

Stakeholders' Responses to Changes in Forest Policies in Pluralism and sustainable forestry and rural development

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Abstract

In recent years, worldwide forest resource degradation and its impact on biodiversity and global warming have attracted a great deal of attention of those involved in the forestry sector at the national and international level. Consequently, planners and policy makers are reconsidering forest policies, and an increasing number of projects have been launched in different parts of the world with the aim of linking conservation with economic development objectives.

Nonetheless, there has been little progress in effectively integrating local people's economic development needs with forest resource conservation objectives. Project designers have been unable to come up with strategies and approaches that would enable them to translate the principles and concepts into effective on-the-ground action (Wells, 1995).

One of the main reasons is that most forestry projects have tended to mobilise their resources and efforts towards addressing the direct causes of forest degradation (e.g. conversion of forest lands to agriculture, collection of firewood and fodder by rural people, wildlife trade, etc.), rather than the less evident underlying reasons which actually drive the use of forest resources.

This paper attempts to provide an analytical framework to determine some of the underlying reasons for forest degradation by examining Nepal's land use policies and practices in a historical context and from the perspective of different interest groups, or stakeholders, who are influenced by such policies. It is expected that this analytical framework may also be relevant for other countries facing similar forestry issues.

The paper is based on three arguments:

- First, although there are many stakeholders with their own social, economic and political goals, most policies relating to forest and other land uses are generally formulated in isolation, mostly by one stakeholder - the government - considering largely its own interests and goals.
- Second, analyses are generally made considering current policy and practices, which may have been the result of past policies and actions.
- Finally, most analyses generally concentrate on stated (expressed) objectives or interests, especially those of government policy and programmes, rather than the unstated objectives and interests which often drive the actions.

Réactions des parties prenantes face à l'évolution des politiques forestières

Sommaire

Ces dernières années, la dégradation généralisée des ressources forestières et son impact sur la biodiversité et le réchauffement de la planète ont suscité l'attention grandissante des praticiens du secteur forestier au niveau national et international. En conséquence, les planificateurs et les responsables politiques sont en train de réexaminer les politiques forestières, et un nombre croissant de projets ont été lancés aux quatre coins du monde dans le but de rattacher la conservation aux objectifs de développement économique.

Néanmoins, l'intégration véritable des besoins de développement économique des populations locales dans les objectifs de conservation des ressources forestières n'a guère avancé. Les planificateurs des projets ont été incapables d'élaborer des stratégies et des méthodes permettant de traduire les principes et les concepts en interventions concrètes sur le terrain (Wells, 1995).

Une des principales raisons est que la plupart des projets de foresterie avaient tendance à concentrer leurs ressources et leurs efforts sur les causes directes de la dégradation de la forêt (ex. conversion des aires forestières en terres agricoles, collecte du bois de feu et des aliments pour animaux par les ruraux, commerce de faune et de flore sauvages, etc.), plutôt que sur les motifs sous-jacents et moins évidents qui déterminent réellement l'utilisation des ressources forestières.

Cet article présente un cadre analytique pour déterminer les raisons fondamentales de la dégradation des forêts en examinant les politiques et pratiques d'utilisation des terres au Népal dans un contexte historique et en

partant du point de vue de différents groupements d'intérêt -- ou partenaires - qui sont soumis à l'influence de ces politiques. Ce cadre analytique peut être également utilisé dans d'autres pays confrontés à des problèmes similaires.

L'article se fonde sur trois hypothèses de base:

- Premièrement, malgré l'existence de nombreux partenaires ayant leurs propres objectifs sociaux, économiques et politiques, la plupart des politiques relatives à la forêt et à d'autres utilisations des terres sont formulées de manière isolée, généralement par une seule partie - le gouvernement - qui considère essentiellement ses propres intérêts et objectifs.*
- Deuxièmement, les analyses sont généralement effectuées en tenant compte des politiques et pratiques actuelles, qui peuvent être le fruit des politiques et actions passées.*
- Enfin, la plupart des analyses se concentrent sur des objectifs ou des intérêts exprimés, en particulier ceux des politiques et programmes gouvernementaux, plutôt que sur les objectifs et intérêts non déclarés qui sont souvent le moteur principal des actions.*

1. A Case study of Nepal's Forests and Other Land Use Policies and Practices

1.1 General background

Nepal, located between India (to the east, south and west) and China (to the north), is amongst the poorest countries in the world, with a per capita income of less than US\$200 and some 40 percent of its 19 million people living in absolute poverty. The economy is dominated by the agricultural sector which contributes a little over 50 percent of GDP and some 90 percent of employment. Agricultural production is largely based on subsistence economy, and dominated by small farmers with less than one hectare average land-holding, although in places with access to motor roads and markets and irrigation facilities, agricultural activities are becoming commercialised. Off-farm cash earning activities are beginning to play an important role in the household economy of some of these areas.

Based on altitude and climate which largely govern the country's vegetation and farming systems, Nepal can be divided into three agro-ecological regions - the *Terai*, the hills and the high mountains.

- The Terai, along the southern border, is an extension of the Gangetic plain and covers approximately 14 percent of the Nepal's total land

(141,000 square kilometres). The altitude ranges from 60 to 300 meters above sea level. The woody vegetation is predominately evergreen hardwood, and rice is the main crop cultivated throughout the region.

- Hills make up 60 percent of the country's total land area, covering a wide altitude range (300 - 4000 m) and including diverse climatic conditions, woody vegetation and agricultural practices. Due to poor infrastructure and inadequate supplies of inorganic fertilisers, hill farming depends largely on livestock and forests for inputs and nutrients to maintain the fertility of land. Maize, millet and rice are the principle crops grown in the region.
- High mountains along the northern border with China (2500m - 8000m) occupy roughly 24 percent of the Nepal's land. Although a small proportion of land supports sparse woody vegetation, the area is mostly covered with snow, and animal husbandry is the main source of income.

The most recent forest survey, using aerial photos taken in 1979, estimated that 38 per cent of the country's total area is under forest cover, with at least 10 per cent of the land surface in the form of shrub land and grasslands (Nield, 1985). The management of forests in Nepal is constrained by a number of factors, including a large and rapidly growing population, more than 90 per cent of which lives in rural areas (HMGN, 1991) and depends on forests for support. There is a high demand for forest products such as firewood, fodder, timber, medicinal plants. Wood is the major, and in most cases, the only source of energy available to the rural people (Bajracharya, 1983; Mahat, Griffin and Shepherd, 1987; MPFS, 1989). A significant amount of fodder required for livestock - so vital for the farming systems - is derived from the forests (Wyatt-Smith, 1982; Mahat, Griffin and Shepherd, 1987). The high demand for forest products gives rise to the urgent need to establish effective approaches and measures for conservation and utilisation of forest resources.

Over time, through various policies, the rulers or the government have influenced the country's land use practices, including forest land. For example, prior to the 1950s, the tendency had been to encourage conversion of forest areas into agriculture, in order to make the land productive. The new government that came into power in the 1950s decided to nationalise all the country's forests and put the resource under the control of the Forest Department. Since the 1970s, the government has implemented a community forestry policy which places the responsibility for forest management with the rural communities. At the same time, it has also set aside a number of national parks and forest reserves (11 per cent of the total land, or about 30 per cent of the total forest area) and created a separate Department of National Parks and Wildlife Protection to manage them (HMGN, 1989).

To what extent have these policies been effective in managing the country's forest resources? How have different groups viewed these policies, and how

have they responded to shifts in policy emphasis? Such questions are critical to the understanding of the problems and issues of forestry management in Nepal.

1.2 Changing forest policies and the stakeholders' responses

Hobley and Malla (1996) describe changes in Nepal's forest policy through three specific periods:

- *Prior to the 1950s*, when control of forest resources was increasingly transferred from the state to private individuals
- *From the 1950s to the 1970s*, when forest resources were nationalised and managed by the Forest Department
- *From the 1970s onwards*, when the government initiated nation-wide community forestry programmes and set aside several blocks of forest areas as reserves for wildlife conservation and national parks

The five major stakeholder groups are the state, donors, government functionaries and/or Forest Department staff, local leaders/elites and peasant farmers. NGOs have been considered here as donors, as most NGOs in Nepal are seen as donors, and many of them actually behave as donor agencies. Although peasant farmers could further be categorised into all sorts of interest groups such as caste, ethnic groups, men and women, this is beyond the purpose of this paper.

1.2.1 Prior to the 1950s

A number of studies have analysed, in general, land use policies and practices in place prior to the 1950s, and their impact. The most detailed studies include those by Stiller (1975) and Regmi (1978a, 1978b). Bajracharya (1983) and Mahat, Griffin and Shepherd (1986a, 1986b) have analysed the policies and practices, especially from the perspective of forest resources. These studies, however, have tended to take the state's actions for granted. This section will try to summarise their work, focusing more on the critical analysis of the unstated objectives for actions of different stakeholders.

Until the 1950s, land was the principal source of revenue for both the state and peasant farmers, as well as a source of prestige and power in the society. According to Stiller (1975), prior to 1743, what is now Nepal was a fragmented group of petty states, whose policies attempted to bring all land under state ownership and to ensure that it did not remain unproductive? Peasants were

deliberately encouraged to convert as much forest land as possible to agriculture in order to earn their living. In return, the state asked the peasants to pay a certain proportion - generally up to one-half - of the produce of the land as a rent or tax.

The state(s) also granted lands in the form of *jagir* and *birta* to officials and nobles who served the state or king. No tax was due on such land. While *jagir* land could be kept only as long as the concerned persons served the state, the *birta* grants had no precise time limitation, and could be inherited and retained by families until they were confiscated by the state. Many officials served as local functionaries, collecting taxes from the peasant farmers.

This land and forest policy was maintained by the Shah kings during and after the unification of Nepal (1743-1845) and by the Rana regime (1846-1950), when the hereditary Rana Prime Ministers controlled the government administration.

Three stakeholders seem to have played crucial roles in the use of forests and other land resources prior to the 1950s: the state, the local functionaries and the peasant farmers.

As land was the principal source of income for the state as well as the peasant farmers, it is no surprise that the state tried to bring land under its control. In other words, although the stated objective of the state was to increase the tax base for government administration and to use the income for the nation's welfare and provide the peasants with the means of livelihood, the underlying aim was to rule the people by controlling their principal source of income and means of livelihood.

Later, the Shah Kings strengthened the army with the stated aim of defending the state and the people; but the unstated aim was to expand the territories of the Gorkha kingdom and build its empire. The kings granted an extensive proportion of lands to soldiers as *jagir* to motivate them to invade other kingdoms.

The unstated objective of the Ranas (1846 - 1950), on the other hand, was to maintain peace with the neighbouring states and avoid invasion, control the land resources and rule the people. They confined the land grant policy to their own family members and some key officials. By 1950, some one-third of the country's agricultural and forest lands had been granted to private individuals, and of that some three-fourths belonged to the Ranas themselves (Regmi, 1978a). They used the free labour and tax accrued from the peasant farmers to build palaces and maintain the luxury of the ruling families (Regmi, 1978a).

The local functionaries fully supported and actively implemented the state land-use policy, as they were the ones who benefited most. Their own unstated interest was to get as much land as possible through *jagir* and *birta* grants, for

which they did not pay any tax, and then to use peasant farmers as tenants to cultivate their lands and exact rents (taxes). In other words, they gradually converted themselves into local landlords, or rulers.

As far as the peasant farmers are concerned, a rent of one-half of the crop yield was too high; the remaining half provided, at most, basic subsistence. As land was brought increasingly under *jagir* and *birta* tenures, the peasant farmers gradually ended up as tenant farmers, cultivating the land of local functionaries (landlords) instead of state land. The local functionaries turned landlords later introduced *kut* (contract) systems, in which the opportunity to till the land went to the highest bidder. As a result, peasant farmers paid much higher rent: under the previous system, the peasants retained half of whatever was produced, regardless of good or bad harvests, but under the *kut* system, they had to pay rent even if crops failed. A significant proportion of them were eventually forced to become slave labourers for the *jagir* and/or *birta* holders (Stiller, 1976; Regmi, 1978b). They had no other option but to continue to serve the local functionaries.

While the stated objective of peasant farmers was to serve the government by serving the local government functionaries, their unstated interests were to free themselves from the grips of the local landlords and elites and to manage their own livelihoods.

1.2.2. From the 1950s to the 1970s

Bajracharya (1983), Mahat, Griffin and Shepherd (1986a and 1986b), Gilmour and Fisher (1991), Malla (1992) and several other studies have analysed the forest policies of this period at length, but once again their analyses remain restricted to the interpretation of the government's stated aims, without questioning its stated objectives. The role of the outside donor agencies is hardly considered in the analysis.

After the overthrow of the Rana regime in 1950, the new government nationalised the country's forest resources and placed them under the Forest Department. The new government also opened Nepal to the outside world and sought foreign aid to support its development programmes. Thus, apart from the state, local functionaries and peasant farmers, two other major stakeholders (the Forest Department and foreign donor agencies) became involved in forest resources.

Now let us consider the new government's policies/actions in light of the stated objectives and possible unstated interests, as well as the subsequent stated and unstated reactions of the other stakeholders involved. The stated aim of nationalising the country's forest resources was to release the land from the control of a few powerful *birta* holders, especially the Ranas, and to equitably manage them for the benefit of all the citizens (Regmi, 1978a).

However, this action by the new government might well have been governed by several other unstated interests: one might have been to discredit the previous regimes; another might have been to exploit forest resources to generate revenue for the new government itself, as it needed to support its own development programmes and establish credibility in the eyes of the people. The new government was not unaware of the way in which the Ranas had exported logs, especially from the *Terai* forests in the south to the bordering states of India for railway sleepers. The Forest Department's subsequent activities which concentrated largely on extraction and export of timbers from the *Terai* forests prove the point.

Another action taken by the new government was to clear forests in parts of the *Terai* with the stated aim of resettling land-less people, mainly of migrants from the hills region. However, this action was also driven by an underlying economic interest - initially the export of logs and timber from the cleared forests to India and later a tax charged for using the cleared land for agriculture.

The donor agencies supported the new government's initiatives by providing both funds and technical assistance to exploit the *Terai* forests and to set up forest-based industries, both aimed at helping to generate revenue for the state. However, it appears that there were at least two unstated objectives of donor agencies, especially those in neighbouring countries: First, the *Terai* forests of Nepal also served as the most important source of timber for markets across the border. Second, because Nepal served as a buffer between the largest communist and democratic countries in the world, donor agencies were also concerned with propagating their own political ideologies and influencing government policies in Nepal.

Perhaps the Forest Department staff, which were given full authority over forests, benefited most from forest nationalisation. But since there was an insufficient number of trained foresters in Nepal, and almost no infrastructure (roads, communication networks, etc.), in no way could the Forest Department effectively manage the country's forests. These foresters, however, never expressed their inability to manage the country's forests -- doing so would have meant losing a government job associated with power and prestige in the society. Thus, although the stated objective of the forestry staff was to manage the country's forests, their underlying interest was to save their own jobs and to maintain power and prestige. The only way they could do this was by seeking the co-operation of local leaders and representatives. Interestingly, these local leaders and representatives were often landlords and the very people who had served as local functionaries in the previous regimes.

The local functionaries probably suffered most from the nationalisation of the country's forests. Many had previously controlled vast areas of forests and had devised their own systems of exercising their rights to restrict peasant farmers'

access to forests, exploiting them to serve their own interests, including imposing obligations of gifts, free labour, etc. After nationalisation, they lost control over forests and peasant farmers, and therefore prestige in the society.

The local functionaries/elites reacted to the government's decision to forest nationalisation in two ways: Many sought key positions in the new political system. Since they had been wealthy money lenders, it was not too difficult for them to be elected as local representatives. The other reaction was to cut trees indiscriminately and clear forests (Bajracharya, 1983) to make the new government policy fail.

When the Forest Department staff turned to these local representatives for co-operation in forest protection, they readily agreed, seeing an opportunity to once again be in control of forest resources and peasant farmers. In other words, both Forest Department staff and local representatives saw the benefit of developing alliances with one another in order to serve their own unstated interests.

Desperate to get out of the grips of local functionaries/elites, the peasant farmers welcomed the new government's decision to nationalise forests. Although the action did not necessarily guarantee free access to forests, there seemed to be two major underlying reasons for them to support the government action. First, the local forest would be no longer under the control of local functionaries/elites. This meant no more obligations (gifts, free labour, etc.) in exchange for forest use. Second, for the peasant farmers, the Forest Department was removed from the village, and thus not a day to day concern. The peasant farmers interpreted this as the system that allowed almost free access to forests. Indeed, there were even reports (Bajracharya, 1983) of some peasant farmers becoming involved in clearing forests for agriculture following the nationalisation.

However, as the number of forestry staff increased and more forest offices were set up in different parts of the country, greater control was imposed on the use of forests. This often led to coercive actions, fines and penalties, and even to graft and bribery. Thus, strained relationships developed, similar to those which the peasant farmers had had with the local functionaries prior to the 1950s. In such situations, the local landlords-turned-representatives took the side of the forestry staff to win their confidence and maintain the alliance with them.

Due to the government's own policy of clearing forests for generating income for the state and because of the peasant farmers' dependence on forests to meet their subsistence needs, forest resources in different parts of the country continued to deteriorate. The increased restrictions imposed by the Forest Department staff on the use of forests, then led peasant farmers to seek other alternatives to meet their economic objectives. Many peasant farmers,

especially those with large land holdings, started to grow trees on their own private farmlands to secure the regular supply of forest and tree products to meet their domestic needs and to maintain the farming system. However, many peasant farmers with small land holdings and tenant farmers who were unable to grow trees on the land they tilled had to rely on the large landholders (in most cases the local elites/leaders) for forest products. The peasant farmers were often required to work for them in return.

In other words, the local leaders/elites were able to manipulate the situation to meet their own unstated economic and political goals. On the one hand, they co-operated with the Forest Department staff to control the use of forests while, on the other, they decided to grow trees on their private lands not only to assure the regular supply of forest products to meet their own needs, but also that the peasant farmers would have to turn to them for forest products. Having sufficient trees in their own private lands also meant that these local elites/leaders did not have to go to forests for forest products - thus avoiding their own direct confrontations with the Forest Department staff.

1.2.3. From 1970s onwards

There have been numerous studies and reports on forest policies and practices from the 1970s onwards (Mahat, Griffin and Shepherd, 1987a, 1987b; Gilmour and Fisher, 1991; Gautam, 1992; Talbott and Khadka, 1994; Malla, 1992, 1996). Not only have their analyses concentrated overwhelmingly on the government's stated objectives of community forestry, but they have also done so in isolation, without considering the other actions of the government, especially decisions to set aside forest reserves and to ban the felling of some tree species. Actions of the donor agencies are hardly questioned by these analyses. There has been little attempt to analyse the unstated interests of the other stakeholders, including the outside donor agencies.

In the 1970s, the government set aside a number of forest areas as wildlife reserves and national parks and created a separate Department of Wildlife and National Parks. About the same time, it also created a Department for Soil and Water Conservation. In the late 1970s, it introduced community forestry rules and regulations with provisions to hand over forests to local communities for protection, management and sustainable use. Through community forestry, it also intended to encourage rural communities to grow trees on their private farmlands by providing free seedlings. In the early 1980s, the felling (even on private land) of some selected tree species, such as *Shorea robusta*, *Acacia catechue*, *Michelia champaca*, etc., was banned. The stated objective for these actions by the government was to protect the environment, preserve wildlife and biodiversity, meet the basic needs of rural people, support agricultural production, and thereby contribute to the process of rural development. Thus, unlike during the previous two periods under review, the government expressed

an overwhelming concern for forest resource conservation and for the need to meet the rural communities' requirements of forest products.

Such a radical decision by the government, particularly the idea of handing over forests to rural communities through community forestry raises several questions. For example, why did the government suddenly decide to set aside forest reserves and national parks? Why did it suddenly decide to turn around and hand over to rural communities the very forests which it had nationalised only two decades earlier? How committed is the government in the stated objectives of its policy decisions? Have the above objectives been achieved? If yes, to what extent? If no, why not? What have been the underlying interests of the government behind such a policy decisions? How did the different stakeholders respond to such a shift in the government forest policy? What have been the stated and unstated reasons for their actions?

Let us try to find answers to these questions. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the major stakeholders remained the same; however, as will become evident later, the outside donor agencies became increasingly influential and started to play a key role in decision making. Almost all of the forestry development and conservation activities in the country are funded by foreign donor agencies. Never before have these donor agencies been so concerned for rural development and environment protection as they are today.

Why have the donor agencies been so concerned and so willing to increase the level of funding to support the government's forest conservation and community forestry programmes, especially at a time when their own countries were undergoing a period of economic crisis?

It seems that the donors' actions at the time were governed by events in their own countries as well as international levels. First, due to an increasing tension between the world superpowers, especially throughout the 1970s and 1980s, donor countries always felt the need to maintain their presence in order to influence the government with their own political ideologies. Second, the rapid deforestation in the Himalayas and other parts of the world, and its subsequent impact on the lives of the rural communities and general environment led the international donor communities to consider the need to protect the wildlife and forest biodiversity (Eckholm, 1976; World Bank, 1978). They started to put pressure on the national government to set aside forest reserves and agreed to provide funds and other necessary support needed to protect the reserves. Third and most important, due to economic crisis including market saturation in their own countries, donor agencies were desperate for opportunities to develop, market new technologies and products and to employ their own people. Some donor agencies even started to compete with one another. Thus, the concerns expressed by donor agencies for the conservation of forest biodiversity, although important, could well have been driven by such underlying interests.

Government actions during this period are no more straightforward. For example, although community forestry rules and regulations were meant for the entire country, their implementation has been confined, even after nearly two decades, to the hills region and outside the protected areas. A community forestry project in the *Terai* region was planned and implemented, but was closed down soon after. Therefore, if the government is really concerned about meeting rural communities' forestry related needs, then why has it been implementing community forestry only in the hills region and outside protected areas? What about rural communities residing in the *Terai* region and in or around the protected areas, where the government has placed armed forest guards and armies? How do they meet their requirements of forest products, and what policy provisions does the government have for meeting the needs for forest products of the rural communities in these areas? When the government started a community forestry project in the *Terai* why did it close the project down without giving it sufficient time to test and evolve as it did for those in the hills region? While it intends to encourage private planting by providing free seedlings, why has it then banned the felling of some tree species, including those on private lands?

There appear to be at least four underlying reasons. First, by the 1970s the forest sector was no longer a major source of revenue for the state. The government had started to generate relatively substantial income from other sources such as tourism, industry, exports, etc., in addition to the increased amount of foreign aid flowing into the country. In fact, the funds received from foreign donor countries for forestry activities in the 1970s and 1980s accounted for several times more than the revenue provided by the forestry sector.

Second, the forest resources of the hills region generated little revenue, so there was no real need for the government to invest its scarce resources and therefore had very little to lose by handing over the degraded forests of the hills region to rural communities. On the other hand, the government has used armed guards to maintain its firm control over the commercially valuable *Terai* forests. Moreover, as the foreign donor agencies were willing to support conservation and community forestry related activities, the government saw the opportunity to create forest resources in the denuded hills region with almost no investment of its own money. Also, there was potential income for the government through national parks and wildlife conservation (tourism).

Third, the hills region represents the highly populated, but economically less developed area of the country (Gurung, 1969, 1971). The government has been concerned about the development of the region, not only to improve the well being of hill people, but also to gain their support for the government. From the early 1960s through to the beginning of the 1990s, the government operated under the partyless panchayat political system in which all other political parties in the country were banned. By the 1970s the increasing anti-government political activities in different parts of the country had started to

cause concern. The government responded by increasing funding for various development activities, thereby gaining support from rural communities. At about the same time, relationships between the world's superpowers had started to become increasingly tense. As discussed earlier, one of the underlying interests of the donor agencies had been to seek the government's favour for their own political ideologies. In other words, both the government and donor agencies saw benefits in helping one another to serve their own underlying interests. It is then hardly surprising that there has been an increased influence of donor agencies in the country's development programmes since the 1970s. Thus, the extent to which the government has been committed to its own stated objectives of forest resource conservation is in question.

Finally, as to the government decision to ban the felling of some trees (even on private land); the policy applies to all stakeholders except the government itself. The government has been issuing permits to harvest these tree species through commercial companies, especially its own timber corporation (Timber Corporation of Nepal). There are a number of underlying reasons for such a policy. First, the ban includes those species which are the country's most commercially valuable, because of a fear that the people might harvest these important tree products from the government forests and claim them to be from their own lands.

In some parts of the hills region, at least in areas where the field programmes have been reasonably well planned and implemented, some positive contributions of community forestry to rural development and environment protection has become more evident (Branney and Dev, 1994; Jackson and Ingles, 1994; Hunt, Jackson and Shrestha, 1995; Blockhus et al., 1995). In some villages where rural communities are in control of local forests, the condition of forests has improved dramatically: wild animals have returned (EDAW, 1994), and the supply of forest products far exceeds the communities' demands for subsistence needs (Jackson and Ingles, 1994; Jackson et al., 1995). Some of these communities have started to express interests to supply the excess products to the nearby markets and to use the income for their village development. But, have these communities been able to use and have benefited from the improved resources? For this, we need to look into the responses of the peasant farmers, local elites/leaders and Forest Department staff.

As far as the peasant farmers are concerned, they have generally been the silent observers. They are not so sure about the government policy of community forestry. For them the concept of community forestry is sound, but just handing forests over to rural communities for control and management may not necessarily translate into better management of the resource and equitable distribution of benefits among the users. There are even cases where some poor peasant farmers have suggested the Forest Department retain

control of forests because of fear that if given to rural communities, forests would in practice be controlled by local elites, essentially returning to the pre-1950s situation (Malla, 1992). Indeed, the doubts and fear of the peasant farmers are not unfounded for the very reasons explained earlier.

The government's current approaches to community forestry seem to emphasise the need to meet the subsistence needs of fodder, firewood, timber etc. Peasant farmers are more interested in programmes which would not only meet their subsistence needs, but also help them move away from the subsistence economy. Indeed, in some rural areas, because of the rapid socio-economic changes (building of roads, schools and other infrastructure, and expanding market activities), many peasant farmers are finding it increasingly hard to manage such changes with an income based on the average per capita land holding of less than 0.5 hectares (Malla, 1992):

We are interested in programmes that not only meet our subsistence needs of fodder and firewood, but also assist us in generating cash income so that we can cope with changes and meet our new demands; so that we can send our children to schools, buy their books, note books and pens and pay school fee; so that we can buy some other essential items that are now needed to manage lives and households and which we can not produce on our lands. (Pers. comm. Villagers, Chhatrebanjh, Kabhre Palanchok District, 1990)

The peasant farmers, particularly those residing near the national parks and other protected areas, who have been denied access to forest products do not believe in the government community forestry policy at all. For them, the policy reflects of the typical government attitude, as well as the inability of its Forest Department staff to manage the country's forest resource, rather than its concern for rural communities' forestry needs:

The government wants to plant trees on grazing and other bare lands and protect the remaining forests. Because the government's Forest Department can not do this on its own, they want to 'use' us to plant and protect forests. But once the forest is grown the government will take it back. If the government really cared for rural communities then why are we not allowed to collect forest products? The government has put guards and army men to protect the forest from us, do you think it cares for rural people? The government does not realise that the very people whom it has employed to protect forest from us are themselves cutting trees and killing wild animals. (Pers. comm. Villagers, Tarkeghyang, Sindhu Palchok District near the Langtang National Park, 1990)

Recent studies indicate more peasant farmers are growing an increasing number of trees on their own land (Malla, 1992, 1996; Carter and Gilmour,

1989; Carter, 1992; Robinson and Joshi, 1993), although most farmers who have been able to grow trees are large land-holders (Malla and Fisher, 1987). However, analysis of the types of trees grown by the peasant farmers reveals that the seedlings supplied by the government or project nurseries represent a very small proportion; the majorities are protected species and have regenerated naturally. There are reports of peasant farmers actually uprooting the naturally regenerated seedlings of these commercially valuable, yet protected species in order to avoid any future problems.

Unlike the peasant farmers, the local leaders and elites have appreciated the idea of community forestry and expressed support for this policy. In recent years, these leaders are reported to have been pressuring the District Forest Offices to speed up the process of handing forests to them. Their stated objective is to contribute to forest resource conservation and the development of their own villages.

The unstated objective of these leaders is to gain control over forest resources and enjoy the benefits provided by community forestry and other new opportunities. Indeed, many of these local leaders are now chairpersons of forest committees which facilitate their access to forest offices and jobs, as well as opportunities for participation in seminars, workshops, study tours, etc. They use this as a means to reinforce their power over their fellow villagers. They keep new knowledge and information gained in the training and study tours to themselves, which accounts for the ineffectiveness of most training programmes designed for the villagers. They support foreign aid as long as such support strengthens (or does not threaten) their credibility and status.

Among stakeholders, the Forest Department staff seems to have been most affected by changes in forest policy, and have shown mixed responses to the government's various decisions on forest policies since the 1960s. They were very supportive of government action to set aside forest reserves and to ban the felling of some commercially important tree species, but there have been mixed response to new forest policy (especially community forestry). While some appreciate and understand the rationale for such policy and the opportunities it creates for new professionalism, many others, particularly those who enjoyed holding power and prestige under the old policy, seem to be reluctant to implement the new policy. They believe that forests should remain under the control of the foresters, and that access to forests by rural communities should be restricted. Therefore, the unstated objective of these forestry staff may well be to see community forestry policy fail. However, regardless of their views, today community forestry in the hills region of Nepal is being launched on such a scale that these foresters have no choice but to conform to the government policy, at least for the time being. Meanwhile, they support the flow of foreign aid money into the country, as it provides them with opportunities for tours and studies in other countries. In other words,

although they do not fully support the policy, they benefit from the opportunities provided by foreign aid for community forestry.

As mentioned earlier, implementation of community forestry activities in some villages has resulted in regeneration and increased productivity. These forests can now supply much greater quantity of forest products than the amount needed by the rural communities to meet their subsistence requirements, and rural communities now want to sell excess products in nearby markets and to use the income for their village development. This has given rise to distinct views among foresters who have been pro-active about community forestry: One regards community forestry as a means to the end, whereas the other sees it as an end in itself.

For the group that regards community forestry as an end in itself, regeneration (and protection) of forests is the first and foremost priority. Rural communities are important as long as they co-operate; they may benefit from such forests, but only to meet their subsistence needs. One senior government forest officer said to the author:

Today community forestry in Nepal is not the same as it was in the late 1970s and early 1980s when I was actively involved in its promotion in the field. I was, and am still, more concerned for the greening of the hills region. To me not only is the concept of "forest user groups" new, but also that the growing view to allow such groups to use forests for purposes beyond subsistence needs is alarming. Opening up the recovered forests for commercial utilisation by rural communities may well lead to the rapid exploitation of the resource, hence back to the previous situation (Pers. comm. Senior Forestry Officer, Forest Department, 1994)

The views of the group that sees community forestry as a means to an end are far reaching, and consider rural communities (particularly the peasant farmers) as central to community forest management. The peasant farmers will participate in forestry programmes if they see genuine benefit in participation, managing the forest resource in ways that will contribute not only to their own well being, but also to improving both the condition and productivity of the resource. Indeed, this is already happening in some villages.

Such differences in views are likely to become even more pronounced, as community forestry activities expand to wider area of the hills region and as the new forests start to yield benefits.

2. Discussions and implications

We have looked into Nepal's forest and other land use policies and practices in different time periods, and the response of various stakeholders. The case

study provides very useful insight into the ways forest and other land use policies are formulated and implemented. Some of the important lessons are as follows:

First, throughout history land resources have played the key role in the country's socio-economic and political change. Land has been the main (often the only) means of livelihood for peasant farmers, and the primary source of income, and therefore power and prestige in the society, for the other stakeholders (including the state).

Second, the changes in forest and other land use policies that the different rulers or national governments have made were largely governed by their own socio-economic and political goals. Up until the 1970s, forest resources constituted one of the major sources of income for the state, or the rulers. Policies were largely geared towards exploiting the resource to generate as much income as possible. While the stated aim for this was to generate revenue for the welfare of the state, the unstated aim was to use the income to build their own palaces (before 1950s), or to gain support for the new government administration to stay in power. Thus, the underlying reasons for the decision to nationalise the country's forest resources in the 1950s was to secure this important source of income and, at the same time, to discredit the powerful *birta* owners, most of whom belonged to the previously ousted regimes.

Similarly, decisions to set aside blocks of forests as national parks and wildlife protection areas and to introduce community forestry were made to derive both economic and political gain from the opportunities provided by the rising environmental concerns around the world and by increased tensions between the world superpowers throughout the 1970s and 1980s. For example, community forestry policy has been implemented only in the hills region, primarily because the hills forests had not been so important in terms of generating revenue for the government. However, a significant proportion of the country's population lives in the hills region, making it politically very important. As the outside donor agencies were willing to provide funds (mostly grants) to support community forestry and other rural development activities in the area, the government saw an opportunity to establish its own credibility with the people and to get the degraded countryside planted with trees at the same time, without having to invest its own scarce resources.

Third, because the government has always tended to formulate forests and other land use policies with its own socio-economic and political goals, it has consciously or unconsciously ignored the perspective of the other stakeholders that were affected in one way or another by its actions. In the process of changing policies to meet its own vested interests, the government shifted the locus of control over forest resources from one stakeholder to another, affecting their relative status and position. These stakeholders reacted to

safeguard their own position and interests, which often resulted in compromises and the development of alliances between stakeholders.

This case study shows how stakeholders compromised with one another to serve their own unstated interests. For example, when the government decided to nationalise the country's forest in the 1950s, it shifted control from the local elites/landlords to the Forest Department staff. This, in turn, created a condition for the Forest Department staff and the local elites (turned local representatives) to co-operate with one another to serve their own unstated interests. Then, in the 1970s, the government's introduction of community forestry shifted the control from Forest Department staff to rural communities, which in turn forced the Forest Department staff to compromise between their job status and new economic opportunities provided through foreign aid. Similarly, during the 1970s, growing environmental concerns as well as tensions between world superpowers created a condition under which the national government and outside donor agencies co-operated with one another to serve their own vested interests.

Fourth, alliances have been established mostly and often only, between the powerful stakeholders. The weaker stakeholders have been unable to push their unstated interests and form alliances with the powerful stakeholders. Amongst stakeholders, the peasant farmers are the weakest, and yet they are the ones who depend most on forests and are affected most by their degradation. They have been unable to push their own unstated interests, despite the fact that they are constantly blamed for destroying forests and trees - their very means of survival.

Most forests that have been handed over as community forests have yet to provide genuine benefits to the peasant farmers. Forest committee members are more often than not the local elites/leaders. Both the committee members and Forest Department staff have emphasised the protection and limited use of forest resources. Cutting of green trees is, in most cases, prohibited. There have even been reports of Forest Department staff taking action against villagers for harvesting forest products from the community forests.

In fact, it is in the interest of both the community leaders and Forest Department staff to see that community forests remain off-limits: the Forest Department staff will see the forest protected and preserved, and the local elites/leaders/committee members, who have trees on their lands, will be the only source of forest products for the peasant farmers. In this way, both stakeholders help meet each other's unstated interests and continue to reinforce their authority on the peasant farmers.

Interestingly, these peasant farmers figure quite prominently in the stated objectives of any policy decisions by the national government and donor agencies, and even the local leaders' and Forest Department staff. Yet, this is

the very group which has always been marginalised in the process of compromises and developing alliances. In other words, the powerful stakeholders have been very successfully using the peasant farmers to serve their own socio-economic and political interests.

Finally, while formulating forest and other land use policies, the tendency of the national government has been to focus on specific problems or crises facing it at that particular time, rather than taking a holistic view. In other words, their approach to the policy formulation has been rather reactive. As a result, policy objectives have been too narrow and lacked flexibility and vision. The decision to nationalise the country's forests in the 1950s, to introduce community forestry in the 1970s, and to set aside large blocks of forest reserves and national parks all reflect the national government's reactionary approach to immediate problems and opportunities at the national and international levels.

In conclusion, the following lessons seem to be critical to the formulation and design of forestry policies, programmes and projects that aim to reconcile conservation and economic development objectives:

In order to determine the real cause of forest degradation, an analysis of forests and other land use policies and practices should be done in the context of current and past policies and actions; the way forests and other lands are used today may directly relate to past policies and actions.

Different stakeholders view the policy from the perspective of their own social, political and economic interests or goals. Moreover, the stated objectives or interests of different stakeholders, including those of the state, are also accompanied by unstated objectives, and it is often the unstated interests that actually drive the actions. Each stakeholder interprets and manipulates the policy changes in ways that best serve its own interests, especially the unstated interests. Therefore, any change in forest and land use policy will affect stakeholders differently and their positions on the use of resources will change accordingly.

Any project or programme which is designed to promote forest resource management involving rural communities will first need to develop an understanding of this complex relationship between forests and the various stakeholders' socio-economic and political objectives, both stated and unstated.

The question is how can we go about developing an environment, or "platform" whereby all the stakeholders can take part in policy formulation? How can we go about developing policies that all stakeholders can have confidence in, or in ways that no stakeholder's position is threatened? In other words, how can we create an environment whereby the different stakeholders can feel confident

to express their own, and consider the other stakeholders', stated and unstated interests?

Table: Forest resource use in Nepal - actions of different actors with incentives, stated and unstated objectives over different periods of time
(Source: Malla, 1996)

Action by	Incentive for action	Stated objective	Unstated objective
<u>Prior to 1950s</u>			
-			
(a) State			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put all the land under the state ownership; forest was open to any one for cultivation; and encouraged the conversion of as much forest land as possible to agriculture. • Harvesting of trees for charcoal production for smelting of ore. • Rulers granted jagir and brita to nobles and officials, civil or military, for services rendered to the king or state • Exported timber, to India (bordering states). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revenue for the state. Peasant paid to the state a rent or tax equivalent to 50% of the produce from the land cultivated. • Services of the nobles and priests to the rulers. • Army to defend the country from outside attack. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make the land fully productive. • To generate revenue for the welfare of the state. • To use the country's forest resource more wisely (green forests, Nepal's wealth!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To get hold of the land which is the principal source of income. • To rule the people by controlling the main source of income and their means of livelihoods. • To support the expanding army and other administrative costs. • To build palaces and support the luxury of the ruling communities.

(b) Local government functionaries

- Encouraged clearance of as much forest land as possible. Get hold of as much jagir and birta grants as possible.
- Employed peasants as tenant farmers to farm their own land.
- Later started kut (contract or bid) system to tenant farmers. Provided loan to the peasant.

(c) Peasant farmers

- As the peasant required to pay to

- No tax had to be paid to the state for lands under jagir or birta tenure.

- Exacted 50% or even more (under the kut system) of the produce of the cultivated land without any labour and without any rent being paid to the state.

- Survival.

- The peasants' right to the land

- To serve the king and the state.

- To increase the productivity of land and increase the revenue of the state.

- To contribute to the economic development of the nation.

- To serve the king and the

- To gain wealth and prestige in the society and rule the peasant.

- To continue to serve (or aspire to the higher position of) the government.

- To maintain status quo.

- To manage their own and

the state up to 50% of the produce of the land, the remaining produce provided at most, basic subsistence to them and their families, one option to escape from this hardship was to get hold of more forests and other lands

was based on their regular payment of the rent to the state (or to the jagirdars and birta holders).

state.

- To increase the productivity of land and increase the revenue of the state.

families' livelihoods.

- Later to get freedom from the grips of the landlords and money lenders.

During 1950s - 1970s

(a) State

- Nationalised the country's forests⁷ in 1957 and passed Forest Act in 1961.
- Placed forest management authority on the Forest Dept. Strengthened Forest

- Forest as one of the main sources of income for the new government.
- Nationalisation of forest was seen by new government as further incentive to disempower the

- To manage the forest more effectively .
- To distribute the income from forest equitably

- To get hold of the valuable forest (timber) resource.
- To generate

Dept. and established Forest offices in different parts of the country

- Initiated resettlement programme by opening up some Terai forest, several wood-based industries in the Terai region and exported timber to India.

(b) Donor agencies

- Provided financial and technical support in forest survey, establishment of forest-based industries, improved logging, and setting up of the Institute of Forestry. Provided machines and equipment for forest- based industries and for surveying and harvesting of forests and trees

- Support for training of forestry officers in India and other foreign countries.

birta holders.

- Support from the foreign donor agencies for forest activities such as timber extraction, setting-up new forest based industries.

- Opportunity to test their systems (technology and management) of forestry.

- Opportunity for exploring market for their technologies.

- Opportunities for exposure to new places, culture and society.

to the people through nationalisation.

- To use the resource for the welfare of the nation.

- To help in the forestry development activities of the country.

- To help building necessary infrastructure for effective forestry development programmes.

- To help establish forestry-based industries for generating

as much revenue as possible by exporting logs to India.

- Use foresters to keep people out of the forests.

- To propagate their own political philosophies and discredit other ideologies .

- To influence development policies and help formulate ones which suit to their own.

- To maintain their presence and influence.

(c) Forest department staff

- Supported the government forestry policy.
- Never ever expressed to the state their incapacity to manage the country's forest resource. Always pretended that everything was fine.

- Employment and income.
- High status government position.
- Opportunity for training in foreign countries

revenue for the nation state.

- To help achieve the stated objectives of the government.
- To serve the state.
- To help save the forest resource.

- To save forests and the job.
- To keep people out of the forest.
- To receive local leaders support to keep people out of the forests.

(d) Local functionaries turned local

- Some reacted negatively to the new government's forest policy. Lost interest to the management of the forest previously under their control. Some were reported to have destroyed forests.
- Many of them were elected as heads and members of the

elites / leaders

- Rather disincentives for the majority - lost the titles.
- For some new opportunity for cash income and access to land through resettlement schemes.

- To support the new political system and new government.
- To support the forest policy of the new government.

- To take advantage of the new opportunity.
- To get access to the important political position and continue to get hold of

village councils
under the new
political system.

the birta
grants as
far as
possible.

- To
continue
to rule the
peasant.

Action by	Incentive for action	Stated objective	Unstated objective
<p><i>(e) Peasant farmers•</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported the new government action. • Some took the opportunity to clear the forest for agriculture. • Migrated to the Terai for land grants (resettlement scheme). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively better opportunity for livelihoods and access to land in the Terai (resettlement scheme). • Free access to forest resource as government's Forest Dept. was unable to control the forests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support the new government forest policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To manage their own and families' livelihoods. • To get free access to forest products without being seen by the Forest Dept. staff.
<p><u>Since 1970's - To Date</u></p>			

<p><u>Since 1970s - to date</u></p>			
<p><i>(a) Donor agencies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failures of the previous development efforts, and continued environment deterioration led to reconsideration of the whole approach to development. • Decided to shift focus to rural development and environment. Support to community forestry, water-shed and wildlife conservation programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to test new development philosophies. • Opportunities for research and innovations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To assist in the socio-economic development of the country. • To help preserve the environment, biodiversity and save the world. • To seek people's participation in forest resource conservation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To continue to propagate their political philosophies, influence development policies and maintain the presence. • To create market for their own products competing with each other for a dominant role in research and technology generation.

<p>(b) State</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issued community forestry rules and regulations. • Established Dept. of Soil Conservation and Dept. of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. Established a number of forest reserves, wildlife and national parks and initiated several forestry and watershed management projects in the country. • Imposed ban on export of logs. • Established Forest Offices in all 75 districts. • Developed Master Plan for Forestry Sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two things prompted the initiation of community forestry and wildlife and national park activities: (i) forestry sector was no longer the major revenue earner for the government. (ii) donor agencies were willing to support these activities. The money received from the donors was much greater than the revenue from forests. • Opportunity to create new forest resource with the help of the donor agencies. • Income from national parks (tourism). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To protect forests and conserve wildlife. • To promote rural development through forestry. • To meet the basic need of rural people and support agriculture production. • To prevent soil erosion and landslides. • To handover all the accessible forests to local 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To attract as much foreign aid money as possible showing the cause of deforestation. • To plant as many hectares as possible while donor agencies are willing to support for this activity and use people as labourers. • To set aside areas for games and hunting for ruling families and other elites.
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		people for sustainable use and management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To limit villagers' access to the forests for basic needs only.
<p>(c) Forest Department Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed feeling about the whole approach to community forestry. Some foresters conformed to the government policy while others are quite disenchanted by the idea of giving control over forests to local people. Some foresters feel professionally dejected and lost. • React 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for new professionalism. • For many, community forestry is rather disincentive as they have lost the control over forests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To contribute to the achievement of the state objectives for community forestry. • To help save the forests. • To seek people's participation in forest resource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To take the chance of visiting foreign countries . • To see community forestry fail (by some) or succeed (by some). • To use the 'people' to plant and protect forests and limit

negatively if something goes wrong in the community forest.		management.	the use of forests by villagers for subsistence need only.
<p>d) Local leaders and elites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported the programme of community forestry. • Initiated forestry programmes in the villages. • Developed ties with Forest Dept. staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds for development activities in the villages. • Study tours and seminars. • Credibility in the village. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help develop forest resource in the village. • To serve the state. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To capture the benefit provided by community forestry e.g. jobs. • To win the confidence of forestry officials and then gain control over the resource and fellow villagers.
<p>(e) Peasant farmers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed feeling about the whole idea of handing over forests to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for income and employment through forestry. • Regular supply of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help develop forest resource in the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To manage their own and families' livelihood

<p>villagers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some supported the ideas. Many are unsure whether it will work in reality. Giving control over forests to villagers could mean giving it to village elites - an action that might put them in a more disadvantageous position. 	<p>forest products for their daily needs.</p>	<p>village.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To serve the state. 	<p>s.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To avoid falling in traps of local elite. • To continue to get free access to forest products without being seen by Forest Dept. staff.
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