

Cultural Dimension of Community Based Forest Enterprise in Nepal: A Case of Handmade Paper Enterprise in Eastern Hill of Nepal

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Abstract

The economic potential of forest-based enterprise has remained an important issue of policy and academic studies and debates in Nepal. However, there is limited or no attention on cultural dimensions. This paper explores the cultural dimensions by focusing on the complementarities and/or contradictions between the culture of people and forest-based enterprise interventions. This paper, based on an ethnographic study of a handmade paper enterprise (between 2015 and 2019 in Sawa village in Tyamke-Mayum Rural Municipality in Bhojpur district in the eastern hill of Nepal), has attempted to discuss the interface between the cultural attributes of Rai people as a moral economy and the techno-bureaucratic processes of the community-based forest enterprise (CBFE) as a part of the global phenomenon of the neoliberal economy. The paper argues that the establishment and functioning of CBFEs in remote village is not only a socio-political process of expansion of state's bureaucratic controls; but this processes, as a part and parcel of the expansions of neoliberal economic institutions and ideas, have also been displacing and/or destroying the indigenous way of local economy. The paper suggests that there is a need of further studies and evidence-based policy debates about the significance of integrating the indigenous way of the local economy and neoliberal economic institutions and ideas in new Nepal.

Keywords: Cultural attributes, Forest based enterprise, Moral economy, Neoliberal economy

INTRODUCTION

What is Community Based Forest Enterprise (CBFE)? Is it only an economic issue? Or it is also related with issues of the people's history and culture of the places and their ancestors? If yes, to what extent the studies and debates on CBFEs until now have addressed or covered these dimensions in Nepal? Nepali society being diverse in terms of culture and cultural practices, obviously demands an understanding of CBFEs from cultural dimensions as important components. However, the studies and debates until now have focused only on the economic and social dimensions such as investment, production, marketing, economic benefits etc., of the

CBFEs. Realising the importance of the cultural dimensions of CBFEs, this paper, therefore, has attempted to open the debates on this gap.

Studies show that CBFEs in Nepal has great potential in contributing to the improvement of local livelihoods as well as the national economy (Acharya 2005; Dhakal *et al.* 2018; Lamsal *et al.* 2017; Pandit *et al.* 2009; Pinheiro *et al.* 2020). Arguments about CBFE's contribution to the improvement of the local livelihoods are related to the generation of employment opportunities at the local level and income from the collection and supply of the available forest resources as well as marketing of the forest products (Banjade &

Paudel 2008; Rai & Chapagain 2014; Rai *et al.* 2016). On the other hand, studies show that CBFEs in different forms and types also have been contributing to the national economy, primarily through revenue (Banjade & Paudel 2008; Pandit *et al.* 2009; Rai & Chapagain 2014).

Nepal being an ecologically diverse and rich country has been producing and sustaining a great diversity in terms of culture and ritual practices of the people. These diversities are important for the reason that they exist along with specific cultural values and beliefs to nature and the environment including forest resources (Allen 2012; Fortier 2009; Nicoletti 2006). These practices, values and belief systems have been producing different forms and types of economic behaviours (Fisher 1994; Fortier 2009; Furer-Haimendorf 1975; Gilmore & Fisher 1991; Stevens 1993), termed as the “informal economy” of the people. However, these forms of economic behaviours of the people have been either displaced or replaced by the state’s interventions such as forest management and land entitlements (Regmi 1978; Shrestha 2001). The processes of the establishment and functioning of different forms of forest management, conservation interventions and CBFEs may be some of the many. In this context, social processes of the loss or (re)displacements of the economic behaviours of the local people that have been rooted from the long history and culture of the people and the place would be one of the issues for further study on one hand; while on the other hand, further study about socio-cultural consequences of these (re)displacements would also be equally important for future impacts/effects.

Neoliberal economy (Becker 1976; Friedman 1957; Hayek 1950) has become a dominant economic paradigm in recent decades and the years from global to local levels. This

paradigm considers the market as decisive in societal and political decision-making processes. This framework believes in the promotion of the private sector or individual entrepreneurs as primary actors for economic growth (McCarthy 2005; Petrova 2014). In this context, the socio-political processes and outcomes of the external interventions arriving at the remote villages in different forms such as CBFEs could be an issue for further study.

Realising the importance of understanding the informal economy in relation to the establishment and functioning of CBFEs in remote villages, this paper has attempted to answer the question of the complementarities and/or contradiction between the informal economy and the neoliberal economy in Nepal. The study’s findings could help policymakers and forestry practitioners to make the forestry sector policies and policy making processes inclusive so that the importance of the diverse forms of local economic practices would be understood, respected and promoted.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is primarily based on the data generated through an ethnographic study of Rai indigenous people in a remote village (called Sawa) in Bhojpur district in the eastern hill of Nepal. The data presented and discussed in this paper were collected during 2015 and 2016 and post visits until 2019. The data used in this paper include myth and oral history of the places and the people and culture and ritual practices of the Rai indigenous people in Sawa village as “cultural attributes”; and the struggles and experiences of the Rai people in Sawa village for the establishment and functioning of a handmade papers enterprise as socio-political processes of “neoliberal market economy”. The ethnographic study as a data collection technique includes in-depth

interviews and key informant interviews (with community leaders and members related to the study handmade paper enterprise as well as government authorities and concerned stakeholders), observation of the relevant events and activities, and participation in relevant community events. The study covers all the user households of *Nayakharka* CFUG (n: 34) which is the official owner of the study enterprise. In addition, available records of the study community such as meeting minutes, and relevant literature and reports have also been used to complement the writing and analysis of the paper. The data relating to the cultural attributes were reflected as the foundation of the local economy (moral economy) primarily based on moral obligations; while the data related to the struggles and experiences of the establishment and functioning of the handmende paper enterprise (both technical and administrative processes) were described and reflected as techno-bureaucratic processes of the expansions of neoliberal economic institutions and ideas. The conclusion of the paper, then, has been drawn from the

reflections on the interface between cultural attributes and techno-bureaucratic processes of the handmade paper enterprise.

THE CONTEXT

The Study Village, Forest Resources and the People

Sawa is a small village situated in the Northern part (a part of Ward one) of Tyamke-Mayum Rural-Municipality (T-MRM) in Bhojpur district in Koshi hill region in the Eastern hill of Nepal. Before the federalised government system, Ward one of T-MRM was Timma Village Development Committee (VDC) as local level administrative division. There are a total of nine small villages/hamlets¹ in this Ward and *Sawa* is one of them. Of the nine villages, *Sawa*, *Falate* and *Fongla* villages are close in terms of geographical location and altitude. *Falate* and *Fongla* villages have been considered as a part of *Sawa* village and therefore the combination of these villages in this study is considered as “*Sawa* village” (Figure 1).

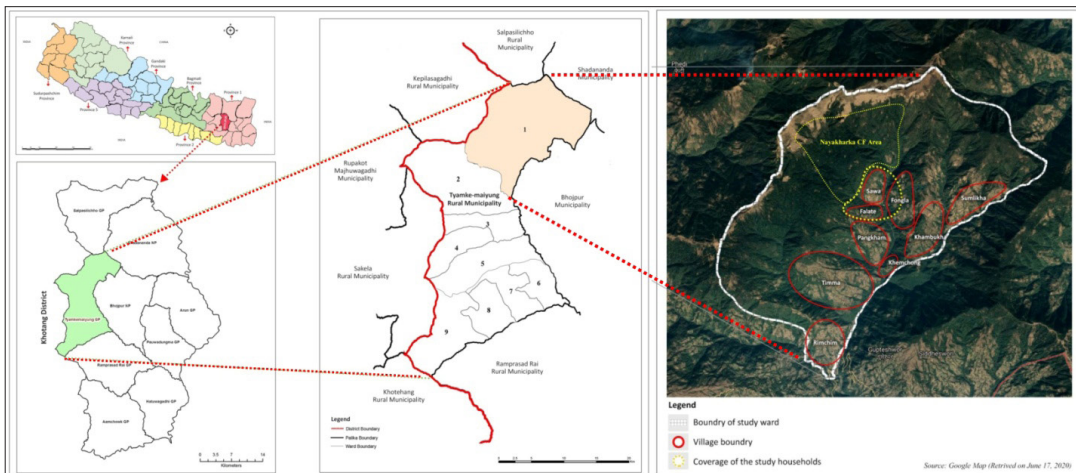


Figure 1: Location of the study site/villages

Source: Nepal Government, Survey Department (retrieved from open access) and Google Map (plotted by the researcher, 2020)

¹ The names of these villages, from South to North are Rimchim, Timma, Khemchong, Pangkham, Falate, Sawa, Fongla, Khambukha and Sumlikha (see map 1).

Sawa village is located at an altitude between 1789m (5870ft) to 3330m (10927ft) from the sea level. The altitude of *Sawa* village characterises the place as a humid subtropical climate with humid summers and cold to mild winters with sometimes light snowfalls in the upper parts. *Sawa* village and its surroundings are rich in terms of the availability of natural resources. This village has wide and dense forest areas in the upper parts and forest patches on all sides. *Sawa* River (flowing down between *Sawa* and *Falate* village), *Harkate* River (in the East), *Pikhuwa* River (flowing between *Fongla* and *Sawa*) and several streams have made this village rich in terms of water resources. The wide and dense forest area has been managed as Community Forest (CF) area². More than 21 types of tree species and 18 types of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and medicinal and aromatic plants (MAP) are available inside *Nayakharka* CF area (Operational Plan, 2015). Of these resources, the barks of the *Daphne bholuwa* (Lokta) and *Edgeworthia gardneri* (Argheli)

plants have been used as raw materials for the establishment and functioning of a handmade paper enterprise.

Sawa is a traditional homeland of Rai indigenous people. They have been living in this village since time immemorial. They claim themselves as the first settler of this village. They have myths and oral history about the places (villages, rivers, some specific places with local names and meanings) and their ancestors (origin, migration, wars, settlements). They also perform different cultures and rituals throughout the year. Similarly, reciprocal labour exchange is a common economic practice in ritual functions, agricultural works, and special functions such as house construction and renovations. These forms of cultural and economic behaviours are “cultural attributes” that provide not only the foundations for collective decisions and actions; but also provide culturally engrained foundation for moral and economic behaviours.

Table 1: Selected cultural attributes as sources of moral economy of the people in sawa village

Cultural Properties	Names	Myths and Oral History	Cultural/Ritual Practices	Implication to forest related activities (e.g. forest based enterprise)
Meaning and Naming of Villages	<i>Sawa</i> and all neighbouring villages (e.g. <i>Pangkham</i> , <i>Fongla</i> , <i>Khambukha</i> , <i>Sumlikha</i> etc.)	Migration, settlements, ownership	Perform different rituals to worship ancestor gods, nature gods and deities	Sense of collectivities are developed among the community members

² The name of this CF is *Nayakharka* Community Forest User Group (CFUG) which was formally registered in 2002 in district forest office. This CFUG, covering a total of 282 hectare area, has a total of 34 households as user households (21 HHs from *Sawa* village, 7 HHs from *Falate* village and 6 HHs from *Fongla* village).

Meaning and Naming of the Places	Small places in Sawa village (such as Sakewathan, Sohandhara, Bomlongma etc) and many places inside Nayakharka CF area	All the places, having local meanings (some have myths and oral history), have names in the local language (Rai language)	Perform special rituals in many of the places such as Sakewa pooja in Sakewathan in eastern-upper part of Sawa village	Community solidarities are enhanced through collective organisation and participation of/ in ritual events
Meaning and Naming of the Rivers	All the rivers in and around Sawa village (namely Sawa, Pikhuwa, Khoiba, Bungkhuwa, Hingkhuwa etc.)	Names of the rivers as shelter of the river deities	Worship rivers and water in special occasions and/or perform special poojas	Sense of collectivities and community solidarities are developed and enhanced; culturally constructed relation between people and the nature is (re) affirmed
Culture and Rituals	A number of ritual practices (namely Sakewa pooja, Pikhuwa pooja, Panchabali Pooja, Goth pooja, Bhume pooja etc.)	Should beg excuse for their economic interventions, worship for the fulfilment of their wishes, thanking for all the gifts of nature (such as crops, foods etc.)	Worship through different rituals or poojas	Sense of collectivities and community solidarities are developed and enhanced; cultural connection between people and the nature is (re)affirmed
Reciprocal Labour Exchange	Chewar, Marriage, Chautara making, Panchabali, special family functions such as house construction and renovations etc.	For moral obligations	Contribute voluntary labour, ritual honour by host family as reciprocity for voluntary contribution (labour)	Develop sense of collectivities and community solidarities; foundation of moral economy

Source: Fieldwork, 2015 to 2019 (self-compiled based on interviews and observations)

Policy Hurdles and Cultural Diversity in Nepal

The government institutions such as the Department of Industry, Department of Cottage and Small Industry, Forest-Based Enterprise Promotion Division of the Ministry of Forest and Environment, do not facilitate CBFEs (Poudel *et al.* 2022). This means forest based enterprises have been attributed to a range of policy constraints that have been creating confusion and nuisances in CBEF promotion (Paudel and Paudel 2010; Sharma *et al.* 2017). These constraints are experienced in the form of state's administrative hurdles and bureaucratic controls (FAO 2018). These forms of policy constraints are creating barriers in raw material collection, supply, transportation, processing, and marketing which have been making the forest based enterprises less attractive sector for investment (Adhikari *et al.* 2019; GoN 2016; Paudel and Paudel 2010; Paudel *et al.* 2022; Rai *et al.* 2015a; Rai *et al.* 2015b). The agencies and support organisations are compelled to promote private sector concepts, techniques, methods, and steps in developing CBFEs due to policy constraints. This has been creating question as well as dilemmas of whether the community is an appropriate entity to establish and operate CBFEs. In this context, hybrid structure between the community and market is suggested as a solution (McCarthy 2005). However, there is a question and dilemma of how this structure addresses cultural dimensions of indigenous people. This dilemma demands in-depth studies and understanding about the status and long term importance of cultural attributes of particular communities.

Nepal is diverse not only in ecology but also in culture and cultural practices. National census 2021 identified a total of 142 caste ethnic

groups (GoN/NSO 2021) and of them, more than hundreds of ethnic groups are indigenous nationalities. One of the basic characteristic of indigenous nationalities is cultural and historical association/relation with the land, forest and nature in and around them. The studies show that the indigenous people hold historically rooted cultural associations with forest resources in and around them and such associations often get reflected in the form of distinct knowledge on resource conservation (Gadgil *et al.* 1993). These associations can be observed in different forms such as myths, oral history, culture and ritual performances of/to their ancestral lands and forest in Nepal (Allen 2012; Fortier 2009; Nicoletti 2006) and other parts of the world (Armstrong 2008; Barthes 1972; Coupe 1997; Friedman 1992; Hendy 2002; Hugh-Jones 2016; Iii 1991; Leak 1994; Lorenz 2008; Murdock 1971). These practices also exist in the form of forest conservation and management practices (Chhetri 1994; Fisher 1994; Furer-Haimendorf 1975; Gilmore & Fisher 1991; Messerschmidt 1994). However, these systems are declining as a result of states' centralised and regulatory policies and laws imposed in different forms such as biodiversity and forest conservation (Agrawal 1995; Anaya 1996; Colchester 2005) and land rights/entitlements (Regmi 1978; Shrestha 2001). In this context, a question is whether and to what extent the concept, practices and policies on CBFEs have acknowledged or considered these dimensions.

Neoliberal Economy and Moral Economy as Conflicting Economic Paradigms

Neoliberal economy (Becker 1976; Friedman 1957; Hayek 1950) that believes the promotion of the market as an undeniable phenomenon and decisive in all societal and political decisions is becoming a dominant paradigm

in recent years. Regarding economic growth from forest resources, the neoliberal economy has great beliefs in individual freedom or the private sector's promotions as means and goals of economic growth and development (McCarthy 2005; Petrova 2014). However, this concept was criticised very early by many scholars and one of the many was David Harvey who argued that the capital as ultimate goal of the neoliberal economy is a process of the formation of the layers of human crisis (Harvey 1985). He, by providing political-economic story and history of the neoliberal

economy, has precaution about political and economic dangers from its unpredictable widespread and growth in the globe (Harvey 2005). He is of the opinion that neo-liberalism is a creative destruction of human's social relations, welfare provisions, attachments to the land and natural resources, habits of the heart, ways of thoughts, and many others (Harvey 2006). Also argued that the neoliberal market economy in forestry sector is neither beneficial to the local communities nor to the environment (Igoe & Brockington 2007).

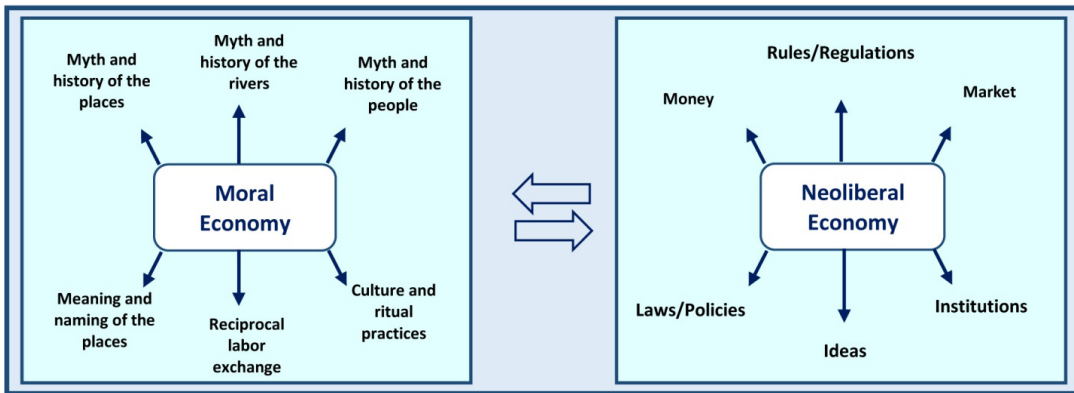


Figure 2: Interface between moral economy and neoliberal economy

Karl Polanyi (1944), in mid 1940s conceptualised labour as an essential component for the functioning of the market economy. He argued that the attempt to turn labour into market commodities has detrimental social consequences (Polanyi 1944). One of the important consequences is a rupture in the embedded social and cultural relationships due to the fact that the market is always causing the destruction of reciprocal exchange system (Kranton 1996). This means the economic life of the people in many parts of the world, especially in the remote village including communities of the indigenous people, operates or functions

through moral obligations (Mauss 1990). He, by exploring gift exchange systems in archaic societies, talked about three obligations: “to give, to receive, and to reciprocate” as social processes of reciprocal economic behaviours of man (Mauss 1990). He argued that gift-giving is a complex social phenomenon that involves social obligations and expectations, creating a web of social relationships. This means gift exchange practice is a process of social reproduction, including kinship systems and the transmission of social values (Godelier 1999) that produce morality based economic relations among workers, employees and employers, and of

firms, families and households (Yalchin-Heckmann 2022). This form of practice is a common social and economic phenomenon among many of the tribal people in India (Keishing 2019). This means, reciprocal labour exchange is practiced more in small-scale societies, minority cultures and minority communities (Tohotom 2014). It gets resulted into the practice of/or emergence of social solidarities (Fujimoto 2013; Molm *et al.* 2007) as social interaction enforcement mechanisms (Fujimoto 2013; Gachter & Falk 2002). This theoretical framework helps conceptualise the understanding of voluntary labour exchange practices among the people in *Sawa* village as reciprocal social behaviours or part of moral economy in the interface of increasing neoliberal economy.

STRUGGLES AND EXPERIENCES: THE CASE OF HHPE

The Rai people in *Sawa* village have stories of struggles and experiences for the establishment and functioning of Hanspokhari Handmade Paper Enterprise (HHPE). These stories include develop community consensus for the location, ensure required investment, setting up of the physical/technical infrastructure, start production, marketing or supply of the products, and efforts for its sustainability. The story of struggles begun when the staffs of the support organisations (namely Livelihood Forestry Program-LFP) came and started enquiring about the availability of *Lokta* plants.

Table 2: Number of HHPE related decisions (by *Nayakharka* CFUG from 2002 to 2019)

SN	Groups and Sub-Groups	Number of Decisions (under types of meeting)				
		Monthly	GA	Special	Total	%
1	Handmade Paper Enterprise	47	12	28	87	8.1
2	Conservation ³	139	24	30	193	18.0
3	Livelihood Improvements ⁴	150	12	37	193	18.0
4	Access to Forest Resources ⁵	132	29	21	182	17.0
5	Infrastructure Development ⁶	51	9	4	64	6.0
6	Other ⁷	215	49	87	351	32.8
Total		728	135	207	1070	100.0

Source: Compiled from meeting minutes, 2019

³ This includes rotational forest guard (88), plantation and conservation (35), thinning and pruning (16), forest fire control (15) and Hanspokhari conservation (39).

⁴ This includes income generating activities (69), CFUG income (107), and tourism (17).

⁵ This includes penalize user households (34), penalize non-user households (55), access to resources (77), and include new user households (16).

⁶ This includes foot trails (20), River Bridge (5), and CFUG building (39).

⁷ This includes project related decisions (59), DFO related decisions (51), review of the meetings (102), and others (139).

During 18 years time (between 2002⁸ to 2019), *Nayakharka* CFUG had taken a total of 1070 decision and of these 87 decisions (8.1%) were related to HHPE. The monthly meeting held on February 22, 2007 was the first formal decisions for the establishment of a handmade paper enterprise under the leadership of

Nayakharka CFUG. However, this decision became an issue of conflict between the people from *Sawa* and neighbouring villages, namely *Fongla* and *Khambukha*. The reason was that the community leaders from neighbouring villages also wanted to establish handmade paper enterprise in their village.

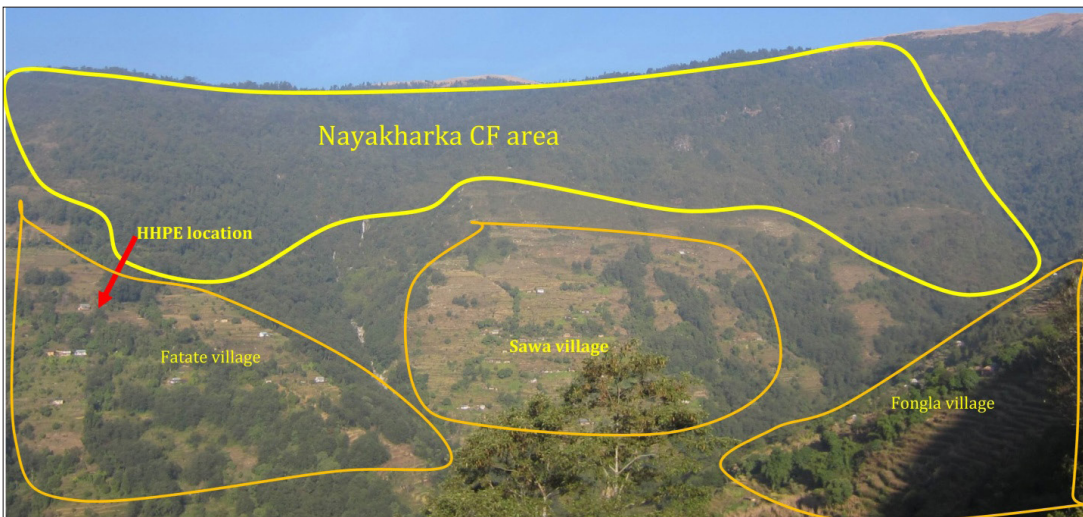


Photo: Sawa village (places plotted by the researcher)

Establishment and Functioning of HHPE

Location and Ownership:

On January 11, 2015, Prem Sampnag Rai (chair of the HHPE management committee) sitting by the side of the hearth inside his house said: "Our enterprise has story of surprise!" He meant to say that HHPE has long story that may make the people surprised to listen and know. In this story, Mani Kumar Rai⁹, Prem Sampnag Rai and Ash Bahadur Rai¹⁰ and many other community leaders from Sawa village had voluntarily involve in advocating

and campaigning for the establishment of handmade paper enterprise in Sawa village under their ownership and leadership. Their involvements resulted into an intense inter-community conflicts, the conflicts between people from Sawa village and the neighbouring villages namely Fongla and Khambukha. The reason was that the community leaders from neighbouring villages also wanted to establish the enterprise in their village under their ownership and leadership. A number of joint committees and sub-committees were formed to resolve their conflicting claims. However, the inter-community conflicts continued for about

⁸ It was the year when *Nayakharka* CFUG was formally registered.

⁹ He was secretary of CFUG at that time, manager of HHPE between 2010-2014, and chair of CFUG after 2016.

¹⁰ Chair of *Nayakharka* CFUG from 2022 to 2016.

two years. The community leaders from both the sides organised series of internal meetings and collective gatherings. Finally, a community gathering organised early 2009 in Khamkbukha village became decisive to the fact that this gathering, after full day conflicting claims, discussions and debates reached to the consensus in the favour of the claims and demands of the people and leaders from *Sawa* village. Regarding this, Prem Sampang recalled and said: “After this decision, a big responsibility came to the hand of *Nayakharka* and *Hattimare* CFUGs. So, I started to devote my time and mind for the establishment of handmade paper enterprise”. Prem Sampang further said: “We later realised that the decision of this gathering was not a win of our battle; rather it was just a start”. A question is why people in *Sawa* voluntarily devoted their time and efforts for this purpose. Regarding this, Ash Bahadur Rai (72) said: “It was our battle for our collective rights and prestige. We fought for collective goods but not for money and the self”. All the struggles and contribution were self-motivated voluntary contribution and these motivations were due to the sense of ownership over forest territories, collectivities and community solidarities enhanced through sense of their place and their collective history of the place and their ancestors.

Formal Registration

This process was a start to encounter a number of administrative and technical difficulties. Regarding this Prem Sampang recalled and said: “We were like a crow in the cloud”. He meant to say that they were completely unknown about the technical and administrative processes of the establishment

of the enterprise. Based on the series of consultation meetings and community decisions *Hanspokhari Agriculture Cooperative* was registered in the District Agriculture Division Office (DADO) in Bhojpur (registration date: April 6, 2010). The purpose of this cooperative was to manage funds (ensure investments) of the enterprise. However, registration of the enterprise became difficult for many reasons. Namely carry out forest resources inventory (Lokta inventory), policy contradictions between District Cottage and Small Industry (DCSI) and DFO¹¹, and fulfill other administrative requirements. The forest technicians, came in the financial supports of LFP, prepared Lokta inventory report (approved on December 24, 2010 by the concerned DFO); other two requirements became a big challenge for them. Finally, they became able to register an enterprise named *Hanspokhari Handmade Paper Enterprise* (HHPE) on January 24, 2011. In accordance to the existing legal provisions, the enterprise was registered in the name of Prem Sampang Rai (as proprietor) and *Nayakharka* CFUG as official entity for the collection and supply of raw materials and marketing of the of products. In fact, registration of the HHPE became possible due to the constant dedication of the community leaders and voluntary contributions of the community members. Regarding this, Prem Sampang said: “Registration of the enterprise was related with our collective prestige. We had to do it to show our collective strengths and leadership capacities”. He meant to say that the dedicated leadership and voluntary contribution were due to collective moral obligations enhanced through cultural attributes.

¹¹ DCSI did not have policy to register the enterprise in the name of CFUG, while DFO did not allow the registration of enterprise in the name of person if the enterprise to be registered in within the 2 KM distance from forest area.

Physical Setups

Physical setups, as another step of community struggle, includes preparation of physical space including construction of the hut, collection required financial investments, identify/buy and transport the machine and other equipments, and installation/fitting of the machine. They were completely unknown about these requirements. They organised series of formal and informal meetings and gatherings to take necessary decisions and mobilise community members. The community leaders, as per the collective decisions, bought and transported the required equipments and materials such as Lokta biting-machine, *lokta* boiling-pots, iron nets, prepare wooden frames, caustic soda, rubber hand-gloves and shoes for workers. They bought and transported these equipments and materials from the nearest market (Dharan and Biratnagar). Regarding this, Mani Kumar recalled and said: "It took almost 10 days for me to bring required materials and equipments from Dharan in the first visit and another eight full days in the second visit to bring biting-machine". In addition, 4 full days of other 2 persons (transport from Leguwaghat to Bhojpur), and 2 full days of other 5 persons (to transport from Bhojpur to Sawa) to transport biting machine to Sawa. They also constructed three temporary bamboo huts (one for boiling Lokta, second for installing biting-machine and third for storing paper and other materials), prepared wooden frames and installed biting machine. They completed these activities through voluntary labour contribution of the leaders and user households. Later, they constructed two storeys house/building (with the use of stone, mud and wood with tin roof) in the same place (started in 2012 and completed by the end of 2013). This house, according to them, worths about NRs 1000000 in 2019. The construction of this house became possible

only because of more than 50 percent of voluntary labour contribution by all the user households. Regarding the voluntary labour contribution, Mani Kumar Rai said: "Almost all the users of our CFUG are our relatives and hence mobilising community members became easier". Sita Devi Rai also reiterated by saying: "All of us are relatives and therefore no one opposes the collective decisions for collective actions". This means one of the reasons of voluntary labour contribution was kinship relations among the members and leaders.

Starting Paper Production

Complicated administrative process for raw material collection and supply and lack of skills or skilled human resources were a big challenge to start paper production. The first challenge was that they had to make frequent visits to the concerned district forest office in order to get official permissions for the collection and then supply of raw materials. On the other hand, collection of raw materials itself is very difficult and time consuming to the fact that a collector should go through long steps/processes such as collection of plant, peeling out the bark, and drying the bark. Regarding paper production Sajana Rai, who worked in this enterprise since its establishment, said: "A general people cannot work in handmade paper enterprise; because one should go through more than 8 steps for the production of a sheet of a paper in one hand; while on the other hand one should continuously work in the water mixed with chemical (i.e. *caustic soda*)". However, on the other hand, she expressed her happiness for having this enterprise in their village. She expressed her happiness by saying: "The visitors always talk to me! Ask me about our enterprise! I feel proud when people ask me about our enterprise. Our village become known to many people because of our

enterprise". Not only Sajana, but most of the community leaders and community members in *Sawa* village expressed their happiness and pride for having HHPE in their village. For example, Prem Sampang Rai said: "Our enterprise is identity of our village" as his beginning sentence in the CFUG monthly

meeting held on November 24, 2015. The value of this enterprise, therefore, is other than the economic benefits for the reason that the people in *Sawa* village consider this enterprise as an identity of the village, rather than the source of economy.



Photo: Paper production processes in HHPE (Photo by the researcher, 2014)

Marketing of the Products

They explored possible buyers through two means: (a) personal efforts; and (b) facilitation support by external agencies. In order to explore market through personal efforts, Mani Kumar had visited *Tinjure* handmade paper enterprise in *Sankhuwasabha*. Based on this consultation, they contacted a buyer in Kathmandu and decided to handover all the responsibility of marketing of their products

to him (Mr. Ang Dawa Sherpa). The manager, community leaders and workers of this enterprise also got opportunities to participate in two market exposure visits in some market centres in Sankhuwasabha, Jhapa and Kathmandu. The first market exposure visit¹² was organised in 2011 and the second was in 2014¹³. They were able to develop market linkages with buyers and entrepreneurs in visited market centres. They also knew market demands as well as importance of

¹² The first market exposure visit was managed by LFP staffs based in Dhankuta district headquarters. In this visit, Mani Kumar Rai and Prem Sampang Rai got opportunity to participate, observe and learn about handmade paper enterprise production processes and possible market linkages in Sankhuwasabha, Terathum, Sunsari (*Dharan* city), Jhapa and Kathmandu districts.

¹³ This visit was managed by staffs of the Multi Stakeholder Forestry Program (MSFP) based in MSFP Lot ONE cluster office in Dhankuta district headquarters. In this visit, a total of 9 individual from among the user households of *Nayakharka* and *Hattimare* CFUGs visited, observed and interacted with different handmade paper producing, upgrading and processing enterprises in Kathmandu.

maintaining quality of the products/papers¹⁴. All the efforts for market linkages were a part of their entry into the neoliberal market economy; but it contradicts with the meaning and purpose of the enterprise to the fact that paper production and marketing, as discussed before, had no/less priority as well as beliefs for monetary gains or earnings.

Efforts for HHPE's Sustainability

Self-decision and collective actions for the conservation and management of Lokta and Argheli plants remained one of important priorities. Monthly meeting held on November 3, 2003 was a first formal decision in which they collectively decided to control illegal collection and supply of Lokta barks from their CF area. Collective decisions and actions of this kind had frequently taken place in later months and years. They had taken a number of collective decisions and actions for plantation of Lokta and Argheli saplings. They planted Lokta in CF areas and Argheli plants in both CF areas and the private lands. Regarding this, Mani Kumar Rai said: "Recently (in 2015), we have planted about 10,000 saplings of Argheli in the CF area under the scheme of land allocation for user households. We have also planted lots of Argheli saplings in the private lands as

well as inside our CF areas". It was observed that (in 2019) the planted Lokta and Argheli saplings (grown up to complete maturity) were wasted for a reason that HHPE was non-functional since 2015. One of the reason was that local people were neither confident nor interested about the economic benefits from collection and supplying of Lokta and Argheli barks. This means, all the efforts for the establishment and functioning of HHPE were due to social and moral obligations developed through collective decisions and actions. Regarding this, Kamal Kumar Rai (55 year old man) said: "I do not believe that we will earn money from plantation of Lokta and Argheli saplings; but we did these all to show our unity in terms of collective decisions and actions to other people".

Investments and Earnings in/from HHPE

As presented in table 3 that NRs 1108750 is a total capital investment of HHPE (between 2010 and 2018). Of these, 14.9 per cent (NRs 164760) were capital share investment from the user households, 9.9 per cent (NRs 110000) were personal donations, and 75.2 per cent (NRs 833990) were donation from different organisations.

¹⁴ Quality of papers as they knew include: ensure proper shape, appropriate labelling, appropriate colour, free from dust and particle, appropriate weight, no damage, free from unnecessary particles inside the label of sheet. They also knew upgrading technologies such as colouring and producing artistic paper crafts like diaries, lampshades, and paper crafts.

Table 3: Sources of funding for the establishment and functioning of HHPE

SN	Name of donors	Years									Total
		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
A. Financial Supports by Organisations/Donors/Governments											
1	LFP	78740	175000								253740
2	Timma VDC		25000								25000
3	DFO Bhojpur		100000								100000
4	MSFP					85250	100000	120000			305250
5	TMRM ¹⁵								150000		150000
	Total-A	78740	300000	0	0	85250	100000	120000	0	150000	833990
B. Personal Donation											
6	Prem Sampang Rai	100000									100000
7	Ang Dawa Sherpa		10000								10000
	Total-B	100000	10000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	110000
C. Share Investment (capital share in HHPE and through Cooperatives)											
8	Capital share (40 HHs)		22260								22260
9	Cooperative (25 HHs)	142500									142500
	Total-C	142500	22260	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	164760
	Total (A+B+C)	321240	332260	240000	0	85250	100000	120000	0	150000	1108750

Source: Compiled from meeting minutes, 2019

¹⁵ TMRM stands for Tyamke Mayum Rural Municipality. The community leaders reported that TMRM and HHPE has agreement for NRs 4,00,000 for the up-grading of HHPE in this fiscal year (2020) however the activities are yet to carry out for the release of the fund.

A total of 772 *koris* of handmade papers (during four fiscal years i.e. 2011-2014) had been produced and a total of NRs 1716000 was earned from its marketing/selling (see table 4). However, paper production was completely stopped after 2015 for many reasons and one of the reasons was damage of its water supply (canal) by the micro-hydropower plant being started to construct in early 2015. The next reason was lack of skilled human resources; while third but important reason was their

no/less confidence of economic benefits. Establishment of HHPE was due to their public commitments and functioning was due to their community prestige. Establishment and functioning of HHPE made possible through collective decisions and actions for voluntary labour contributions. The fundamental basis of such decisions and actions are moral obligations enhanced through cultural attributes.

Table 4: Quantity of handmade paper, marketed price and earnings

a) Quantity of the paper (<i>kori</i>)				
Years	Thickness of the paper (grams)			Total
	30 gram	20 gram	10 gram	
2011	73	124	4	201
2012	178			178
2013	173			173
2014	79	131	10	220
Total	503	255	14	772

b) Selling Price Rate (NRs per <i>kori</i> of paper having different weight categories)			
Years	30 gram	20 gram	10 gram
2011	2100	1400	700
2012	2500		
2013	2600		
2014	2600	2100	1100

c) Earning from selling the paper products				
Years	30 gram	20 gram	10 gram	Total
2011	153300	173600	2800	329700
2012	445000	0	0	445000
2013	449800	0	0	449800
2014	205400	275100	11000	491500
Total	1253500	448700	13800	1716000

Source: Field work, 2019 (compiled from CFUG records)

There is lack of systematic data/records of the expenditure and earning from HHPE. A study of the Tinjure Handmade Paper Pvt Ltd in Sankhuwasabha district found that a total of 57 per cent of the income from selling the handmade paper products is spend for buying required raw materials (Rai & Dahal 2016, p. 55). Regarding cost for raw materials in HHPE, Mani Kumar and Prem Sampang said that about 50 per cent (NRs 858000) of the total earning from the selling of paper products spend for raw materials and about 20

per cent (NRs 343200) spend as institutional management cost (labour, chemicals, other materials etc). The remaining 30 per cent (NRs 514800) may be speculative profits of the HHPE for 40 HHs as share holders. The speculative annual income from raw material collection/supply and HHPE profits of a single household became NRs 9527 (Table 5). This income/earning is not encouraging in compare to the extent of voluntary labour contribution and time consuming process of raw material collection.

Table 5: Speculative income/earning from HHPE

Headings	Total (NRs) (cost and profit)	Total (NRs) (HHs/members)	Income (NRs)	
			Total	Annual in 4 years
Cost for raw materials	858000	34	25235	6309
HHPE profits	514800	40	12870	3218
Management cost	343200			
Total (HHPE earning)	1716000			
Average (HHs earning)			38105	9527

Source: Field work, 2019 (speculative calculation)

One of the important decisions and practice of *Nayakharka* CFUG was to make the presence of every household as mandatory for the collection and supply of Lokta raw materials. This means they collected raw materials collectively and then divided the income equally. The average earning shows that HHPE could not become a means of economy. However, it became a platform to demonstrate collectivity and community solidarities. Regarding this Ash Bahadur Rai said: “Actually, we established this enterprise to show our strengths of collective works to others. We became successful because we all are always united for collective works.” Manikala Rai (35 years old lady) also said: “I did not count the days I have voluntarily contributed for our enterprise. But I say that it was my responsibility to obey collective

decisions and rules!” She meant to say that the decision for HHPE establishment and functioning were their own decisions and contributing as per the decisions was personal responsibility as respect for the collective rules.

On the other hand, collective decisions and actions for the establishment, functioning, marketing and sustainability of HHPE were due to the influence and support of external agencies. Regarding this, Ash Bahadur said: “We did according to what the people came from district and different parts of the country said and suggested us. We were completely unknown about all the processes to be followed and their future results. We did not earn money from these efforts, however I would say that we at least became

able to demonstrate our unity and collective strengths". The statement by Ash Bahadur and many other community leaders for HHPE in Sawa village and results from these efforts until now are evidence of the influence of the market and voluntary contributions.

DISCUSSIONS

The issue of how economic behaviours of the people at local level operate is one of the important dimensions of CBFEs. It is because local economy helps understand and assess strengths and weaknesses of the people as collective force. This paper, based on the cultural attributes (Table 1) of the study people, has considered following three issues as cultural dimensions of economic behaviours.

Developed Collectivities

The studies argue that myths and oral history of the places and the people in the particular places are important foundations as well as sources of the collectivities of the people, particularly among the indigenous people who have socio-cultural relation with the nature (such as land, forest, water, grazing lands and other form of natural resources) (Armstrong 2008; Barthes 1972; Coupe 1997; Friedman 1992; Hendy 2002; Hugh-Jones 2016; Iii 1991; Leak 1994; Lorenz 2008; Murdock 1971). This conceptualisation is applicable in the case of HHPE in Sawa village for the reason that the study people have deeply embedded socio-cultural relations as well as sense of ownership with/for the nature in and around them and these are observable in different forms of cultural attributes (Table 1). They have been sustaining these attributes through articulation of the different forms of myths and oral histories of the places (i.e. villages, particular places, rivers) and their ancestors (i.e. ritual worshipping, migrations,

settlements). These forms of their relations and sense of ownerships are foundations of their collectivities (Bell 1992; Turner 1998; Turner and Turner 2006) and that have been continued through culture and ritual performances.

Enhanced Community Solidarities

One of the characteristic features of indigenous people is collective actions developed over centuries of history such as culture and rituals of worshipping land, forest, water and other form of nature (Agrawal 1995; Alcorn 2011; Anaya 1996; Asante *et al.* 2017; Kala 2017). These forms of cultural attributes of the indigenous people not only determine their worldviews (Bell 1992; Melaku-Getahun 2016), but also enhance social ties and community solidarities (Boyer & Wertsch 2009; Xygalata *et al.* 2013). The ethnographic studies among different Rai clan groups in eastern hill of Nepal (Allen 2012; Gaenzle 2000; Hardman 2000b; Nicoletti 2006) have also found these forms of cultural attributes. Similarly, the people in Sawa village have also performed different forms of the rituals of worshipping natures (Table 1) such as worshipping land, water, forest patches, and special places as shelter of the nature gods and deities as well as worshipping ancestor gods and goddesses. These forms of cultural values, beliefs and ritual practices are cultural foundations of the community solidarities.

Sustained Reciprocal Economic Behaviours

It is argued that economic behaviours of the traditional societies are operated through reciprocity and/or moral obligations (Godelier 1999; Harvey 2006; Keishing 2019; Mauss 1990; Polanyi 1994; Yalchin-Heckmann 2022). This is social process of economic behaviours of man that create social

obligations, expectations, and a web of social relationships (Mauss 1990). These forms of economic behaviours are practiced more in small scale societies, minority cultures and minority communities (Tohtom 2014) which more often get resulted into the practice (or emergence) of social solidarities as social interaction enforcements mechanisms (Fujimoto 2013; Gachter & Falk

2002). The people in Sawa village have also been thriving to sustain culture of reciprocity and moral economic behaviours. They have been practicing these forms of economic behaviours in different ritual performances (such as Chautara making works, Panchabali pooja, Chewar etc.) and economic activities (such as house construction and renovation, special works like firewood collection) (Table 1).

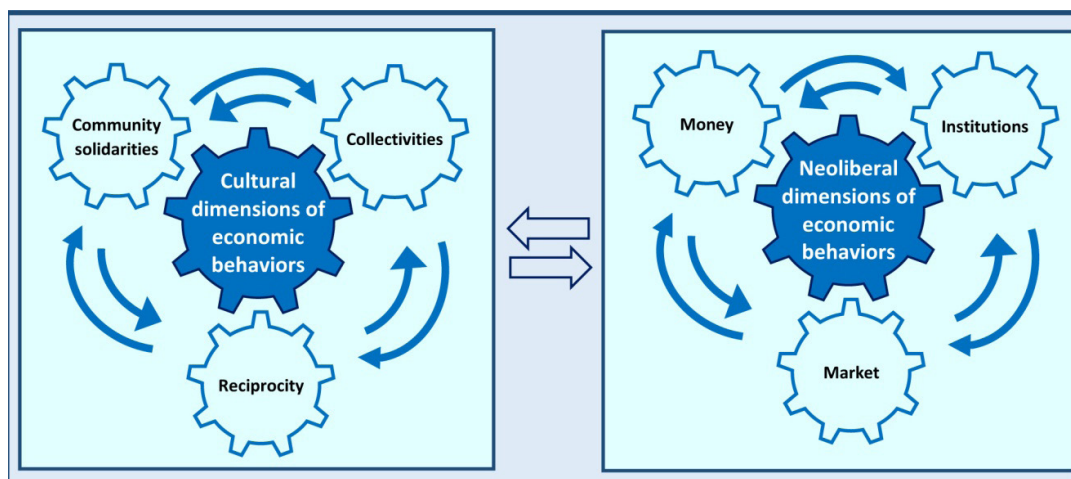


Figure 3: Cultural dimensions and neoliberal-economic dimensions of economic behaviours

However, on the other hand, the neoliberal economy penetrated in Sawa village in different forms, such as promotion and advancement of CBF, have been creating not only the confusions and dilemmas in the economic behaviours of the people; but these also have been creating different forms of institutions, ideas, roles, responsibilities, and obligations. These have been creating dilemmas and contradictions upon historically rooted economic behaviours (which is called “moral economic behaviours”). Here, establishment and functioning of HHPE in Sawa village as a penetration of neoliberal economic behaviours have been analysed from following three dimensions.

Funding and Investments

It is argued that one of the basic characteristic feature of neoliberal economy is its attempt to turn labour into market commodities (Polanyi 1944). This process became a cause for the destruction in reciprocal exchange systems (Kranton 1996). The case of HHPE in Sawa village is also an example of how culturally rooted moral economic behaviours of local people have been interrupted by the external financial supports (money or funds) came and/or received from different donors (Table 3). For example, collective decisions and actions for collection/management of the funds or investment (such as registration

and functioning of cooperative) have become processes of bringing/pushing them towards techno-bureaucratic control.

Technical and Administrative Procedures

The studies argue that forest based enterprise policies and governing institutions in Nepal (as per policies, acts, regulations etc) are creating confusion and nuisances in CBFE promotion (Paudel and Paudel 2010; Sharma *et al.* 2017). One of the examples could be the costly and complicated registration processes (Adhikary *et al.* 2019; Paudel *et al.* 2018). Moreover, state's administrative hurdles and bureaucratic controls on forest based enterprise in Nepal (FAO 2018) have been making the forestry based enterprises less attractive sector for investment (Adhikari *et al.* 2019; GoN 2016; Paudel and Paudel 2010; Paudel *et al.* 2018; Paudel *et al.* 2022). In addition to this, the steps and processes of the establishment and functioning of HHPE in Sawa village is an example of how the socio-cultural and economic behaviours of the people in remote village gradually came under the state's techno-bureaucratic control as like as a theoretical argument of "governmentality" (Foucault 1991) or "new liberal governmentality upon the marginalised people" (Gupta 2012). An example is that the community leaders and people in Sawa village compelled to follow all the administrative processes and procedures of the government (e.g. DCSI and DFO) for the establishment and functioning of HHPE. These have become techno-bureaucratic processes of changing or replacing (and/or displacing) local socio-economic behaviours.

Market Linkages

It is argued that Nepal's forestry sector has achieved limited success in terms of economic growth and contribution (GoN 2016; GoN

2019; MSFP 2014). One of the major reasons, as argued, is lack of appropriate market linkage (FAO 2018; MSFP 2014; Rai and Chapagain 2014; Rai *et al.* 2016). On the other hand, the scholars who criticise neoliberal market approach (Godelier 1999; Harvey 2006; Keishing 2019; Mauss 1990; Polanyi 1994; Yalchin-Heckmann 2022) argue that market linkages within neoliberal economic frameworks break the existing social system of the economic life of local people. The case of HHPE in Sawa village also demonstrates the processes of how the people in Sawa village gradually became dependent to the market functioned as a part of neoliberal economy. This means, HHPE interventions and people's engagements have become socio-political processes of the penetration of neoliberal economic market's institutions and ideas into the socio-economic behaviours of the people in Sawa village. It is a process of the "market linkage" and it has resulted into breaks, displacement and/or destruction of the local economic behaviours that were based on the historically rooted web of social relation that is grounded on the practice of reciprocity.

CONCLUSIONS

Interface between moral economy (Godelier 1999; Harvey 2006; Keishing 2019; Mauss 1990; Polanyi 1994; Yalchin-Heckmann 2022) and neoliberal economic (Becker 1976; Friedman 1957; Hayek 1950) frameworks on forest-based enterprises, particularly on CBFE interventions, displace and/or destroy culturally rooted local economic behaviours. The case becomes further deteriorating for the communities having historically rooted cultural attributes that are interrelated and interdependent with surrounding nature and the environment. The displacement and/or destruction of the culturally rooted local economic behaviours take place through

expansion of the techno-bureaucratic processes and procedures for CBFE interventions and/or engagements of the local people in one hand; while on the other hand neoliberal economic institutions (e.g. management committee, cooperative, HHPE) and ideas (i.e. forest resources is source of money) gradually change the attitudes and economic behaviours of the people.

However, a thorough look at the interface between the indigenous communities having cultural attributes as fundamentals to the web of reciprocal social relations and the CBFE interventions (that come with the concept and practice of neoliberal economy) seems like complement each other. For example, the interventions and outcomes of HHPE in Sawa village may give an impression that CBFE interventions are contributing to the local economy on one hand; and on the other hand, cultural attributes of Rai people in Sawa village complement to the entire HHPE intervention processes. A minute look on the case, however, contradicts to the fact that historically rooted cultural attributes that may have immeasurable values for collectivity and community solidarities have neither been recognised nor promoted; rather techno-bureaucratic processes and procedures imprinted through state's laws and policies have been established as part of the socio-economic life of the people. An interesting fact is that this process takes place within a couple of years. This has been creating not only a risk of the complete loss of the historically rooted cultural attributes of a community in the place; but it is also a microcosm of the socio-political process of the entire nation and beyond. It raises a question of whether and to what extent the protection of moral economy is important in Nepal and beyond when promotion and advancement of the forest based enterprises including CBFEs becomes an issue for policies and the practices.

No doubt that promotion and advancement of CBFEs could be a vehicle for the improvement of local livelihood as well as source of the national economy. However, the studies and debates on CBFEs until now have paid little or no attentions about the long term socio-environmental effect or impacts of the loss of the diverse forms (and natures) of cultural attributes of the indigenous people and local communities. It demands comprehensive studies at the national level, followed with ethnographic studies in some of the selected CBFEs as representatives of the diverse cases so that the evidence based policy debates takes place, evidence based policies are formulated, and appropriate institutional arrangements are made and translated into the practice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is based on the PhD research in Anthropology conducted under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) at Tribhuvan University Nepal. The fieldwork grant for this research was provided by Nagao Natural Environment Foundation (NEF), Tokyo in Japan. So, I am grateful to NEF for the research fieldwork grant.

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