute to the further marginalization of the poor, women and *dalits*. Facilitating agencies, and the structures they form, to approach marginalized groups also has severe limitations. For instance, on the part of both government and non-governmental facilitators, there is limited understanding of the ways to properly reach the poor and disadvantaged members of CFUGs. Moreover, these facilitators have limited skills and ability to provide appropriate and locally-useful services for the promotion of sustainable resource management and the assurance of social justice. Though local people value the assistance of external agents, their intervention might, intentionally or unintentionally, support or reproduce existing hierarchical social relationships in the community (Banjade and Ojha, 2005).

This paper describes the processes that were used in facilitating dialogue and interactions between different stakeholders and between agency and structures that have lead to pro-poor inclusive approaches in CF.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Nepal's Community Forestry processes have potential for social transformation towards a pro-poor, inclusive and more democratic social system (Timsina *et al.*, 2004). The transformation process has to transform both the agency and structures, which are historically constructed and embedded in the social traditions, values and norms. The term "agency" herein represents the autonomy and freedom of individuals; the degree to which they may act independently of and in opposition to structural constraints, potentially reconstituting the existing social structures through their freely chosen actions. Human agents have a basic property of intelligence and reflexive capacity (Giddens, 1984) but these again are constructs of the social system. Empowerment of people can be seen as a process wherein they have the freedom to apply their knowledge and to access and utilize externally-based knowledge without sublimating to outside experts (Rahman, 1991). Some suggest that the deconstruction of existing power structures and institutional imperatives are important to facilitate social transformation whereby social justice is ensured.

The concept of "structure" refers to the institutions, traditions, norms, values and ethos of a community. It also refers to large-scale social structures. However, it can also refer to micro-level structures, such as those involved in human interactions (Ritzer, 1996). Concepts of agency and structure are not mutually exclusive and are inextricably linked (Giddens, 1984). Their dialectic tension, contradictions and transformation are key for social transformation. Human agents are individuals as well as organized groups. Social classes, such as caste or ethnic groups, are also considered to be actors. Agency refers to these kinds of conscious and creative actors (Ritzer, 1996).

It is believed that without addressing the issues of agency and structure, one cannot sufficiently facilitate the process of social transformation. For this reason, our method of intervention in CFUGs includes both agent and structure-oriented approaches to Community Forestry.

We propose a transformative learning approach that can initiate change in both agency and structure if facilitated properly. We consider "transformative learning" to be a conscious and deliberate learning process undertaken through experimentation and piloting, encouraging stakeholders to consider issues systemically and holistically while reflecting, making decisions or promoting discourses for transformation. In addition, this process encourages people to critically reflect on and deconstruct the existing structures and value systems that hinder the transformation of a society, consider the risks and uncertainties during planning processes and prepare effective communication strategies with relevant stakeholders. The transformative learning approach provides space for citizen groups to engage in processes of negotiation while recognizing the coexistence of different actors with differing, but sometimes complementary, interests. This approach also facilitates interaction for the purpose of building consensus among the stakeholders of CFUGs (Timsina *et al.*, 2004). Accountability, transparency and mechanisms for conflict resolution are key in developing trust among the participating stakeholders.

We used these concepts in facilitating an action-learning process within the CFUGs described below, conceptualizing them as "Participatory Action Learning (PAL) Process", "Self-Monitoring Process", "Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM)" and most recently as "Transformative Learning" We present the process and outcome of it for the period of 2003 to early 2006.

SITE FEATURES AND ISSUES

Site Description

The sites we refer to here represent the biophysical context of the hills and *Terai* of the Eastern, Central and Western regions of Nepal. The situation of the hills and *Terai* differ not only in terms of biophysical aspects, but they also have socio-cultural differences as the latter has received a flush of immigrants from the hills, interacting with the indigenous people of the *Terai*. Ease of transportation and resource availability are generally better in the *Terai*. Moreover, the government's priorities in regards to the management of forest resources through communities also differ between the hills and the *Terai*. To capture the dynamics of these differences, we have selected sites within both hills and *Terai* in all three of the regions investigated. The period of time in which we applied the 'action and learning'[1] approach to social transformation also differs between the sites. Key features of these sites are presented in Table 1.

Gagan Khola CFUG is located in Siraha District of the Eastern *Terai* Region of Nepal. One of the reasons for interest in this CFUG was that it has received a prestigious conservation award (Ganeshman Vatabaran Samrachhan Puraskar) in 1998. However, d*alits* of the CFUG were economically and socio-culturally suffering from the actions taken by the higher castes and economically advantaged members of the community. We referred to the process applied in the CFUG as "Self-Monitoring" and this approach was applied during the period of 2003-2004.

Figure 1 Districts belonging to the sites

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[1]We have used different terminologies without sublimating the basic essence of transformative learning, though the steps we have followed during the facilitation have adapted to allow context specific variations. The terminologies include "participatory action and learning)", "self-monitoring" and "transformative learning".

Table 1: Key Features of the Sites

N	Name of CFUG	Address	Region	Area (ha)	HH*	Ethnic Composition	Key Characteristics	PAR** Duration
1	Sundari	Amarapuri –1-9, Nawal parasi	Western Terai	390	1268	Brahmin, Chhetri, Gurung, Magar, BK,	Timber oriented forest management One man leadership	2003-2005
2	Gagankhola	Lalpur-2 & 5, Siraha	Central Terai	75	165	Pasawan, Rai, Yadav, Mahato, BK	Committee domination Exclusion of poor Poor governance	2003-2005
3	Baisakhesowari	Mirge-9& Jiri-1, Dolakha	Central Hills	103	155	Sherpa, Chhetri, BK, Newar	Passive forest management Potential for NTFPs	2004-Apr 2006
4	Khanyubas	Dhankuta Municipality-5, Dhankuta	Eastern hills	136	141	Rai, Brahmin, Chhetri, Limbu, Newar, Tamang, Gurung, Nepali/ Pariyar, Magar	Conflict between Newar and other castes (mainly "Atha Paharia Rai")	Since March 2005
5	Handikharka	Dhankuta Municipality, Dhankuta	Eastern hills	201	237	Rai, Brahmin, Chhetri, Bhujel Limbu, Newar, Tamang, Gurung, Pariyar, Magar, Kami	CFUG with the worst governance system	Since March 2005
6	Patle	Lamatar-1, Lalitpur	Central hills	105	158	Brahmin, Chhetri, Bhujel, Chand , Nepali, Newar and Tamang	Near to capital city; highly potential area for eco-tourism	Since March 2005
7	Chautari	Pathari –9, Morang	Eastern Terai	129	421	Atha Pahariya Rai, Brahmin, Chhetri, Bhujel, Limbu, Newar, Tamang, Gurung, Pariyar, Kami, Nepali, Magar	Higher social and economic diversity	Since March 2005
8	Chautari	Rajahar-8, Nawalparasi	Western Terai	355	763	Brahmin, Chhetri, Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Tharu/Chaudhari, Bote/Majhi and Dalits (B.K./Sunar, Pariyar, Nepali)	Elite domination Highly heterogeneous CFUG and large no. of users; large forest area and high income compared to other CFUG	Since March 2005
9	Kajipauwa	Tansen –11, Palpa	Western hills	24	111	Brahmin, Chhetri, Magar, Newar and Gandarva	Near to the district headquarters Limited exposure with external stakeholders	Since March 2005

* HH = Household
** PAR = Participatory Action Research

Baisakhesowari CFUG of Dolakha District in the Central Hills and Sundari CFUG of Nawalparasi District in the Western *Terai* are two CFUGs wherein we facilitated a process similar to that of Gagan Khola, known as the "Participatory Action and Learning (PAL)" during 2003-2005 as part of a participatory research project entitled *Developing Methodology for Planning Sustainable Management of Medicinal Plants in Nepal and India[2]*. In Baisakhesowari

CFUG, the users are predominantly Sherpa, although there are several households of Chhetri, Newar, Tamang and BK. In contrast, Sundari CFUG is a mixed community of various castes and ethnic groups. Though both of the CFUGs are rich in non-timber forest products (NTFPs), Sundari CFUG has a higher annual income through the sale of *Sal* timber.

Among the six CFUGs in which we are conducting a Participatory Action Research project entitled *Improving Livelihoods and Equity in Community Forestry in Nepal: The Role of Adaptive Collaborative Management*

(ACM)[3] since March 2004, three of them are located in the eastern region of Nepal. Two are from the eastern hill district of Dhankuta and one from the Teraian district of Morang. Patle CFUG, which belongs to the mid-hills of Lalitpur District, is the only CFUG from the central region of Nepal. In the western region, there are two CFUGs, one located in the mid-hills, Palpa, and another in the *Terai*, Nawalparasi. We have selected CFUGs that represent a range of characteristics: level of activity in current practices, attitudes and commitment of leadership, conflict within the community, and socio-economic heterogeneity. For example, Handikharka CFUG of Dhankuta has nearly failed as a CFUG because of corrupt and poor governance practices. In contrast, Chautari CFUG of Morang District has a relatively better governance system. Furthermore, in some CFUGs, such as Khanyubas CFUG of Dhankuta District, we observed tensions between different ethnic groups.

Key Issues and Challenges

In all of the CFUGs listed in the table above have suffered from the challenges of human agency (i.e. the attitude, commitment and behavior of individuals and groups) and structures in which the agency operates (i.e. rules, policies, values and norms). These agents are socially constructed and influenced by the socio-cultural, political and economic structures. Furthermore, the agents are continually interacting to effect change in the structures. Historically-manifested relationships of gender, caste and class are embedded in the thoughts and behaviors of agents as well as in the social structures that they have established and developed. When we recognize that the constant interplay of agency and structure makes social change and transformation possible, we see challenges in both the agency and structure.

The differences between the various classes, castes and genders are obvious, as most of the poor people have no accesses to resources or the decision-making process. While working in these nine CFUGs, we found that there were several issues related to agency, structure or both. Some of these issues are listed below.

We have observed in most of the CFUGs that either the poor are excluded from the CFUG processes and receive that the rich and elite allocate for them or are reluctant to join in these processes and have not seen any hope for the improvement of their position through Community Forestry. The people consider a position in the CFUG committee as a symbol of high social status in the society and people crave to get the position. Thus, only the rich and powerful are able to obtain these positions. In almost all of the CFUGs, none of the members of the executive body were from the poorest households. Among the members of the committees, few, predominantly the chairperson and secretary, were active in making the major decisions related to group governance, benefit sharing and forest management. We also observed that most of the CFUGs have limited exposure and linkages with external support institutions. Some had these problems because of distance (e.g. Chautari, Morang; Chautari, Nawalparasi) while others were located very close to the service centers but could not manage to develop links (e.g. Kajipauwa, Palpa; Khanyubas, Dhankuta) because they did not know how to build these linkages.

Community forests have not made a significant contribution to the household-level economy as the program's focus is only in meeting forest product requirements or the development of physical infrastructures. Livelihoods improvement through Community Forestry has not become a major agenda in any of the CFUGs, though a few have initiated poverty reduction activities through investing their funds in income-generating activities (Chautari, Morang).

KEY PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES

Key Processes and Steps to Facilitate Transformation in Communities

We considered critical investigation as an intervention with a focus on the collective analysis of the past and present situations as well as on visioning and planning for the future. We facilitated the identification of issues and their root causes to help the CFUGs to address these issues, thereby increasing the capacity of the agencies within CFUGs.

social and transformative learning. In doing so, the major focus was on the learning cycle for transformation.

The learning cycle involves an iterative series of steps: situational analysis, planning, action, monitoring and reflection/learning leading to the next cycle of planning, action, monitoring and reflection (see figure 2). The details of the action steps applied in these sites, with some contextual variation, are explained below.

Figure 2: Continuous Learning Cycle of Planning, Action and Reflection (adapted from Hartando *et al.*, 2003)
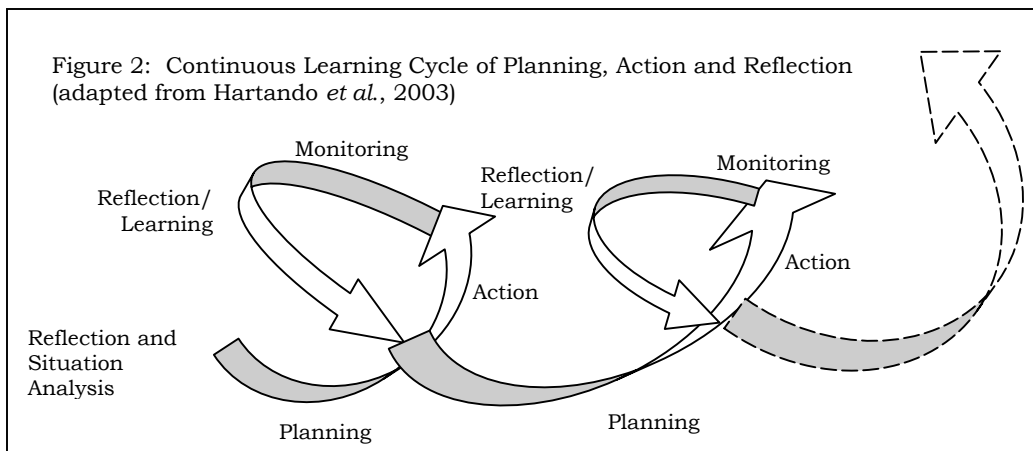
While facilitating the group process, either directly or through the selected facilitators from existing institutions, our focus was to create an environment for sensitizing change agents (e.g. CFUG leaders and social workers) and users as well as for the transformation of existing practices and institutions to allow space for social transformation. In this process, we sought to achieve the maximum participation of each section of the community (i.e. gender, caste and class) in each step of the process. The process intended to transform both agency and structure to ensure equity and establish deliberative governance practices within the CFUGs.

This process provoked CFUG leaders to reach the majority of CFUG members, beyond the CFUG committee officials, and cautioned them to ensure that all of the interest groups' views and concerns are taken into consideration (Banjade *et al.,* 2005). We broadly used the approach of

Step 1: Reflecting upon the situation: understanding the context

a. An informal meeting with CFUG officials and users

An informal meeting with CFUG officials and with some users was the first step towards entering the CFUGs, after having discussions with district and sub-district stakeholders. Holding several informal meetings with CFUG leaders and users was useful to explore the context of the given CFUG and to plan a formal meeting with the Executive Committee (EC).

b. Formal meeting with the CFUG executive committee

Meetings were organized with the executive committees. In some CFUGs (Handikharka, Dhankuta; Gagan Khola, Dhanusha), leaders tried to avoid the process and showed resistance in the initial periods. In those CFUGs, we consulted the users and other social leaders and received consent

from them, inducing pressure on the existing leadership to allow the process in the CFUGs.

Through a process of critical questioning conducted by the facilitators, ECs were able to reflect on the issues of the CFUG, including their governance and the institutional mechanisms obstructing the achievement of the expected social change. Sharing the concepts of transformative learning and deliberative processes and receiving consent from these leaders for intervention was an important outcome of this step. The EC should have ownership over the process and their commitment to the process is important.

c. The key informant meeting and household survey

Discussion with a number of key informants helped external facilitators to explore the CFUG's socio-political context and power relationships in greater detail. It also allowed the facilitators to better understand the issues of the CFUGs. When issues of the poor or any other category of users were not revealed through these interviews, a survey of sample households with some critical inquiry questions would help to access the information. For this purpose, the households selected were from the low economic and ethnic groups.

Step 2 – Analysis and planning

d. Holding meetings with geographically-based subgroups – (toles)

The purpose of this step was to hold meetings with geographically-based subgroups of CFUG to provide an opportunity to bring forward their issues, perspectives, ideas and interests with regard to forest management and CFUG governance. To this end, a series of *tole*[4] meetings were organized. In such meetings, *tole* members could identify the dominant issues. In addition, the members critically reflected on the past and present scenarios of CFUG institutions and practices. They also selected representatives to facilitate

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[4] A *tole* (or hamlet) is a small geographical location, usually comprised of 8-25 households who live in close proximity with one another and have formal and informal interactions. Because of daily engagement with each other, people sharing a *tole* usually speak out comfortably.

continuous communication, both among themselves and with the CFUG committees. While conducting discussions at the *tole* level, special focus was given to bring the voice of women, the poor and marginalized groups into the forum so that the agencies were empowered to raise their voices and concerns. In *toles*, a level of sensitivity towards the well-being of women, the poor and marginalized groups was highlighted through games, stories and diagrams.

e. Holding reflective workshops of tole representatives and executive committee

An important step in the process of transforming agency and structure through transformative learning was to conduct a joint workshop of both *tole* representatives and the CFUG Committee. This was a key event when leaders and representatives became reflective of their CFUG's structures, processes and resulting praxis, possibly becoming ready to find a new way towards social transformation. This process helped to identify a direction for future changes in forest management and CFUG governance and produce some concrete negotiated proposals to be presented within the assembly of CFUG members. The important outcome of this stage was the development of proposals to solve problems, address major issues and recognize those issues that need further inquiry and learning. In some CFUGs, separate meeting of *tole* representatives only was also organized before this workshop where they shared and negotiated the issues that the *toles* had identified.

f. Reflection at the tole level

The outcomes of the joint workshop of *tole* representatives and the CFUG Committee are shared within the *toles*. Suggestions, options and opinions were herein received for further refinement of the proposals.

g. Holding CFUG assembly to finalize new rules and policies

According to Nepal's Forest Act 1993, the General Assembly of CFUG users is the most powerful and legitimate body to make decisions and determine directions for change within the CFUG. The proposals developed through earlier processes of deliberation are put forward in the assembly for discussion, adaptation and decision. In our sites, the assemblies approved new

group constitutions and forest management plans and also reorganized Executive Committees. In addition, the assembly also set procedures for effective communication, deliberation, enforcement of rules and decisions, self-monitoring and learning.

Step 3: Putting decisions into action

h. Action group formation for implementation

Action groups were then formed on the basis of proposed activities and were assigned the responsibility to coordinate and implement them. Plans were then drawn up for the review of the ongoing activities and for continued reflection to facilitate learning from actions, including failures, and interactions effectively.

Step 4: Reflection and learning

i. Self-monitoring and reflection

At this stage, CFUGs were encouraged to make the necessary arrangements to institutionalize a review of the ongoing activities and continuous reflection to facilitate the learning processes. This step was vital, as the users were able to learn more and achieve expected outcomes when they observed and reflected upon from the results of the CFUGs' actions. In the action learning process, failures are recognized as opportunities to learn, eventually reducing the shock of failure. The monitoring and reflection process is important for users to analyse the contextual information they collect during the process and use the same to improve further planning.

j. Follow-ups

Follow-up actions, regular monitoring and feedback mechanisms were developed to facilitate the reflection – planning – action – monitoring – reflection/learning cycle to continue in the CFUGs. To support this, each of the steps suggested above would be monitored and reflected upon. Information thus received would be analysed so as to maximise the learning at each level. The outside facilitators should follow up on the process over the course of the next cycle, while local facilitators would lead the process.

Outcomes: Social Transformation for Pro-Poor Governance

We briefly present here the major outcomes of facilitating "Action and Learning" or "Transformative Learning Process" in the CFUGs, the process that has helped to transform the existing power relationships towards the adoption of pro-poor initiatives.

Inclusion of the excluded

In spite of existing Executive Committee (EC) -dominated planning and decision-making processes in the nine CFUGs, they have shown commitment to and interest in the inclusion of the poor, women and *dalit* users. As a result, *toles* and interest groups have been identified as requisite units for planning and decision-making. The ECs of these CFUGs continue to recognize the representatives of the *toles* and interest groups and are allowing them to present and provide suggestions to the EC meetings. Users in the EC are represented according to economic class in eight of the CFUGs, and by ethnicity, gender and *tole* in all CFUGs. In nearly all of the CFUGs, the new committee formation process appears to be more representative and democratic in comparison with the previous ones, which was haphazardly formed by the influence of a few elite people. The process of facilitation has empowered the agency, in this case the poor and marginalized, helping in the reformation of the structure, in this case Executive Committee.

Capacity building and empowerment

We see that users, particularly the poor, women and marginalized, were able to put forward their positions clearly and emphatically when they were provided space within which they feel at ease, particularly within the meetings at the *tole* and interest group level. With continuous reflection and deliberation, the users are exposed to the processes of Community Forestry, and their confidence in addressing its issues is increased. With additional information and critical reflection, the poor of Chautari CFUG in Nawalparasi have started to challenge the existing leadership and have increased pressure on the EC to make decisions that would benefit the poor. Women have also started to reflect on their roles and developed their abilities rapidly, once they received opportunity for exposure and leadership roles (see Box 1).

Box 1: Empowerment of a community facilitator

Pabitra is a young and energetic girl of about 19 years from the Bhujel ethnic group. She is taking management courses at the intermediate level. She is the eldest of the three children of her parents. We reached her through the EC and found that she was neither familiar with the CF processes nor did she get any opportunity to be involved in any kind of capacity-building events.

However, after being selected as a facilitator, she became involved in the process of facilitating "Transformative Learning" in Adaptive Collaborative Management Project. While facilitating, she not only became empowered herself, through the knowledge of processes and facilitation skills, but she also received respect from her own community. Initially, her presence in the meetings was naïve but she transformed herself subsequently has shown maturity in facilitation and critical inquiry of social processes. She said,

> "Action-reflection and the learning mode of the Adaptive Collaborative Management [ACM] process contributed towards changing my thinking and behaviour. As a result, I feel empowered."

Transformation of attitudes of powerful people for the legitimate space of the poor in CFUGs

In the context where Community Forestry is accused of excluding the poor and supporting the *status quo* of the rich, the elite dominating at the cost of the poor and marginalized people, transforming the attitudes of well-off people to take the poor as legitimate stakeholders is a challenging one. A break in the perception and knowledge through sensitization tool, such as equity games and subsequent reflection on these games, demonstrated that the poor receive the least benefits from resources management. This initiated discussions among the users, making it possible to reflect upon and become positive towards giving rights to the poor users. Though the degree of achievement within these CFUGs varied, we found that the poor users were increasingly retaining their space and respect in the community (see Box 2).

Box 2: Respect Granted to Sumitra B.K. of Sundari CFUG , Nawalparasi

Sumitra B.K is a general member of Sundari CFUG, in Amarapuri VDC, Nawalparasi District. She is a poor widow from a *dalit* group. Nine years ago her husband passed away in an accident when he was working in the construction of a community irrigation project. She had four children, the youngest being only nine months old when her husband passed away. She does not own any land and had taken shelter on community land in a very old house, finding it difficult to protect her family from rain or cold.

Her fate changed due to change in attitude of CFUG leaders. During the facilitation of the PAL process, CFUG leaders organized a joint meeting with the Village Development Committee-level community leaders, CF Advisory Committee, leaders of Community-Based Organizations and others elites of the community. They discussed how they could provide support towards poverty reduction strategies. As a result, the CFUG decided to support the poor and discussed with Sumitra B.K. about what she would prefer to have done immediately from the CFUG. She responded that her house desperately needed renovations and it was difficult for her to do by herself. As a result, the CFUG built a house for her. In addition, she has received a goat to support her livelihoods-she said.

> "The FUG has provided me with free membership as well."

In a General Assembly organized in 2004, the CFUG leadership proposed that she should be the chief guest, whereas the trend was that the DFO or other authorities were offered the role of chief guest. She offered *tika* to the newly elected members and prize-winners who were mostly from the high Brahmin or Chhetri castes. She found it to be an unexpected respect and dignity provided to her by the community, an example of social transformation where society is sharply differentiated by the caste.

Most of the CFUGs have decided to use 10-30% of their funds to be utilized in pro-poor activities. Principally, the money has been given to establish income-generating activities (IGAs). For this purpose, the CFUGs established criteria for the selection of the poor and started investing in the poorest users. In other cases, soft loans have been provided to the poor when they desired to start up enterprise or any IGA.

Development of linkages and networking

CFUGs are searching for new opportunities and resources as they formulate plans for the future activities of the CFUGs. Since the "Transformative Learning Process" emphasizes the inclusion of diverse perspectives and knowledge systems within institutions and, when needed, be transformed, the process continually seeks out possible alliances and partnerships with external institutions. All of the CFUGs, after applying the "Transformative Learning Process", have developed improved relationships with external agencies and are receiving better services and support in performing their activities effectively. With improved governance and inclusive decision-making processes, many organizations became attracted to and offered support for the CFUGs. CFUGs themselves have also started developing linkages with surrounding CFUGs, to facilitate learning from each other. The interface with external agencies and improved relationships not only has helped to change the attitudes and behaviors of the users, particularly the leadership, to be more inclusive and practice deliberative governance, but has also helped to change the existing institutions and policies that had maintained existing discriminatory power relationships.

Recognition of toles and interest groups as basis for planning and reflection

One of the major achievements of the "Transformative Learning Process" is that it can effectively sensitize the CFUG leadership on the need and strength of mobilizing *toles* during the planning, implementation and self-monitoring processes. When this is recognized, the users at large have demonstrated interest in and commitment to the promotion of Community Forestry, helping to increase community initiatives in

CF management and overall community development. The practice of public deliberation has also provided space for discussion on various socio-cultural issues, including gender, class and ethnic relationships and ways for their transformation.

Development of dynamic vision and understanding of collective goals

When most of the users had previously been planning and acting on an ad hoc basis with no clarity and understanding of the CFUG goals, the "Transformative Learning Process" facilitated CFUGs to become sensitive towards their collective vision and set directions for the collective goal of the CFUG. All of the users have agreed to revisit both their collective vision and the indicators developed as milestones of the vision periodically.

Appreciation of intentional learning

It was recognized by the forest users that it was necessary to establish a mechanism for regular monitoring in the days to come. For this purpose, a monitoring sub-committee separate from the EC was formed in each of the CFUGs. The sub-committees regularly and closely observe and analyze the functioning of the CFUG as a whole and provide feedback to the EC and users. The sub-committees periodically reflect to assess whether the CFUG is moving in the right direction and effectively generating expected outcomes. Ongoing action and reflection has become a regular process of CFUGs and appears to be helpful in transforming the agency and structure.

Increased sensitivity towards equity issues

Users and leaders are increasingly becoming sensitive to equity issues after participating in a series of meetings about the "Transformative Learning Process". In a visioning workshop, Chautari CFUG of Nawalparasi has decided to declare their policy decision in the CFUG slogan, *Unequal distribution of benefits for the purpose of ensuring equality.* This slogan indicates a move towards positive discrimination with the intent of giving greater benefits to the poor and marginalized. This sensitivity has produced positive impacts on the poor and marginalized groups. In some CFUGs, they have reduced or waived the membership fees

for the poor. In addition, the poor have begun receiving subsidies for purchasing forest products, varying between CFUGs. Some such products are provided to the poor free of cost; the costs of others are reduced by up to 75%.

CONCLUSION

The framework of agency and structure applied in this article for analysis has been used primarily to analyze how the local process of facilitation has promoted dialogue and interaction between different actors and structures. In the contexts of social differentiation and imbalance in power relationships, the processes of facilitation adopted in these CFUGs have appeared to be useful tools to empower the agency (e.g. *dalit*, poor, women and ethnic groups) by developing their confidence level to interact with the structures, including not only the social norms, values and ethos, but also interpersonal social relationships and structure, such as the CFUG committees. The concepts and practices presented in this article as tools for the facilitation of interaction between agencies and structures revolve around a perceived need for social transformation that addresses the larger issues of equity and social justice. As discussed in various cases in the previous sections, these tools appear to have been useful in negotiating the tensions that lie between the powerful and powerless, the rich and the poor, the upper and lower castes, men and women, and between ethnic groups. This has lead to a transformation in the existing social structures. We see from the specific examples that most of the elite, including Brahmins and other powerful people, have recognized the poor and lower caste people, provided roles and space in decision making and offered increased level of benefits.

As the concepts and methodologies of interaction between the agency and structure used in the different CFUGs located in different parts of Nepal appeared to be useful in transforming their local political structures and institutions, these processes, methodologies and tools have the potential to be useful within larger social and political contexts with some modification and adaptation.

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