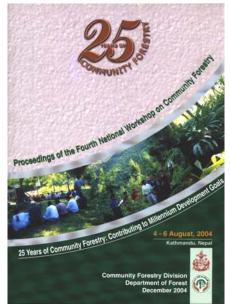# 25 Years of Community Forestry in Nepal: A Review of Fourth National Workshop Proceedings

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On August 4-6, 2004, a national workshop on community forestry was organized by Department of Forest (DoF), Nepal in collaboration with a number of bilateral projects and civil society organizations. This was fourth national workshop of the series since 1987 when community forestry was at nascent stage. This national workshop series has been a key-contributing factor in the development of community forestry, which has helped define its legal and regulatory framework and develop consensus on key issues among key players. While the first workshop (1987) focused on laying foundations of community forestry including inputs to the Forest Act 1993, the second workshop (1993) emphasized institutional aspects of community forestry including inputs to Forest Rules 1995 (Niraula 2004). The third workshop (1998) sought to develop shared national vision of community forestry using appreciative inquiry, including reassessment of strengths and obstacles of community forestry. The fourth workshop (with 204 participants representing government, non-government, bilateral, and grassroots organizations) has been successful in documenting a wide range of "second generation issues" and innovations from various parts of the country, which could inform further refinement of policies and practices of community forestry to achieve the twin policy goals of poverty reduction and environmental conservation.

The purpose of this note is to summarize important points contained in the 587 pages long proceedings of the workshop, which comprises of 82 papers. While the papers are organized in four categories (keynote papers, sustainable forest management, livelihood and governance), large numbers of papers within each of these categories preclude readers to easily trace papers relevant to more specific aspects of community forestry. In this context, this note is prepared to both highlight one or two key points of each of the papers and guide the readers through the relevant sections in the proceeding. For space related reasons, citations of authors and bibliography have been avoided and page numbers of the respective articles are given in brackets immediately after the "key point (s)".

The proceeding was reviewed combining the "open coding" methods of grounded theory techniques along with "theoretical sensitivity" to control the number of categories within a manageable limit which allowed fresh categories to emerge more directly reflecting the contents of the proceedings (Strauss and Corbin 1990). In doing so, the number of categories has been expanded from the original three (livelihoods, governance and sustainable forest management) to twelve so that a more specific set of categories can emerge which clearly indicate the kind of papers contained within the respective categories (although there is an unavoidable possibility of overlaps). Most authors have emphasized the need for transforming community forestry governance at different levels and enhancing livelihoods of the poor households within forest user groups. Key points of the conference papers are given below by 12 categories linking community forestry:

1. NATIONAL POLICY

Several policy-related papers identify emerging issues and explore directions for policy change in the light of a number of second generation issues identified. A keynote paper of the proceeding has proposed "adaptive and inclusive" framework to governance which can potentially ensure greater equity and promote sustainable forest management in line with millennium development goals, tenth plan and poverty reduction strategy paper (4). Similarly, a few other papers have identified specific policy issues – community forestry operational guidelines insufficient to facilitate practice of CF at local level (56); lack of clear policy to address wildlife around CF (95); community –based timber processing company directly affected by government decisions on 40% royalty and lengthy harvesting approval process (286); contradictions between forestry and non-forestry legislations (450); and discrepancies between legal provisions and actual enforcement. The role of judiciary in clarifying the meaning of forest legislation is also considered an integral part of forest policy and practice in Nepal (559, 450). Relation between two closely related programs (leasehold forestry and community forestry) is also discussed indicating a possibility of more complementary relations (195).

Some papers have reviewed the way forest policies are made in Nepal. A review of policy making during 1998-2004 found limited public deliberation during policy decisions (548). Another analysis claims that forest sector policies have contributed to socio-political vulnerability rather than stability (333). On the "demand" side of the policy, still another paper analyzes the nature and effectiveness of policy advocacy in relation to government decision on 40% royalty on forest product sale by community forest user groups (CFUGs). (346).

2. INTERNATIONAL POLICY

Some of the papers have touched on the issues of international policies, which have implications on the practice of community forestry in Nepal. An important issue raised is that kyoto protocol criteria do not allow trading of carbon sequestered by Nepal's community forestry (64). Similarly, the need for quantification, pricing and internalization of environmental values of community forest within and beyond national boundary is also identified (48, 371).

3. FOREST MANAGEMENT

A number of papers identify and present evidences for diverse avenues (in ecological, technical and institutional aspects) of advancing forest management within the realm of community forestry - need for certification mechanism (72); need for criteria and indicators for sustainable community forest management (31); need for improved harvesting technologies for community forest (78); need for forest type specific demonstration plots for improved silvicultural management of forest (87); evidences of usefulness of "positive" thinning in community forests (109); evidences showing that condition of community forest is improving while that of government forest is degrading (118); concept and experiences of "Community Forest Management School" to move from passive to active management of community forests (127); evidences on forest users' perceptions and practices related to passive or conservative approach to silvicultural operation (136); need for increased involvement of CFUGs and local service providers in preparing and revising forest management operational plans (165); and need for incorporating total economic value in forest decision-making (48).

4. NTFPs MANAGEMENT

Papers provide both general and specific aspects of NTFP development in relation to community forestry in Nepal – an overview of policy and practical issues of NTFP management (42); evidences on cultivating an exotic mushrooms on wooden logs (124); need for NTFP network to enhance economies of scale and resist exploitation by traders (142); evidences showing possibility of CFUGs cultivating medicinal and aromatic plants (150); evidences showing potential of seabuckthorn in income generation (155).

5. TERAI AND HIGH ALTITUDE

Community forestry agenda has largely been confined to the middle hills, and there is still a slow progress in both Terai and high hills due to different contexts and confusions among the actors. The proceeding includes a paper on high altitude which identifies the need for better understanding of existing institutions and practices, implying that middle hill model of CF may need some modifications in the case of high hills (98). Similarly, two papers deal with the issue of community forestry in the Terai. One of them presents evidences that livelihood of the poor has not improved despite improvement in the condition of CFUG-managed forest, suggesting to shift from forest management to livelihood orientation (199). Another paper undertakes analysis of general and specific situations of community forestry in Terai concluding that CF can hold equal promise in the Terai as in the middle hills if it is planned and implemented in more regional basis (such as district) in complementarity with collaborative forest management so that issues of distant users (people living away from forests) are also addressed (317).

6. CFUG GOVERNANCE/INSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES

A number of papers have emphasized the need for transforming governance at CFUG level for enhanced equity and effectiveness in forest management, and some of them have gone further to provide experiences and evidences of pilot actions in the field. Key innovations documented include – need for democratization of CFUGs at Tole levels (294); adaptive, collaborative and learning based approach helps to democratize CFUGs and enhance outcomes on forests and livelihoods (358); and action-learning oriented inclusive and interactive approach to facilitating equitable change at CFUG level governance (480); and tools and processes for governance coaching (563). Two specific insights in relation to how CFUG interact with other institutions are that: informal indigenous institutions within CFUGs (such as *parma* and *guhar*) need to be transformed for equitable governance of CFUGs (476); and CFUGs coexist with a number of "indigenous, induced and sponsored institutions" which are being overlooked by community forestry program implementers (489). Some papers document experiences of CFUG level governance reform with positive results - increased participation of women and dalits (508) and improvement in at least some aspects of governance (515, 521, 531, 569).

7. CROSS-SCALE GOVERNANCE

The issue of "good" governance at different levels, including micro, meso and macro featured prominently in the conference proceeding. Papers deal wiht both conceptual and practical issues. A paper provides a blend of framework, concept, indicators, challenges and options for community forestry governance at different levels emphasizing the links between government, civil society, forest users and private sector (298). Likewise, another paper provides a critical overview of state-of-the-art situation on roles and relationships among government, civil society, donors, forest users and FECOFUN within community forestry (180). Still another paper presents approaches to governance building on USAID-sponsored study findings and project experiences, which identify limited inclusion, partnership and weak governance in overall sense as the key challenges (422). Two papers present preliminary experiences on operationalizing principles of good governance at FECOFUN (433, 459). Monitoring and evaluation system at different layers of government/program, which is confined to mere collection of data without proper analysis, reflection and feedback to decisions, is also raised as a key issue of community forestry governance (438). The need for sensitizing media for promoting equitable governance of community forestry is also identified (445). One paper documents bilateral project experience of involving local NGOs in the delivery of community forestry services including their governance (467).

8. LIVELIHOODS

The conference has given due space for exploring links between community forestry and local livelihoods and equity. A thematic paper outlines the relevance of sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) emphasizing four key aspects: a need to "liberalise CF" from sectoral thinking; a need for not only asset building but also how assets can be transformed to create concrete livelihood outcomes; change in "institutional policies and processes" for greater livelihood impact; and a set of specific issues and possible responses from the perspective of SLA (171). There are both good and bad news on livelihood outcomes of community forests. Bad news is that there is limited CFUG impact on livelihood of the poor (Terai-199, overall – 208). An example of bad news is that there are evidences, which confirm that CFUG funds are not being effectively mobilized for livelihood opportunities (278). Good news are many - tools of income and poverty measurement being developed (188); development of pro-poor innovations in community forestry practices including well-being ranking, leasing out parts of forest land, enterprises and special arrangement for forest product distribution (229, 245, 250, 290). Two papers provide evidences for improved livelihood impact through various innovations - improvement in various aspects of livelihoods through community forestry intervention (259); women becoming more actively engaged in CFUG process when the CFUG collaborated with a safer motherhood project to address issues of women' reproductive health (271). There is even an appreciation of the need for pro-poor approach with "positive discrimination" (264).

9. GENDER DIMENSIONS

The proceeding contains a few papers, which explore gender-related change in community forestry. Two papers provide an update of gender-related initiative within Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation, which is developing a vision of gender-balanced organization, policies and strategies (352, 538). Another paper highlights perspectives of a national women resource user network (HIMAWANTI) on gender related reform in community forestry (472). A few other papers provide evidences of gender related innovations at local level - female extension staff improves women participation in CFUG but not necessarily the quality and effectiveness of participation (531); CFUG undertaking safer motherhood (271); women not in key decision-making posts of CFUG (461). One paper challenges the "women-only CFUG" using evidences from the field and argues that it is not a better alternative, suggesting instead to emphasize gender-mainstreaming and women empowerment (399).

10. ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND BUSINESS

There are a few papers, which emphasize the need for enterprise-oriented approach to community forest management for enhancing livelihood impact. Two papers document the initial experience on pro-poor community forestry-based NTFP enterprises (255, 229), and one paper provides an update and lessons of Nepal's first CFUGs-owned timber processing company (286).

11. UPSCALING OF NEPAL EXPERIENCES

International actors and promoters of community forestry have showed keen interests on the policy and practice of community forestry in Nepal. The proceedings contain a paper by Regional Community Forestry Training Center (RECOTFC), expressing a commitment to continue collaboration with community forestry programme in Nepal while working regionally (Asia-pacific) to promote community forestry (378). Likewise, International Forestry Resources and Institution (IFRI) of Indiana University updated its efforts in developing concepts and variables for comparing Nepal CF with a range of other contexts outside Nepal (385).

12. KEY THEORETICAL ASPECTS LINKED TO COMMUNITY FORESTRY PRACTICE

Several papers draw insights from a range of theoretical ideas or concepts which include - common property (409, 199), governance (422), deliberative democracy (548), communicative rationality (548, 484), collective action (333, 385, 409), sustainable livelihood (171), adaptive management (358), total economic value (48, 371), Mann Whiteney test of difference over time (118), principles of silviculture (109), statistical tools (such as Gini coefficient, Lorenz curve, head count index and ANNOVA) (188), theory of Himalayan degradation (218), tragedy of the commons (218), personal and organizational habits and behaviour (298), participatory forestry (317,333), social exclusion (399).

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