

## District Forest Coordination Committee: An Emerging Multistakeholder Platform for Collaborative Forest Management in Nepal's Terai

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### Abstract

*In line with government policy on decentralization, and recognizing the inadequacies of previous attempts for the management of Terai forests in Nepal, two donor funded programs are supporting localized planning and decision-making for the forest sector. To this end, District Forest Coordination Committees (DFCCs) are being established as permanent, multi-stakeholder forums in 11 Terai districts, involving Forest User Groups, government and non-government agencies, trade and industry, the media and political parties. Based on experiences over the past two years, this paper analyzes the prospects for DFCCs as permanent formal fora for collaboration among all district forest stakeholders. Using theoretical as well as practical insights, conditions that influence the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder platforms are discussed, including issues around legitimacy, representation, linkages between constituents and representatives, and coordination between and within levels. The author contends that the idea of DFCCs has great potential, but to ensure the success, a clear mandate and detailed guidelines are needed.*

*Key words: Nepal, Terai, district forest coordination committee, collaboration, social learning*

### INTRODUCTION

There are innumerable issues that require resolution if the forest sector in Nepal's Terai is to fulfil its full potential<sup>1</sup>, both in terms of generating revenues for development efforts, but also for supplying the basic livelihood needs of the local population, and raw materials for downstream processing and manufacturing. Previous efforts at planning for the management of the Terai forests included the elaboration of Operational Forest Management Plans (OFMPs) in most Terai districts. Although these were generally technically sound plans based on an analysis of the forest resources, they failed to take into consideration the socio-economic situation of the districts for which they were written, and little, if any, consultation with local stakeholders was undertaken. The resulting plans were therefore seen by local forest sector stakeholders as being divorced from the real needs of the people in the districts (e.g. Kanel 2000, Pokharel & Amatya 2000).

The OFMPs categorized the Terai forests into three broad categories: Government Managed Production Forest; Government Managed Protection Forest; and the remaining small percentage of generally degraded forest, as Potential Community and Leasehold Forest. Issues that these plans failed to resolve include how to deal with encroached forest land, whether more productive areas of forest would be more suitably managed as Community Forest, how the Potential Community and Leasehold Forests should be divided between users, how local users were to be engaged in supporting District Forest Offices (DFOs) to manage Government Managed Forest, how Protection Forest should actually be managed, how the increased supply of Forest Products (FPs) would be marketed, how grazing, fodder and other Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) would be managed, and how the forest sector outside the natural forests should be supported.

DFOs were not given the necessary support or resources to enable them to undertake the planned activities and faced hostility from local stakeholders. The Governments ill-advised ban on the felling of green trees, the perceived incompetence of the Timber Corporation of Nepal in marketing FPs, and the failure to release sufficient budgets to DFOs all contributed to the plans never being fully implemented. However, the categorization of the forests has remained, restricting the handover of community forests to only within the proposed areas.

More recently, the Forest Policy of 2000 (HMG/N 2000) has emphasized that productive National Forests in the Terai should be managed collaboratively. The details of how Collaborative Forest Management should function are not yet clear, nor is how collaborators will be involved and what their respective rights, roles and responsibilities will be.

Therefore it has been recognized that new plans need to be formulated taking into account all the issues mentioned above, starting from an analysis of the socio-economic situation in the districts and accordingly planning the management of forest resources that addresses the concerns of all stakeholders.

This paper aims to assert the need for a formal institution such as a District Forest Coordination Committee (DFCC) to coordinate forest sector planning, implementation and monitoring in a transparent and representative manner between diverse stakeholders. Some early experiences from the Terai districts of Nawalparasi, Rupandehi and Kapilbastu are discussed. The Local Self Government Act (1998) provides a legal framework for such a forum. The paper argues that the key to the success of an institution of this nature is not through occasional formal meetings but through the continuous, systematic and open sharing of information outside of meetings and the cooperative use of budgets and resources. It is argued that these links should be formalized in the Terms of References (TORs) for DFCCs. However, it is also recognized that for any multi-stakeholder platform such as this, many other issues around true representation exist. Röling's (2002) framework for conditions that influence the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder platforms is used to analyze DFCCs for the forest sector in the Nepali Terai.

### **INITIATION OF TERAJ FORESTRY SECTOR SUPPORT PROGRAMMES**

In line with His Majesty's Government/Nepal (HMG/N's) general drive to decentralize planning and decision-making through the passing of the Local Self Government Act (1998) and recognizing the inadequacies of previous plans for the management of Terai forests, two donor funded programs have been set up to support localized planning and decision-making for the forest sector: the Biodiversity Sector and Environment Program – Siwalik and Terai (BISEP-ST) funded by SNV, and the Livelihoods and Forestry Programme (LFP) funded by Department of International and Rural Development (DFID).

It has been argued above that the OFMPs did not take into consideration all the forest sector issues deemed important by stakeholders, and that parts of the forest sector should not be considered in isolation from the others. Therefore, both programs have been designed to take a sector-wide approach to district level planning for the forest sector that includes looking at the linkages with forests, such as those between forested and non-forested areas, water and soil conservation, FP commercialization versus livelihoods, Income Generating Activities (IGAs), marketing, trade and industry, wildlife and biodiversity conservation and eco-tourism.

Given that the forest sector has diverse stakeholders and broad links with other sectors, the participation of all stakeholders in forest sector planning and the coordination of activities is necessary.

### **Biodiversity Sector and Environment Program – Siwalik and Terai**

BISEP-ST is operating in the 8 Central Development Region Terai districts and 'follows the sector-wide approach, meaning that it takes the Nepali situation as starting point and addresses bottlenecks of the Terai forest sector. The major principle of the program is trying to make existing policies, institutions and ideas function by strengthening co-ordination and implementing arrangements. Hands-on learning will help in improving the existing institutions' capacity for active and sustainable management of the forest sector contributing to livelihood support and economic development'

(BISEP-ST 2002a). DFCCs are being formed to strengthen co-ordination and implementing arrangements. The BISEP-ST program document further says (BISEP-ST 2002a):

*'Experience shows that improving the Terai, Inner Terai and Siwalik forest management needs sector-wide effort. Stakeholders must develop ways of co-operation to effectively apply relevant complementary forest management modes. Much work on individual modes such as Community Forestry, Block Management, Private Forestry, Protection forest and Buffer zone management has been done. Now these modes need to be complemented with a planning routine, product distribution and processing system, and become part of a comprehensive forest sector development program. The program aims to fulfill two major goals: developing a (biologically, organizationally, financially) sustainable forest sector, and creating livelihood opportunities. The Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MOFSC) will work for this ambitious but promising idea in the shape of Biodiversity Sector Program for Siwaliks and Terai (BISEP-ST).'*

The BISEP-ST program's structure means that DFCCs do not operate in isolation, but are closely linked to partner / stakeholder organizations and implementing bodies through formalized institutional arrangements. I suggest that these institutional links are actually more important than the DFCC as an entity in itself, as it is through these links that coordination and transparency is really attained, through reciprocity and trust. In the BISEP-ST area DFCCs are linked to District Support Units (DSUs) that act as implementing agencies for DFCC decisions, and DFCC members are linked to their respective organizations and the 'constituencies' their organizations represent. In the BISEP-ST districts DFCCs are also linked at the regional level through a Regional Forest Coordination Committee (RFCC) and a Regional Support Unit (RSU).

The institutional arrangements being developed in the BISEP-ST districts reflect the way BISEP-ST is designed as a program, with activities being implemented through partner/stakeholder organizations rather than directly by BISEP-ST itself. BISEP-ST currently has no permanent staff presence in the districts, and relies on existing institutions to carry out its program. This is different to LFP, which has a regional office in Butwal to run and coordinate its program activities in the three districts where it is operating.

Although the BISEP-ST model is being developed with the primary purpose of enabling their program and funding to be coordinated at the district level by all stakeholders, it has the secondary purpose of coordinating other forest sector actors' activities using other funds, as well as improving transparency, discussion and monitoring within the district forest sector as a whole. Instead of having a number of different, often informal, fora for this purpose, it was decided by all stakeholders that a single formal institution set up by the District Development Committee (DDC) under the legislation of the Local Self-Governance Act (1998) would be more appropriate, hence the formation of DFCCs (BISEP-ST 2002b). The rationale behind BISEP-ST and DFCC formation in the central Terai is discussed by Van Schoubreock et al (2003) in a separate article in this issue of the Journal.

### **LFP-Terai**

The Terai component of the LFP has a first phase objective of facilitating the participatory development of district strategic forest management plans in the Terai (DFID 2000). The districts of the Lumbini Zone: Nawalparasi, Rupandehi and Kapilvastu, have been selected for the implementation of this first phase (Neil 2001). A preliminary strategy is outlined in the LFP Inception Report (LFP 2001, Bampton 2002).

LFP's, current two year phase, does not intend to undertake individual projects. Rather, it proposes to strengthen existing institutions, and the links between them, in order to achieve coordinated planning for future implementation of forest management activities by local institutions. LFP's role will be to facilitate the planning process through the compilation and dissemination of appropriate information,

capacity building of local institutions and by bringing stakeholders together in the planning process (LFP-Terai 2001). If successful, LFP will support local institutions to implement the management plans for 8 further years.

From initial discussions with stakeholders in the LFP-Terai districts at multi-stakeholder workshops held in March 2002, it was decided to slightly adapt the BISEP-ST model for DFCCs in these districts (LFP 2002), the primary purpose being the coordination and monitoring of all the activities of district forest sector actors, including LFP's, and improving transparency and discussion within the forest sector as a whole. The DFCCs are not being established primarily to coordinate only LFP activities, as has been the case in the LFP-Hill districts where DFCCs have only involved DFOs and DDCs with LFP. A principle role of the fledgling DFCC in LFP Terai districts will be the development and agreement of district forest management plans.

### **Opportunities: BISEP Conceives, LFP Elaborates**

Although not a completely new idea<sup>2</sup>, the present idea for DFCCs in the Terai, legally formed according to the LSGA (1998), comes from the SNV funded BISEP-ST program as explained in the article (Van Schoubroeck et al 2000). BISEP-ST is striving to coordinate all forest sector planning and activity implementation in the Terai districts of the Central Development Region through a multi-stakeholder forum in each district. The principle is to contrive a situation in which a set of more or less interdependent stakeholders in the forest sector are identified, and, usually through representatives, invited to meet and interact in a forum for conflict resolution, negotiation, social learning and collective decision making towards concerted action (Röling 2002).

However, DFCCs also attempt to encourage decentralization of forest sector planning to the district level by involving DDCs, and other stakeholders, as partners of DFOs, and indeed DFCCs are formed according to Article 190 of the Local Self-Government Act (LSGA) 1998 – 'Power to form sub-committees'. Article 204 of the LSGA requires coordination between DDC, Government Organizations (GOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for formulating the integrated district development plans. DFCCs follow the same principle although they represent a permanent forum for forest sector stakeholders for coordination and planning purposes, and for developing an open and transparent means to discuss issues affecting the district forest sector. In essence, the principle accepts Röling's (2002) contention that sustainable society, be it at the local or global level, emerges from interaction and a recognition of interdependence between all, implying a need for mechanisms to solve social dilemmas and negotiate agreements and to develop a shared ability for discourse and reflection through interactive thinking.

LFP-Terai and partners have found the concept and model developed by BISEP-ST to be useful and pertinent to the situation in the Lumbini Zone. The rest of this article is based on LFP-Terai's experience to date in forming DFCCs and considerations about how they should function to be fully representative, transparent and accountable.

### **CAN 'DFCC' BECOME CREDIBLE AND EFFECTIVE PLATFORMS?**

The composition and TORs for DFCCs were discussed in the multi-stakeholder workshops and participants suggested that the DFCCs should include the widest possible representation of all stakeholder groups. Their suggestions for DFCC composition included DFOs, DDC members, Village Development Committee (VDC) federation, NGOs, Community Forestry User Groups (CFUGs), industry, other government line agencies, media and political parties. The composition is detailed in Figure 1 below.

However, these workshops were only the beginning of a process. There are further issues that need to be addressed to ensure that DFCCs are indeed open, representative and transparent fora for the discussion, negotiation and resolution of district forest sector issues, and that they do indeed address

the opinions of all forest sector stakeholders, particularly the disadvantaged and those who depend on forests for their livelihoods. Röling (2002) lists certain conditions that influence the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder platforms such as DFCCs and this framework is used for the analysis of DFCCs in their current context in Nepal's Terai:

1. Establishing the mandate and legitimacy of the platform
2. Engaging relevant stakeholders
3. Integration with existing institutions and processes
4. Defining the scope of the platform
5. Establishing incentives for participation
6. Co-ordination between national and local levels
7. Ensuring effective facilitation
8. Establishing and monitoring performance indicators.

These issues, in the context of DFCCs, are further elaborated below.

### **DFCC Mandate and Legitimacy**

Firstly, of concern is the legitimacy of DFCCs and the decisions they make, and how they are recognized by other institutions. Although paragraphs one and two of article 190 of the LSGA (1998) allow for the formation of such committees, and paragraph 3 specifies that 'the functions, duties, powers and procedures of the sub-committee to be formed pursuant to sub-section 1 shall be as prescribed by the DDC', it does not, however, give guidance as to how these should relate to existing institutions and other legislation. For example, could the DDC give the DFCC formal authority to review DFO periodic reports and audit the accounts? Can the DDC allow the DFCC to manage its own budget? Can the DFCC formally approve, or not, a district forest management plan?

### **Engaging Relevant Stakeholders**

Further concerns arise around the question of representation. Which stakeholder groups should be represented in the DFCC? How are representatives selected as members of the DFCC? And how do representatives interact with their constituencies?

The answer to the first question is not easy in the Terai forestry context as everybody feels that they have a stake. The initial multi-stakeholder workshops that suggested the composition of DFCCs were naturally biased by those who were present. It is therefore important to review the composition of DFCCs so as to get representation of those who really do have a large stake in the forest sector, rather than only those from formal organizations or with an official mandate linking them to the sector. It is important for stakeholders to attempt to organize themselves into recognizable groups that represent their common interests. The DFCC should encourage this, and accept new members from groups that successfully establish themselves to represent different stakeholder groups.

### **Incentives for Participation**

This issue is closely linked to the provision of appropriate incentives for participation. DFCCs should try to avoid the usual financial incentives to participants, and focus on the ideas that participation will lead to a better understanding of the forest sector and its actors, a chance to influence policy, priorities and planning, and possibly the chance to raise funds for programs to be implemented by, or for the benefit of, a participating stakeholder groups.

## **Integration with Existing Institutions and Processes**

With respect to how DFCC members are selected from their stakeholder groups, especially for those that represent VDCs, NGOs, CFUGs, and industry, it is critical that these members do indeed represent the interests of their constituencies (i.e. those from the same stakeholder interest group), and not only personal interests or those of his or her immediate organization. Where formal institutions such as line agencies already exist, or federations of institutions, e.g. the federations of VDCs, NGOs and FUGs, the selection of representatives to be DFCC members should be reasonably easy. However, it must be transparent and integrated with the rules and processes of the concerned institutions where these exist. Where they don't, the institutions themselves need to devise an appropriate selection mechanism. Where formal groups do not already exist, the DFCC should encourage their formation, e.g. for district forest sector industries, which in this case could perhaps be formalized either through the local Chambers of Commerce or through the Nepal Forest Industry Federation.

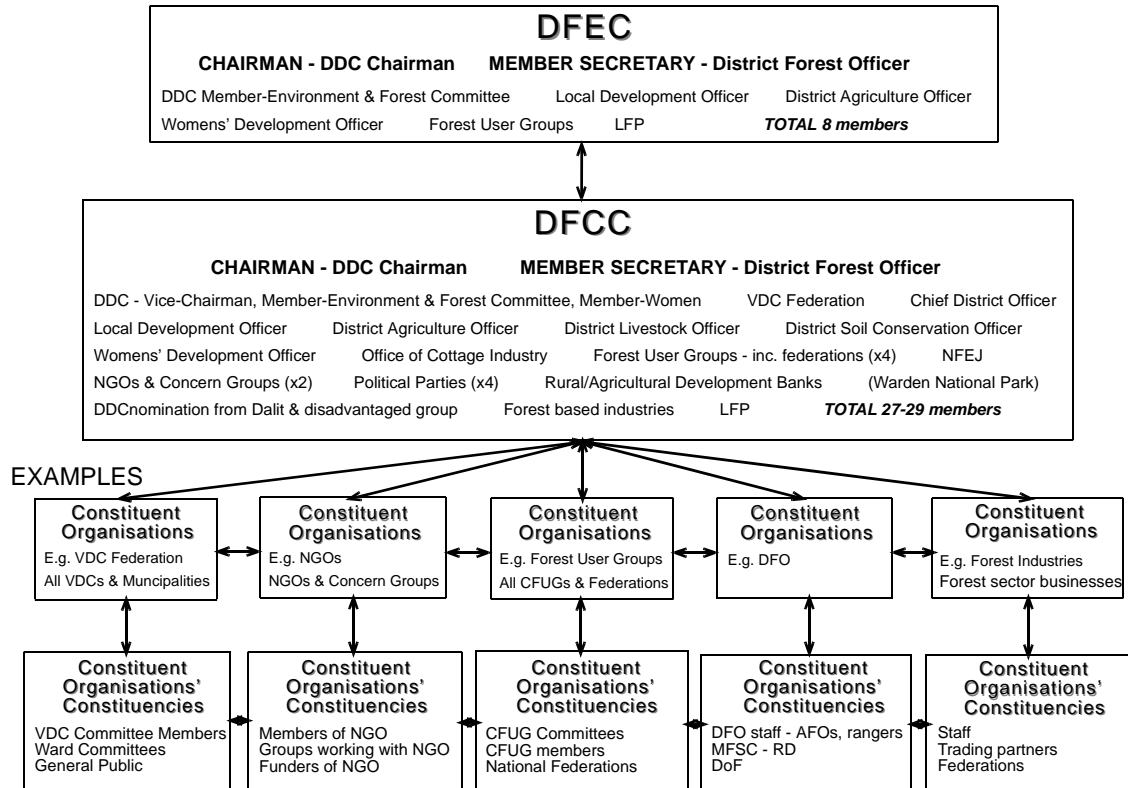
It is also important that constituencies being represented by a DFCC member from a federation have an opportunity to censure the performance of their representatives and that changes can be made as necessary, if it is felt that the DFCC member is not actually representing the interests of his or her constituency. It is a common observation that representatives tend to lose their effectiveness as they become more absorbed in the collective culture established under social pressure in the forum (Röling 2002). This requires that DFCC members communicate DFCC issues regularly to their constituents and that their representation is reviewed annually. Representatives that are selected due to their position in an organization such as the DDC or line agencies must make sure that DFCC information is passed onto their successor when their tenure expires, e.g. local government representatives and government line agencies. A file of all DFCC related information should be maintained by each DFCC member to ensure institutional memory.

In many cases, such as the VDC Federation, FUGs, NGOs, forest industries, etc., each DFCC member representing a stakeholder group will belong to a particular organization within the larger stakeholder group he or she is representing, e.g. a particular VDC, FUG, NGO or company. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the members of the DFCC communicate regularly with their full constituencies, and not only their immediate organization. It is the links outside the formal DFCC meetings that really ensure full representation, participation and transparency. The principal barrier to effective collective action is generally poor communication (Edmunds & Walsenburg 2002). Clear lines of communication could be ensured by each DFCC member explicitly listing those organizations he or she represents, and with which he or she will regularly communicate, and this should be written into the roles and responsibilities of DFCC members. For example, in the case of FUGs, all existing FUGs would be considered constituents of the FUG representatives on the DFCC, and all VDCs would be constituents of the VDC representative. The communication between the DFCC member and the other member organizations he or she is representing should be, where possible, through the regular meetings of federations where they exist, and DFCC business should become a regular item on their meeting agendas. In order to facilitate the spread of information, the DFCCs should produce sufficient copies of meeting agendas and minutes, reports etc. in appropriate language for DFCC members to pass on to their constituents.

Similarly, many of the organizations that make up a stakeholder group themselves have a wider constituency to which they are responsible. In the case of VDCs this is the whole VDC committee, ward committees and the general public in their VDCs. Likewise, FUGs are responsible to all their users, not just their committees, and Government Line Agencies to all their staff and their central departments and ministries. It is important that these channels of communication remain open and that DFCC business is passed from the DFCC via members to their constituent organizations and that these organizations pass it on to their full constituencies. This should again become regularized

through each constituent's regular meetings. The linkages between DFCC members and the constituencies they represent are illustrated in figure 1 below as the vertical arrows.

**Figure 1: The composition and linkages between the various levels of the forest sector through the DFCC in LFP-Terai districts (DRAFT)**



**Linkages between Constituencies and Representatives**

In order for constituents to be able to lobby their representatives, it is essential that DFCC meeting agendas, and supporting information, be disseminated well in advance of formal DFCC meetings, which should become regular calendar events. As each DFCC member should have a list of his or her constituencies, sufficient copies can be made and distributed accordingly. It is then up to each DFCC member to call meetings of his or her constituencies in advance of DFCC meetings to discuss how he or she can best represent their views at the DFCC. Similarly the minutes of all DFCC meetings should be disseminated back to all DFCC members' constituencies. This allows constituencies the possibility to censure their representative's performance.

Likewise, DFCC members should report to the DFCC about the forest sector activities of their constituencies. This should also be formalized. All reporting to the DFCC should then be disseminated amongst all the DFCC members' constituencies. The reporting format does not need to be standardized, but should include all activities carried out in the forests, trainings, formal meetings

attended, impact etc. Most organizations that DFCC members represent have their own reporting systems already. These can be adapted for reporting to the full DFCC.

### **Defining the Scope of DFCCs**

The ToRs for DFCCs should be clear and should define the roles and responsibilities of DFCC members. TORs should be linked to a clear statement of the objectives and mandate of the DFCC. In the LFP-Terai district, the debate around TORs has begun, and should be finalised in the first full DFCC meeting in each district. Outline TORs have been prepared already from the outcome of discussions at the multi-stakeholder workshops. (Box 1)

#### ***Box 1 Provisional Terms of Reference for DFCCs in Nawalparasi, Rupandehi and Kapilbastu as agreed at multi-stakeholder workshops (LFP-Terai 2002)***

1. DFCC members will meet regularly to address the forest related issues at least twice a year;
2. DFCC will identify roles and capacity of governmental and non governmental institutions working in forestry related fields in the district;
3. DFCC will coordinate all the programs of different organizations and donors in the district.
4. DFCC will support the identification of interests, needs and problems of all stakeholders in the district;
5. DFCC will find out the priority areas of forestry activities/program in the district according to interests of stakeholders;
6. DFCC will create a forum so as to resolve all the conflicting issues on the basis of common interests/understandings;
7. DFCC will formulate a district forest management strategic plan based on consultation, interest and suggestions of all stakeholders
8. DFCC will monitor and evaluate the approved district forest management strategic plan.
9. DFCC will support to formulate forestry related policy and programs
10. DFCC will prepare District Forest Executive Committee (DFEC) TOR
11. DFCC will share/circulate forestry related information to all the concerned stakeholders within district

These TORs need to be revised so they become more detailed and contain clear guidelines as to the scope of the DFCC, and the roles and responsibilities of members, bearing in mind the framework for analysis used in this paper.

### **Coordination between Local, Regional and National Levels**

Whilst DFCCs are primarily aimed at coordinating district level forest sector activities, they should also play a role in informing policy-makers at the regional and national level. In the BISEP-ST supported central development region, there is provision for a Regional Forest Coordination Committee (RFCC). This is appropriate where regional programs exist, but should only meet occasionally when there are specific issues of regional importance that need to be addressed. Regional fora should have access to national fora such as the Forest Sector Coordination Committee (FSCC).



Again, it is less a need for meeting regularly, rather that communication channels should remain open between districts in a region.

Although it is not feasible for DFCCs themselves to meet regularly at a regional or national level, individual stakeholder groups can more easily. This is especially the case for government line agencies such as DFOs and federations of user groups. At regional meetings of such stakeholder groups, common DFCC themes should be discussed as a matter of course, and related back to each DFCC.

### **Facilitation**

It is not yet clear whether facilitation is necessary in the case of DFCCs as these will be permanent fora. However, it is recognized that facilitation might be desirable where issues with conflicting positions need to be discussed. Where projects such as LFP exist, there exists an opportunity for the Project, as a neutral institution, to facilitate discussions.

### **Monitoring**

However, monitoring should be more than simply submitting reports about inputs, activities and outputs. The DFCC should attempt to become a 'learning organization' that develops a monitoring system to inform adaptive management along the lines suggested by Pokharel et al. (2002). Monitoring for adaptive management involves questioning and monitoring the assumptions that lead to a particular strategy, decision or action being taken, so that future decisions can be changed if the assumptions were found not to hold true (Pokharel et al 2002). At the same time the DFCC should develop indicators to monitor its own performance so that the DFCC process itself can be improved.

### **Other Considerations for DFCCs**

Although the Röling's (2002) framework for conditions favoring effective is useful for analyzing the potential for DFCCs, there are some other considerations that need to be addressed in the context of DFCCs in the Terai.

#### ***Communicating with non-literate***

As much of the communication between the DFCC and constituencies will be through written means, it is very important that those who receive these written communications explain the contents to non-literate members of their constituencies. The DFCC should investigate other communication channels and methods to ensure its debates reach the widest possible audience, and that everyone has a possibility to have their opinions passed back to the DFCC. One suggestion is that the DFCC sponsors a regular radio program to disseminate its discussions and that it includes the views of all stakeholders. Each DFCC should develop its own communication strategy with the aim of ensuring the widest possible audience and feedback mechanisms for full transparency.

There will always be other stakeholders who need to be consulted on specific issues. For example, irrigation groups and District Irrigation Offices where forestry is, or could be, linked to their activities. Similarly, the roads and electricity authorities, and the land and revenue offices, where these have links with the forestry sector. These other stakeholders can be invited as observers or as resource persons when the DFCC discusses specific issues of relevance to them, and should be included in DFCC reports dissemination as appropriate.

LFP and BISEP-ST both would ultimately like to facilitate the development of district forest sector plans, and their implementation. The development of these plans and the coordination of their implementation will be a major part of the initial work of DFCCs, especially in the LFP-Terai districts where district level strategic forest management planning is the primary objective of the program's first phase. The DFCC should then work on coordinating the implementation of these

plans, monitoring activities and their impacts and reviewing and updating the plans through the application of learning from the monitoring. Joint monitoring for adaptive management should lead to better coherence of understanding between stakeholders.

DFCCs could also establish smaller area forest sector working groups at the Ilaka or range post level, where stakeholders from different groups have an opportunity to discuss and negotiate issues at a local level. These should preferably be chaired by a local member of the full DFCC where possible. This idea is represented by the horizontal arrows linking constituencies in diagram 1. In Dang district (G. Allison pers. com.), there are already formalized range post committees that serve a similar purpose, and the model could be adapted to work under the DFCC. The formalization of these groups would enable them to undertake control of their own budgets for implementing programs, as well as fund-raising, management and monitoring activities.

#### ***Participation of disadvantaged and marginalized groups***

Although multi-stakeholder forums such as DFCCs have the potential to enable better transparency and opportunities for otherwise excluded groups to be included in negotiations, there is still a risk that disadvantaged groups will not benefit and that they may indeed be exposed to even greater manipulation and control by more powerful stakeholders. According to Edmunds and Wollenberg (2002) these are more likely where:

- Neutral or objective conditions are created
- Consensus is desirable
- All stakeholders need to be involved
- Negotiations can be considered in isolation from other strategies employed by stakeholders.

It can be argued that these conditions will frequently apply to DFCCs. Therefore DFCCs must explicitly address the conditions affecting disadvantaged groups and the politics at work continually in discussions and negotiations, and this should be explicitly written into DFCC ToRs. This is especially the case for Government representatives who's legitimate interests should be a mix of the varying interests of society and who should also advocate the interests of the voiceless interested groups of the future, rather than their own vested interests (Gregerson et al 1995). Indeed, part of the rationale behind forming DFCCs is to ensure that Government bodies do actually promote and attempt to balance society's multiple interests with other stakeholders rather than on their own to promote only their own narrow interests.

Likewise, with the wide diversity, and often incompatibility, between interests and stakeholder positions, it is inevitable that some interested groups may win, while others lose. Satisfying some people may result in not satisfying others. Also, some decisions, in trying to strike an equitable balance, may not satisfy any of the key interested groups with strongly held values (Gregerson et al 1995). However, the effect of perceived losses can be made up to some extent through an understanding of interdependencies (Röling 2002) and associated indirect gains.

#### ***Executive committees - DSUs and DFECs***

As LFP-Terai has an area office in Terai to coordinate LFP's program activities, there is no need to set up District Support Units (DSUs) in the same way as in the BISEP-ST area. Instead, it was suggested at the LFP multi-stakeholder workshops that a District Forest Executive Committee (DFEC) be formed to implement, through the responsible agencies and organizations, the major programs recommended by the DFCC. The DFEC comprises members from the organizations with a legal mandate for the forest sector, i.e. the DFO and the DDC, and it would be the DFEC that ultimately takes decisions based on advice received from the DFCC. It is recognized that all stakeholders do not have equal power to determine the activities actually undertaken in the forest sector.

It is also appreciated that such a large gathering of stakeholders such as the DFCC, with up to 30 members and many divergent interests, will not always be able to reach consensus on all issues. Yet, consensus will not always necessary on all issues. However, the DFCC forum does offer all stakeholders a chance to voice their opinions and concerns, and negotiate compromises, and for decision-makers to become aware of divergent opinions and the reasons for them. It is up to the DFEC to weigh these opinions and make final decisions according to their best judgement. However, it should be explicit in the DFEC TORs that the DFEC fully justifies its decisions with respect to opposing opinions voiced in the DFCC.

It has been suggested that DFCCs meet twice a year, as gathering such a large group of people is not easy, whereas DFECs should aim to meet every two or three months. These meetings should become regular calendar events. However, the DFEC should be in regular contact with all DFCC members regarding activities in the district forest sector, and all meeting agendas and minutes should be disseminated to the full membership of the DFCC. As stressed before, it is the communication between stakeholders outside the meetings that ensures true transparency. The DFEC can also invite any observers or resource persons as and when deemed necessary. Of course, additional 'extraordinary' meetings of both DFCCs and DFECs can be called at any time as necessary.

The DFEC should also be mandated by the DFCC to negotiate with external stakeholders such as other government line agencies where forestry is inter-related with their activities, e.g. irrigation, roads, electricity, land, revenue, cottage industry, cooperatives etc. However, it must again be explicit in the TORs that the minutes of such meetings and negotiations be recorded and disseminated amongst the full membership of the DFCC.

### **Funding**

Finally, the question of funding the DFCCs and DFECs as well as district forestry development has to be addressed. As recent proposals suggest that DDCs should receive a proportion of the revenues generated from forest activities within their districts, a proportion of these funds should be earmarked for direct DFCC operating costs, such as meeting expenses and paperwork. Of the remaining funds, the DDC should decide how much is to be dedicated to other forest development activities, as the remainder should be used in general district development activities in other sectors that cannot generate their own funds. The creation of forestry development fund should then be debated by the DFCC and implemented by the DFEC, and through other stakeholders as appropriate.

The forest sector will also receive funds from a diversity of sources, including the central government through line agencies and local government, as well as through donor and NGO projects and private sources. The DFCC should be aware of all the different sources within the forest sector and discuss the plans for the spending by each forest related organization. This is not to say that the DFCC should determine how each organization spends its budget, but to ensure that organizations are applying their resources to activities identified in the district forest sector management plan and to ensure better prioritization, coordination and complementarity of activities, whilst avoiding overlaps or gaps in the overall district forest sector development activities.

### **CONCLUSION**

The idea of DFCCs as a permanent formal forum for improving the collaboration and transparency between all district forest sector stakeholders has great potential. This is evident from the large number of divergent groups with different stakes in the forest sector and their interest to improve coordination, planning and monitoring. However, it is critical that the mechanisms of its functioning are detailed and agreed by all stakeholders. It has been argued above that it is not the DFCC per se that will ensure transparency; rather that it is the linkages and communication between the different levels and stakeholders that are more important, and that these therefore need to be regularized both between and within the represented organizations. Also DFCC members must be accountable to their

constituents, and mechanisms need to be in place to review their representation so that changes can be made if necessary. It is hoped that this paper will be useful for the development of formal guidelines and TORs for DFCCs.

The development of guidelines and TORs for DFCCs must consider Röling's eight conditions, especially those with regard to establishing a clear mandate for the DFCC and those relating to representation and accountability.

It is recognized that the process of DFCC development will involve a large amount of adaptive management, and that flexibility and learning from experience are paramount. However, the model could serve for other Terai districts and also for the hills. It also could be adapted for other sectors where a wide variety of stakeholders require better coordination and negotiated solutions to conflicts. Let us hope that all stakeholders honestly engage in the process of social learning, and that our optimism in the appropriateness of interactive multi-actor platforms such as DFCCs will be borne out.

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<sup>1</sup> Kanel (2000) estimates that less than 10% of the Terai forests' potential is captured economically at present.

<sup>2</sup> The idea of stakeholder fora and full stakeholder participation has been strongly advocated by many in the past, e.g. Ojha & Paudel 2000.