

# Social transformation through community forestry: Experiences and lessons from Nepal

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the current status of Community Forestry (CF) in the hills of Nepal and its impact on broader social transformation process. To explore the current status and impacts two Community Forestry Programme (CFP) implemented hill districts were selected for the study. Research methods like focus group discussion, key informant and semi-structured interviews, transects, social and resources mapping, time line were used in the study. Both primary and secondary information were used to analyse the contribution of CFP on social transformation. It is revealed that the CF in the hills of Nepal is greatly contributing for social change and transformation through institutionalised Community Forestry Users Groups (CFUG). CF has demonstrated the appreciable success despite some limitations and the problems faced. The contributing variables for social transformation used in this study are equitable, gender-sensitive, empowerment-led and poverty-focused outcomes through participatory decision making process, raised awareness on multifunctional use, economic and ecological contributions of forests and roles and responsibilities of users, well functioning of forest users groups, representation of poor and women in forest management and utilisation and sustainable management of natural resources and bio-diversity. These all indicators demonstrate that the broad social transformation is achievable through effective CFP.

## Acronyms

AFP	Agro-Forestry Programme
CBD	Convention of Biological Diversity
CF	Community Forestry
CFUG	Community Forest User Groups
DDC	District Development Committee

DFO	District Forest Office
DoF	Department of Forest
DPCC	District Project Co-ordination Committee
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal
FYM	Farm Yard Manure
GEEP	Gender Equity Empowerment and Poverty
GO	Governmental Organisation
HIMAWANTI	Himalayan Grassroot Women's Natural Resource Management Association
HMG/N	His majesty's Government of Nepal
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
IG	Income Generation
LP	Leasehold Programme
MNRB	Management of Natural Resources and Bio-diversity
MP	Micro Projects
MPFS	Master Plan for the Forestry Sector
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NSCFP	Nepal Swiss Community Forest Project
NTFPs	Non Timber Forest Products
OP	Operational Plan
PCC	Project Co-ordination Committee
RFD	Regional Forest Director
SDC	Swiss Development and Co-operation Agency
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
TA/DA	Traveling Allowance/Daily Allowance
TRIPs	Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights
VDC	Village Development Committee
WTO	World Trade Organisation

## 1. Introduction

This paper is divided in seven sections. The first section covers the general introduction. The second section attempts to present the major problems faced by CFP at the time of its implementation. The third section characterise resources and actors and their relation with legal and regulatory framework. The fourth section presents the contribution of CF on social transformation. The fifth section briefly presents the determinants of success and failure of CFP. The sixth section synthesises the lessons learnt from the CF and their wider relevance. Finally the last section presents conclusion of the study.

This study was carried out in Dolakha and Ramechhap districts of central hills of Nepal. The objective of the study is to assess the contribution of Community Forestry (CF) to satisfy the basic needs of communities. Therefore, the relationship between people and forest resources, potential impacts of CF on the livelihood of people, and sustainable management and natural resources and bio-diversity is explored. To explore the relationships and impacts, Dolakha and Ramechhap districts where Nepal-Swiss Community Forestry Project (NSCFP) of SDC-Nepal is working was selected for the study. These two districts represent the Community Forestry in hills of Nepal. The study was carried out from the March 1998 to December 1999 as a part of the PhD research project called as "Conflict Management in Natural Resources: Land Forest and Water". Reference has been made from other Community Forestry implemented districts to supplement the information. Primary information were collected through qualitative methods like focus group discussion, resource and social mapping, time line, key informant and semi-structured interviews with members of CFUG, staff from Non Governmental Organisations (NGO), District Forest Office (DFO), Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN), Himalayan Grassroot Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI), District Development Committee (DDC), Village Development Committees (VDC), transact visit to community forests, observation of the general assemblies and meeting of CFUG and committees. Secondary information were collected through reviewing reports, project documents, operational plans and meeting minutes of CFUG, previous research findings, books and monographs. Researcher was also attended self-evaluation workshops organised by NSCFP in Charikot, Manthali and Kathmandu to document the expression on review of achievements, reaction and assessment by the key actors (representatives of users, politicians, administrators, NGO, GO, DDC, VDC and project staff) involved in the CF.

Forest resources are one of the major resources directly affecting the survival of rural people in Nepal. Subsistence needs of women, poor and backward people as well as commercial needs of well-off people are directly linked with and partially fulfilled by forest resources. Considering the paramount contribution of forest resources to the livelihood of users, Master Plan for the

Forestry Sector (MPFS) 1989 envisaged to meet people's basic needs for fuelwood, timber, fodder and other forest products on a sustained basis, and to promote people's participation in forestry resources' development, management and utilisation (HMG/N, 1989). Therefore, Community Forestry Programme (CFP) is placed in top priority to improve living condition of people through sustainable management and use of forest resources. NSCFP is supporting CF in Dolakha and Ramechhap districts to improve the living conditions, empower target population with emphasis on equity aspects and sustainable management of natural resources. Therefore, the focus of CF in the hills of Nepal in general, and Dolakha and Ramechhap in particular, is to enable users groups to implement community forestry related activities leading to a balanced and sustainable social, economic and ecological benefits. The third phase of NSCFP (1996-2000) is actively involved in CFP to achieve sustainable, gender-balanced, poverty-oriented results through the implementation of CF with different partners like NGOs, private organisations, GOs, etc. (NSCFP, 1997a; 1997b). Micro Projects<sup>i</sup> (MP) is one of the contributing approach jointly developed by the actors involved in CFP to make the Community Forestry successful (Lamichhane et.al., 1999).

## **2. Problems recorded while implementing community forestry in the study area**

There were some problems observed during the time of implementation of CF in the study area. They were mainly related to the economic position of women, poor and social differentiation in society. The daily requirement of fodder and fuel wood was lacking or insufficient to poorest people and women. They had to be involved in other activities whereby their work burden is increased. Furthermore, their work load was increased due to their involvement in forest management activities. Because of such work burden and socio-cultural reasons (subordinate position in society) their participation in forest resources uses decision was ineffective. This category of people had less access to private forest resources as well as low or no purchasing power. This situation was creating a deprivation trap to this category of people.

- Problems in identification/definition of forest boundaries and users mainly due to lack of awareness and lack of participatory planning process, etc.
- Misuse of CFUG fund due to lack of knowledge and skills on fund mobilisation, record keeping and accounting;
- Elite domination on decision making process;
- Lack of transparency,
- Diverse interests on forest management objectives among the users,
- Resources pooled by non-CFUG members;
- Uncertainty about the government policies (frequent changes) and reluctance of government to hand-over resource rich forests, resistance of some forest professionals,

- Vested interest of certain powerful actors;
- Vertical social stratification (castism)-which create unequal social hierarchy and suppress lower caste people in access to and control over forest resources as well as management decisions;
- Limited capacity of DFOs in terms of technology, manpower and autonomy, even some time misuse/abuse of authority; gap between policy and implementation.
- Non availability and/or lack of forest resources due to fast deterioration and improper exploitation of government managed forest resources before they had been handed over to CFUG,
- Limited ability of users to influence the prevailing marketing conditions mainly due to insufficient volume/quality of forest based products to meet the market requirement, lack of experiences of users on trade management and co-ordination, weak market information exchange mechanism, wider profit margin between primary and secondary producers or collectors and ultimate traders,
- NTFPs business is limited by policy context, and with the hands of few traders, etc. (Poudel et.al. 1998).
- Consensual identification of forest boundaries and users;
- Deterioration of government managed forests due to uncontrolled or irrational exploitation;
- Lack of sufficient manpower to meet the over growing service needs of forest users reside in disperse geographical locations,
- Limited technical capability of available technical manpower of DFOs due to lack of information/knowledge on latest innovation on forest management; conventional ways of academic training, and conflict between foresters (academically trained on forestry discipline) and other forest professionals (trained in social sciences).
- Uncertainties about forest policies (changes towards control), target oriented CFUG formation process rather than focus on quality of CFUG (pressure to fulfil the CFUG formation target),
- Frequent change/transfer of forest professionals working in the study area,

These problems were seriously hampering the CF implementation process. The image of DFOs in the eyes of many local people was negative. People fear with DFOs as they hold enormous authorities (firing, catching and jail, financial punishment, court cases, etc.). The legacy of the past image of DFO is not yet completely disappeared. In some cases, DFO staff still show reluctance to hand-over forests to CFUG. Even some time conflicts between two or more agencies working in the same geographical area in the same sector (e.g., leasehold and community forestry) create confusion and difficulties.

### 3. Observation on actors and resources

This section describes the characteristics of the actors and resources and their relationship with legal/regulatory framework and economic context. The actors include women, poorest, CFUG, DFO and other concerned stakeholders. The resources include forest, fodder and fuel-wood.

### **3.1 About the actors**

The major actors are women, poorest people, CFUG and DFOs. In addition to them, other important stakeholders involved in CF are DDCs, VDCs, and NGOs, FECOFUN, HIMAWANTI, etc. Brief descriptions of the status of major actors are presented below.

#### **Status of women**

The status and position of women is still sub-ordinate in the study area due to the patriarchal socio-cultural structure of the society. Existing socio-cultural characteristics of societies like caste system, marital status, economic condition, level of education, access to information, etc. are determining factors to rise/limit the status/position of women in society. Even within such a resistant socio-cultural situation, the status of women in the study area is gradually improving due to the efforts of NSCFP and other organisations (Khadka, 1999). It was reported that working hours of women is decreasing from 14 hours per day to 12 hours (NSCFP, 1999b). Gradually, the work load between men and women is becoming balanced. Women are also increasingly involved in forest management and economic activities. Their general level of awareness is raised due to the participation in training, workshops, CFUG general assemblies, CFUG executive committees, and facilitation for social mobilisation. In many CFUG women are Chairperson, some women from the CFUG Executive Committees are also elected in the VDC bodies. Several women emerged as social activists and change agents and are contributing to rural social change process. Till the end of June 1999 women are holding position of chairperson in 8 CFUG committees. Similarly, 39 percent of committee members in Dolakha and 27 percent in Ramechhap are women (NSCFP, 1999b). In some cases women are becoming empowered and working effectively as successful managers (e.g., women of Bhorlepakha CFUG).

Pre SLC scholarships to the girls of disadvantaged group of people and Dalit (so-called untouchables), I. Sc. Forestry scholarships to women from the study area, Forestry Extensionist Training for women to make women facilitators locally available, employment of female staff, etc. are some of the special arrangements made by NSCFP to promote the participation of women and to improve their status and condition (Khadka, 1999). In nutshell, the women's empowerment trend is encouraging and bringing positive effects in communities for social change.

#### **Status of poorest**

Vast majority of the people in study area are suffering form poverty and deprivation. Dolakha and Ramechhap districts themselves belong to 23rd and 31st rank respectively in the national poverty and deprivation index (ICIMOD, 1997). Community forestry in itself is a user focused programme rather than absolutely poverty focused one because it can not exclude rich people from the use of forest resources (Upreti, 1999b). However, Master Plan for the Forestry Sector emphasised to direct CFP towards poverty reduction. The main poverty related issues of the poor users are lack or inaccessibility of fodder and fuel wood for daily requirements, increased burden of forest management, lack of purchasing power, non participation in forest use decisions due to several constraints like lack of time, no access to private forest resources, low level of education and awareness, lack of confidence, etc.

It is realised that NSCFP has encouraged all involved actors to make special provisions like compulsory involvement of poorest during the preparation of CFUG constitution and OP, deliberate attempt to select poor and deprived group of people for pre-SLC scholarship, representation of poorest in CFUG committees, encourage to express needs and concerns of poorest during the CFUG formation, support for access to low interest credit, include poor people in leasehold programme (LP), etc. From all these strategic efforts, the level of awareness on concerns of poorest is raised, poor and backward people are increasingly involved in CF management process. In many cases, poverty focused activities like inter-cropping of cardamom, ginger, turmeric, broom grass, bamboo and lapsi (*Choerospondias axillaris*) in the CFs are increasing. Allocation of certain patches of CFs to disadvantaged group of people for the cultivation of cash crops and to collect the required forest resources started to practice. The trend is encouraging and gearing towards the destiny. Ethnic composition in leadership is also increasing and gearing towards more balanced. Involvement of so called untouchables in CFUG committees (4-7 percent) is almost proportional to the total population (Upreti, 1999b). Self confidence and ownership feeling of poorest and women is increasing in the study area. However, the level of direct benefit from the CFs to poorest is relatively low as compared to general users and still below the level of satisfaction.

### **Status of Forest Users Groups**

Principally CFUG is an autonomous institution and solely responsible for the management of CFs (Shrestha, 19999; Shrestha, 1987). All members of CFUG have equal rights and responsibilities. Executive committee is a representative of users, responsible to accomplish the activities and authorities provided by the general assemblies of users. Majority of the users in the study area are poor and depending mainly upon available CFs for their survival. Some users are also depending on government managed forests. Few users; those who are rich, have alternative like private forests to meet their demands on forest products.

Self confidence and management skill of CFUG is increasing because of especial activities like CFUG networking workshop, CFUG forest management training, OP monitoring and evaluation, CF introduction workshop, record keeping training, CFUG evaluation and rewards, users study tours, women workshop, implementation of five phase CFUG formation process (Annex 1) through the involvement of users. All these activities and efforts are contributing to develop capacity of CFUG. Institutional development aspect of CFUG in general is still weak (Poudel, 1999), however, many CFUG are emerging as a functional institution and gradually strengthening their position. CFUG are shifting their orientation from protection of forest to proper management and utilisation (Upreti, 1999b).

The CFUG formation process practised in the study area is an important step to achieve operational sustainability of CFs (see annex 1) which focus on a detailed and stepwise procedure for the CFUG formation active involvement of users. This is a participatory, process-oriented methodological approach to ensure the qualitative participation of targeted population (i.e., women, poor, disadvantaged group of people) and equity concerns. The quality of CFUG (management skill, decision process, planning, etc.) is improved due to a joint effort of NGOs, DFOs and NSCFP. The majority of CFUG are able to protect their CFs and properly utilise fodder, litter and fuelwood. However, elite domination on CFUG committee formation, decision making and forest resources distribution still prevalent. Women leadership is encouragingly emerging even from within the unfavourable patriarchal socio-cultural circumstance (Khadka, 1999).

Several CFUG have collected fairly large amount of money in their fund but many of them are not yet clear on how to properly utilise the fund (Lafranchi, 1998). Some capable CFUG have started to utilise their fund in community development activities like construction of schools, temples, community buildings, school maintenance and furniture supply, student support, non formal education, vegetable cultivation, donation to the severe sufferer from natural calamities like fire, landslide, etc. in addition to forest related activities (NSCFP, 1998; 1999a). Few CFUG have disbursing money as a low interest loan to their members for economic activities. Recently some CFUG have started to hire forest technicians for the amendment of the OP by using the CFUG fund. This is an example of spending 25 percent fund of CFUG in forest management activities to achieve the sustainability. Nevertheless, it is still a concern on how to make CFUG fund more transparent, and on how to advise on efficient utilisation.

### **Status of District Forest Offices (DFO)**

It is found that the DFO in both districts are sensitised on gender and equity issues. Because of specially designed methodologies and procedures to facilitate CF management process, DFOs are much aware on the need of



involvement of poorest people and women in the forest management decision process (Upreti, 1999b). The orientation of DFO staff is changing towards facilitators and supporters of CFUG. This is because of motivation developed and awareness created by training to DFO staff and their active involvement in CF planning process. The capacity of forest staff is developed through training on leadership, participatory forest resources assessment and planning, decentralisation and devolution of forest management, CFUG networking, marketing of tree and forest products, development and management of medicinal plants, conflict resolution on forest management, community forestry extension, and exchange of information, opportunities for higher education, etc. which seems instrumental to motivate forest staff to work for the better functioning of CF in the study area.

The co-operation between CF actors seems good, exceptional to the general condition in Nepal. The quality of constitution and OP prepared by DFO staff is improved as compared to the second phase of the project. The workload of DFO staff is increased (NSCFP, 1999a). However, they are still facing some problems like lack of sufficient equipment and tools, budgetary constraints like travelling and daily allowances, etc. to effectively facilitate the CFP in the study area.

### **Status of other actors**

In addition to the major actors mentioned above, there are 49 intermediary organisations involved to implement micro projects based on the demand for support from CFUG. They are significantly contributing to improve the forest management plans, as well as to the empowerment of users. Main activities performed by the intermediary organisations are support to CFUG formation process, forest management, agro-forestry, soil conservation, biological conservation, record keeping, community forestry awareness, NTFPs management, training, literacy classes, and IG activities. However, many intermediary NGOs are financially entirely dependent from the project and weak in transparency issue and altruistic leadership. At the current situation the sustainability issue of these organisations is doubtful. Capacity building support to these organisations is insufficient and needs careful and deliberate consideration. DDCs and VDCs are also supporting to implement the CFP in the study area. Rural Energy Development Programme and Rural Community Infrastructure Programme are also implementing some forest related activities in the study area. In Ramechhap NGOs involved in CF created an NGO Co-ordination Forum and conduct several activities. The Ranger Association Nepal is also involved in MPs. These all, in general, are willing to promote CF in the study area.

### **3.2 About the resources**

Indigenous management system of "RANIBAN" (queen forest) by local people through setting of code of conduct is the source of inspiration for CFP in Nepal. Major forest resources directly affecting the livelihood of rural people identified are fodder, fuelwood, timber, litters, medicinal plants, and other non-timber-forest-products (NTFPs), etc., from forest. Forest management activities, subsistence activities, and IG activities are major activities directly related to the livelihood requirement of users. CFP is based on the philosophy of participation by users in forest management activities. Ecological interdependence, social imbeddedness, complexity and uncertainty are part of the hill community forestry. Within this context, different types of resource users, having different economic and social status, perspectives, knowledge systems, values, understandings and objectives, are involved in community forestry. The brief characterisation of each resource is described in the following section.

## Forests

Forests have multi-functions ranging from protection of erosion to religious function to watershed stabilisation to bio-diversity conservation. Forests are providing fuelwood, fodder, ground grasses, litters, timber for making house, wooden logs for building bridge, herbal medicine from medicinal & aromatic plants, earnings from these timber and NTFPs as direct contributions from forest resources to satisfy the needs of users. In addition to these direct benefits, forest resources are also indirectly contributing to increase the agricultural production and productivity by improving soil fertility. The amount of availability of FYM is increased. Soil condition (organic matter, texture, structure and porosity) is improved. Condition of animal health is improved and increased animal productivity through supply of quality fodder to lactating animals (Poudel, 1997). Income level of users is changed. CFs are also significantly contributing to conserve water sources, balancing environment (O<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub> balance), reduction on landslide and soil erosion as indirect benefit from the forest resources to satisfy the needs of users (Beak et. al., 1997). All these are contributing to improve human health.

The area covered by forests in Dolakha and Ramechhap is 94400 and 66100 hectare (ha) respectively (NSCFP, 1999a). The major forest types available in the study area are tropical, sub-tropical, lower temperate, and upper temperate. Similarly major tree species available are *Acacia catechu* (Khair), *Shorea robusta* (Sal), *Terminalia tomentosa* (Saj), *Pinus roxburghii* (Khote salla), *Schima wallichii* (Chilaune), *Quercus glauca* (Phalant), *Quercus lantana* (Banjh), *Quercus semicarpifolia* (Khashru), *Rhododendron spp.* (Gurans), *Pinus wallichiana* (Gobre salla), *Tsuga dumosa* (Thingre salla), *Abies spp.* (Ghoge salla), *Pinus pitula* (Pate salla), *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis) etc. (Sinha et. al., 1996). In case of Dolakha, about 4000 hectares of afforestation have been made mainly with pine species (NSCFP, 1997b). Dolakha and northern part of Ramechhap districts have relatively good forest cover. High altitude forests in

both districts are resource rich in terms of timber as well as NTFPs and not yet handed over to communities.

Condition of community forests (CFs) in the study area is improving as compared to the government managed forests (1999b). Main reasons for this situation are i) CFs, in past, were mainly protection oriented. Therefore, users of CFs also pooled forest resources from the government forest to protect their CFs ii) DFOs have not sufficient manpower to monitor government forests as they are also concentrated in CFs, iii) Lack of ownership feeling in government forests, iv) Irrational exploitation of government forests by powerful traders (tragedy of commons). Protection oriented management approach of CFs is gradually changing to sustainable production-utilisation-management approach. The natural regeneration on CFs is encouraging due to the emphasis in natural regeneration over plantation. In one CF 86 types of ground grasses/bushes and more than 36 tree species were counted in the Kafal community forest in Ramechhap. Plantation is increasing under the private entrepreneurship arrangement to make the afforestation economically efficient and demand driven. High altitude forests have a high potential to create employment opportunities through community entrepreneurship or private enterprises if handed over to CFUG. Private forest nursery programme is contributing to develop agro-forestry as well as to raise income level of nursery owners. In most of the cases, participatory silvicultural production oriented practices are adopted for forest management in CFs (Lafranchi, 1998). Boundary conflicts and users identification are still major problems in CF. Cultural dimension is very important to protect and conserve trees of religious value (e.g., *Ficus religiosa*).

Bio-diversity situation in the study area is improved (Ibscher, 1999). Plant species composition is increasing due to natural regeneration and plantation of seedlings distributed by DFOs and private entrepreneurs. DFOs have provision of award to motivate CFUG to promote natural regeneration in their CFs, and plantation and protection grant to CFUG to improve the condition of their forests. As a result, annual increase of growing forest stock in study area is 3-7 percent (Annual Report, 1997/98). Canopy coverage of CF is increasing. Execution of biological soil conservation and agro-forestry programme (AFP) are contributing to improve the forest condition. Due to improved condition of CFs water conservation and soil fertility are increased. Soil composition of the CF areas is changed and organic matter in soil is increased. Due to all these factors micro climatic conditions are changing. Therefore, there is an urgent need to hand over resource rich government forests of the study area to users for the better management and utilisation, to develop forest based enterprises, to create employment opportunities and ultimately to uplift socio-economic condition of rural people. So far only 17 percent of the potential CFs is handed over to communities in Dolakha with an average of 0.51 ha per household and 0.82 ha/household in Ramechhap (NSCFP, 1999a).

## Fodder

Due to raised level of awareness on AFP and better management of CFs the situation of fodder in the study area is improved. In general, access to fodder and litters is increased. Agro-forestry practises in private land are remarkably increased due to the protection of CFs. The concept of "social fencing"<sup>iii</sup> is promoting proper development and utilisation of forests and grasses in private land as well as in CFs. Now, it is a common practice to stop open grazing in private land whereby cropping pattern is changed from growing only rainy crops to all round cultivation (Schuler, 1997). However, the access to fodder for poor people is limited in CFs because of limited access or restriction due to protection and because of degraded forests has limited forest production, even if forests have access to them. Grazing restriction in CFs also created some problems, especially to poor people. Therefore, it is essential to develop/workout appropriate grazing system within CF management systems to bring positive balance between forest conditions and socio-economic consequences to address the fodder and litter deficiency problem.

Dissemination and exchange of information on successful indigenous or local agro-forestry practises to different communities and villages across the study area is an unique character (Tembe, 1998). In the study area the indigenous agro-forestry practices are very common and dominant. Technical support to establish/operate private fodder nurseries are helping to improve fodder situation. Stall feeding practices are increasing after the implementation of CFP and helping to protect local forests. Free grazing is still common in high altitude forests. Fodder for stall feeding is supplied from private agro-forestry, government forests and some time from CFs. It is observed that the pressure on forests is decreasing to a large extent due to promotion of agro-forestry in private land. Agro-forestry practises in private land is providing fodder for animals and increasing FYM. Major fodder species available in the study area are Badahar (*Artocarpus lakoocha*), Nivaro (*Ficus auriculata*), Gogan (*Saurauia napaulensis*), Khasru (*Quercus semicarpifolia*), Kutmiro (*Litsea monopetala*), Payu (*Prunus cerasoides*), Khanayo (*Ficus semicordata*), Bamboo (*Bambusa spp.*), Dabdabe (*Garuga pinnata*), Dudhilo (*Ficus nerifolia*), Gidari (*Premna integrifolia*) Katush (*Castanopsis indica*), Koiralo (*Bauhinia purpurea*), etc.

## Fuel wood

Fuel wood is major forest resource for the survival of poorest people. Poor people are obtaining fuel wood either from CF and/or government managed forests. It is revealed that the fuelwood use efficiency in the study area is significantly increased. Respondents of Dolakha explained that they are consuming 50-60 percent less firewood than before taking over the CFs. However, selling of firewood collected from some local forests is stopped after CFs, therefore, poor people were losing their daily earnings.

### 3.3 Legal and regulatory framework

Private Forest Nationalisation Act 1957 was enacted by His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG/N) to eliminate private Birta ownership (approximately the one-third of the valuable land/forest of the nation given to individuals by feudal Rana regime as award to military service), and to control the destruction of national forests. This act mis-perceived the problems and unintentionally transformed all forest activities into a constabulary (Belbase and Regmi, 1998). Forests managed by indigenous systems were appropriated and their traditional rights were curtailed (Ibid). This nationalisation of forests developed negative perception of people whereby private forest lands were purposefully deforested to protect from nationalisation. Communal forest management responsibilities became dysfunctional and open access to forest resources resulted into severe destruction of forests. Government was not able to control such destruction. Then the enactment of the Forest Act 1961 defined forest categories, listed forest offences, prescribed penalties and defined the roles and responsibilities of Department of Forest (DoF). In this way, that Act restored the control of government over forest resources (Ibid). Observing the poor performance of nationalised forests, policy makers realised the need of involvement of users to manage the local forests. The National Forestry Plan of 1976 recognised the importance of participation of local communities in forest management. Therefore, the Forest Act 1961 was amended in 1977 and 1978 and categorised the Nepal's forests into i) National Forests ii) Panchayat Forest iii) Panchayat Protected Forests iv) Religious Forests v) Leasehold Forests and vi) Private Forests. This Act also made provision to involve Panchayat<sup>iii</sup> for forest protection. The Panchayat Forest Rule 1978, The Panchayat Protected Forest Rule 1978 and the Leasehold Forestry Rule 1978 emerged to mitigate the effects of Private Forest Nationalisation Act 1957. Afterward, the Decentralisation Act 1983 has been a milestone to mobilise local communities for local resources management.

As a policy measures, from the Sixth Five year Plan (1981-85) community participation in forest management was emphasised. The Seventh (1986-1990) and Eighth (1991-1995) Five Year Plans had also emphasised CFP and prioritised to hand-over government forests to communities. Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) focused to appropriate management and utilisation of forest resources by maintaining the balance between environment and development. Master Plan for the Forestry Sector came into existence in 1988, which clearly articulates the primacy of community forestry. The MPFS gave clear policy framework to meet people's basic needs for fuelwood, timber, fodder and other forest products on a sustained basis by promoting people's participation including women. Community and Private Forestry Programme was placed in top priority. After the restoration of democracy, most progressive Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 was promulgated, which foresee people as the source of power? Article 26(3) of the constitution requires the State to pursue the policy of mobilising the nation's natural resources. Similarly, the Article 26(4)

stipulates to make special arrangement for the protection of rare wildlife, forests and vegetation. The need of drastic changes and enactment of several acts and legislation including Decentralisation and Forest Acts were essential to meet the spirit of the Constitution. Therefore, Forest Act 1993 was enacted. As a reformation process Community Forestry Regulations came into existence and emphasised to hand-over government forests to particular user group through DFOs. Forest Act 1993 and The Forest Regulation 1995 recognises CFUG as a legal entity and emphasizes institutionalisation of them. A CFUG registered according to the Section 41 of the Act is an autonomous and corporate body with perpetual succession. The Forest Act 1993 empowers DFO to hand over any part of national forests to a user group in the form of CF. According to rule 29(1) of the Forest Regulation user group must have submitted application to DFO fulfilling the conditions prescribed by HMG/N to take over CFs. DFO grants legal certificate to CFUG of CFs. The Section 25(1) entitles users to develop, conserve, use and manage CFs to sell and distribute the forest products and fixing their prices as per OP. The Village Development Committee Act 1992, the Municipality Act 1992, the District Development Committee Act 1992 and the Local Self Governance Act 1999 are some of the major regulations and legal frameworks directly related to CFs. Besides them, Buffer Zone Management Regulation 1996, National Parks and Wild Life Conservation Act, Water Resources Act 1992, Water Resources Regulation 1994, Land Act 1964, Environment Protection Act 1996, etc. are other regulations related to CFP.

The OP of CFUG should be approved by DFO. According to the rule 26(2) CFUG can even develop, manage and utilise forests in public lands after getting approval from the owners and accepted by DFO. The boundaries of villages, towns and districts shall have no effect on handing over a forest area as CF. CFUG is authorised to impose penalties to any members of CFUG who breach rules and OP. However, it is not clear that who has authority to pose penalties to the offender other than CFUG members. The Forest Act (first amendment 1999) authorises DFO to penalise the office bearers of an CFUG if they are working contrary to the Forest Act, Regulation and OP. This controlling mechanism reduces the independent identity of CFUG. The Act and regulation also entitle to have separate fund for CFUG obtained from grants, donation and assistance from individuals/institutions and sale of forest products. 25 percent of the CFUG fund must spend in forest management activities. The activities prohibited in CFs by the Rule 31 are: functions restricted by the OP, to destroy forest or transfer land ownership of CFs, to clear forest areas for agricultural purposes (not allowed to cultivate annual crops), to build huts and houses, to take any action which may cause soil erosion, to capture or kill wildlife in violation of prevailing laws and to extract or transport rocks, soils, boulders, sands, pebbles, charcoal, lime and herbs protected by prevailing laws. These prohibitions are limiting the power given to CFUG by Forest Act, and contradictory to the principle of decentralisation and delegated legislation.

The CFUG can collect, distribute or sell only the forest products clearly stated in OP. According to the Section 27(1) of the Act, DFO has authority to cancel the registration of CFUG when DFO considers that CFUG is not respecting OP or not fulfilling the conditions of Act and Regulation. CFUG have right to appeal against DFO's decision only to the Regional Forest Director (RFD) within 35 days of the notice of the decision. The decision of RFD is final. This arrangement is not appropriate as CFUG has no chance to appeal to the court of law for final decision. There are also following contradictions observed in the forestry laws:

- Though Forest Act 1993 is much progressive than many other Acts of Nepal, it is still insufficient to meet the spirit of Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal 1990 as the Preamble of the Constitution clearly states that the source of all legal authority in Nepal is inherent in the people, where as Forest Act 1993 illustrates that CF rights are originated from the state.
- CFUG do not have direct ownership rights to the CF land. Only usufruct rights of management of forests are entertained by users. Users said that "Mandro sarkarko, biskun hamro"(we are drying our grains in the mattress of the government).
- Forest Operational Guidelines states that work plan approved along with conditions added by DFO as per the Rule 29(2) of the Forest Regulation that would add unnecessary control to CFUG functions/decisions.
- The power and functions entrusted to CFUG by Act has been limiting by Forest regulations, government notices and circulars of DoF.
- Several inherent contradictions are observed between Forest and Local Self Governance Act about the control over natural resources. For example, the authority to control forests existed in the VDC, according to Local Self Governance Act, remains with VDC. However, according to Forest Act CFUG are authorised to decide on CFs irrespective of the authority of VDC. VDC has authority to hear complaints about pasture, grass and fuel wood in the VDC area, however, Forest Act do not provide such authority to VDC. Local Self Governance Act keeps DFO under DDC, but DFOs are reluctant to acknowledge this arrangement.
- The recently expressed intention of government officials working in the forestry sector to change forest act and regulations indicate the signal of threat to decentralised regulations and spirit of civil society.
- Some users of the study area felt difficulties to assert their rights regarding the commercial forest products due to variation in rhetoric and reality of charging royalty to NTFPs, administrative difficulties, etc. For example, decision of HMG/N on the first of Baisak 2053 Bikram Era circulated by the DoF to DFOs limits the rights of users to sell their products out side the CFUG or districts.

It is realised that there might be a great inequity in future, if forest resources available in the VDC is controlled only by a particular CFUG at the cost of other inhabitants of the VDC. This situation creates economic disparity within the VDC because in many cases CFUG (small proportion of the population of the

VDC) might have many times more money to invest for their welfare than the total budget of the VDC. Therefore, a co-ordination mechanism and regulatory framework between VDC and CFUG to proportionally mobilise the financial resources obtained from the forests situated in that particular VDC the welfare of the inhabitants of that VDC is essential to balance the situation.

### **3.4 Community Forestry and the prevailing economic context**

Economic liberalisation and free market policy of government is supportive to strengthen the economic independence of CFUG as they have rights to sell their forest products instead of oligopoly of very few organisations. However, the impact of liberalisation and free market policy to poor and disadvantaged group of people, in general, is negative. Over growing demand of NTFPs, donor's interests to promote NTFPs, increasing number of forest based production, processing and marketing enterprises (timber, Nepali paper, crafts, herbs, dyes, etc.) at local and national level are conducive factors to promote economic dimension of CFs. The general economic condition of the study area is influenced by the infrastructural development like road and communication. Various development projects and programmes implemented in the study area are influencing economic context. Trade and industrialisation policies of government have important bearings on relationship between actors and economic aspect of the forests. Land reform and landless peasant rehabilitation activities are other relevant socio-economic issues influencing management of forests. The tension between economic gain and conservation of natural resources (e.g., patenting and trade related intellectual property rights, genetic modification v/s conservation of biological diversity) is another

## **4. Contribution of Community Forestry on social transformation**

In this section quick assessment of impacts of CFP on social transformation and bio-diversity has been presented. The elements of social transformation included here are gender, equity, empowerment, poverty, CFUG, DFO, and policy and planning. Here, the word impact is not dealt in rigid sense and covers outputs, results, effects and consequences. Similarly, the assessment is not based on the absolute sense, rather, it is interpreted in relative level based on trend existing hierarchically shaped feudalistic socio-cultural system of the study area.

### **4.1 Contribution of CF on forest management and bio-diversity**

Management of forest and bio-diversity: The condition of forests, especially those forests handed-over to CFUG has remarkably improved in the study area. Natural regeneration and bio-diversity are increased. It is reported that the species composition of flora and fauna, crown coverage, micro-habitat of the invertebrates, mosses, fungi, lichens and habitat for birds, reptiles and wild animals are increased. These all have positive impacts on the forest based



ecosystems. People are aware on objective of forest management and silvicultural requirements. Users are actively participating in the forest management process. The feeling of ownership is strongly developed. Even poor and women are increasingly involved in the forest management decision making process. Activities like thinning, pruning, fire control, harvesting, lauripalo and sithi-palo (rotational surveillance of forests by users having specially designed stick and or whistle), creating IG opportunities through cultivation of perennial cash crops, etc. are examples of improved forest management practices. CFs are providing ecological stability and increase bio-diversity (Upreti, 1998). CFUG are becoming sensitive to biological resources conservation (e.g., Thulonagi CFUG in Jiri/Dolakha has identified and declared 5 plant species as depleting species and prohibited to cut them, Suspa CFUG declared small part of CFs as "conservation area", bee keeping is integrated with community forestry in Serauli Gurdu CFUG to promote pollination and income generation) and production based forest management. It is reported that the number of wildlife species and their population have increased after improvement of forest condition (for example, number of wildlife in Sitakunda community forest has been increased from 12 (before 1992) to 75 in 1997 (Beek and Rai, 1997). However, In few cases, some forest management practices have negative impacts on bio-diversity (e.g., preference of fast growing multipurpose species, removal of unwanted species and dead trees, dried leaves, etc.).

**Agro-forestry:** Agro-forestry is a system of sustainable soil management combining trees with crops and livestock, aiming at increased yields based on the positive interaction of these elements (Schuler, 1997). Therefore, the agro-forestry has important role in the farming systems to raise the living condition of people. Agro-forestry activities in private land are significantly increased due to the controlled grazing and fodder tree plantation. Awareness on importance of agro-forestry is raised and information exchange between villagers is increasing. Private agro-forestry nurseries are available in the study area. The significant positive results noticed are: 1) increased multiplier effects, 2) degraded land is covered with vegetation, and 3) number of productive livestock is increasing. Agro-forestry achievement in Ramechhap is higher than in Dolakha. NGOs are creating awareness on agro-forestry through literacy classes and micro-projects. The trend is encouraging and showing positive results. Controlled grazing is increasingly practised in private land too to promote agro-forestry in private land. Stall feeding is promoting manure production. Increasing agro-forestry practices is reducing the pressure on CFs, giving more opportunities for poor and women to access CF resources because users, who have well-established agro-forestry in their own land, get resources easily from their own forests with less time and efforts. This also increasing income level of users involved in agro-forestry activities and improving soil fertility status.

#### **4.2 Contribution of CF on Forest Users Groups**

The level of awareness on reducing gap between demand and supply of forest resources is gradually increasing. The overwhelming demand of taking over of government forests by the CFUG, improved condition of CFUG managed forests, alternative and efficient use of forest resources, increased participation of community in forest management process, etc. are the evidences of positive impacts of CFP (Tembe, 1998). Increasingly, people are realising the economic, ecological, environmental, religious, cultural and political roles of forests and their contribution to social change. Nevertheless, there is still wider scope for broadening knowledge on production potential of forest and socio-economic and ecological benefits.

Transfer of forest management to CFUG is increasing. About 230 forests have been already handed over to users within a decade in the study area. So far only small patches of mainly resource poor-degraded forests are handed-over (NSCFP, 1999a). Since last year the big patches of resource rich forests (up to 700 hectare) started to be handed-over.

Capacity building of CFUG members and pressure groups: Several members of CFUG are trained on conflict resolution, gender, equity, forest management, agro-forestry, book keeping, planning, leadership, income generation, NTFPs management, etc. CFUG members are also participating in different workshops and study tours. These training, tours and workshops are facilitated or supported by NSCFP, DFOs, NGOs, FECOFUN, HIMAWANTI, etc. The impacts of these activities are positive to manage forest as well as to address the GEEP concerns. CFUG are developing their capacity and emerging as community based organisations. In several cases, democratic practices adopted by CFUG are being examples for other social and political institutions at local level. It is a positive signal that the most of the CFUG formed after 1997 have created special provisions for disadvantaged group of people in access to the forest resources (more privilege either at subsidised rate or free of cost, providing loans at low or no interest rate, allocation of part of CFs to use only for them, etc.). Similarly, the needs and interests of lower caste people are also considered during the preparation of CFUG constitution and OP (Upreti, 1999b). Lower caste people are almost proportionally represented in CFUG committees of their total population. In this regard, the finding of the study of Damber Tembe in Ramechhap is noteworthy to mention. He states that "an untouchable man said that his appointment as vice-chairperson in the CFUG had encouraged him and other lower caste people to take part in community development activities, and that his position has ultimately allowed them access to information which directly concerns them. This had never happened previously" (Tembe, 1998: 30). It is reported that participation of women and disadvantaged group of people in CFUG committees and their qualitative contribution is increasing in newly formed CFUG. Main reasons explained for such a success are: sufficient time and efforts invested proper facilitation and rapport building with communities, transparent, democratic and participatory process followed. Quality of forest management plans of CFUG formed through

MP approach has substantially improved due to better assessment of the forest conditions as well as needs and interests of users considering equity and gender issues. However, in some cases, people's perception towards their CFUG committees was negative (e.g., Suspa and Charnawoti) due to their poor performance (Poudel, 1999). Dinesh Poudel, in the findings of his study in Suspa and Charnawoti CFUG, states that "the forest belongs to committee, not to community" (Poudel, 1999: 41).

In recent years, CFUG are also gradually getting more post formation supports from DFOs and intermediary organisations. It is remarkable that the interest of users in terms of obtaining support from the DFO/project is changing to technical and facilitation aspects rather than financial assistance. This is a sign of maturity of CFUG and their ability to assess their real need as well as to make themselves financially independent. In some cases, executive members of VDCs are also members of CFUG and executive committees and started co-operation and joint project with CFUG (for example Suri VDC is contributing from its annual budget to promote CF activities). Earlier CFUG chairpersons, mainly dominated by powerful elite, were the only who used CFUG fund in low or no interest rate and invested to poor villagers on high interest loan. Gradually, CFUG members are becoming aware on such malpractices and protesting or stopping it. Some CFUG are providing low interest or interest free loan to their members to establish small enterprises at local level, e.g., Allo (*Girardinia diversifolia*) processing, weaving, etc. CFUG funds are also mobilised to establish forest and agro-forestry nurseries. All these achievements justify that the trend is in right direction. However, it is insufficient and there is high need for improvement. Power groups like NGOs federation, Ranger Association, FECOFUN, HIMAWANTI, etc. are emerging to deliver the support services to CFUG.

#### **4.3 Contribution of CF on District Forest Offices**

Capacity of DFO staff has been developed through different training to support CFUG. These training cover conflict resolution, gender, equity, participatory forest resource assessment and planning, decentralisation and devolution of forest management, forest products marketing, community forestry extension, agro-forestry, income generation, etc. Professional training to DFO staff imparted knowledge and skills to facilitate participatory equity-led forest management process. The authorities and responsibilities are also decentralising. The relationship of DFOs with other actors is improved. The Attitude and working style is changed and the quality of work is improved. In summary, the role of DFOs is changing towards facilitator and advisor to CFUG (Upreti, 1999b). However, DFOs are still unable to provide the required level of services to the CFUG due to lack of manpower, TA/DA policies and other constraints.

#### **4.4 Contribution of CF on gender**

Gender sensitivity is increased in the study area mainly because of the participatory forest planning and management practices worked out and adopted by NSCFP and other actors. MP is a powerful strategic and methodological approach to address the gender concerns. Participatory forest inventory method (Rai and Beek, 1998) is also contributing to raise gender awareness. Women leadership is increasingly developed and leading to CFUG committees and VDCs, etc. Representation of women in CFUG committee is increasing (e.g. 39 percent in Dolakha and 27 percent in Ramechhap) as against 19 percent in Okhaldhunga (NSCFP, 1999a) and 19 percent of national figure (Shrestha, 1997). About 35 percent trainees are women in the training supported by NSCFP. Six CFUG in Dolakha and 2 in Ramechhap are headed by women chairpersons. Following are example of increased gender sensitivity in the study area:

- Technical and managerial ability of women on forest management is increased. Several women groups on agriculture, income generation, saving, NFE and kitchen gardening are formed and working properly in addition to women CFUG.
- Local institutions, political parties, educational institutions are also softening towards gender concept due to mass scale awareness,
- Gender Working Group is formed in Dolakha representing all district based concerned actors to facilitate gender sensitive programme planning and implementation in the partner organisations as well as to co-ordinate, exchange and document gender related experiences and information.
- Culturally resistant patriarchal society is gradually changing and recognising the roles of women in society,
- Participation of female in forest management and other development activities are increasing,
- Workload of women is decreasing and directing towards the balance between men and women,
- Some women are able to strongly raise their voice to their rights. They are emerging to perform non-traditional roles,
- Practical needs and strategic interests of women are started to reflect on OP and CFUG formation process due to greater gender consciousness among the actors (mainly users),
- Access to and control of women on resources is gradually increasing,
- Women's vulnerability to poverty and violence and subordinate position is decreasing,
- Self confidence of women is increased. Male members also recognising the community role of women. The relationship between men and women in some cases is transforming in equal status,
- Increased insights of women about their own situation and CFs related matters
- Women's participation in training and workshop is also increasing.

- It is interesting to note that not only the project staff but also the staff of partner organisations are much sensitive on gender, poverty and equity concerns.

The most remarkable positive impact is observed on gender sensitisation. Because of gender awareness, not only number of women in CFUG assemblies and committees, but also their qualities of contribution have increased. Roles of women facilitators from local NGOs and female staff of project are greatly contributing to encourage and empower women users as well as sensitise male members on the gender role (Upreti, 1999b).

#### 4.5 Contribution of CF on equity

At the beginning of the execution of CFP in Dolakha and Ramechhap poorest people were affected by the imposed restriction on CFs. The forest management was mainly based on the interest and need of the powerful and rich people (e.g., Suspa, Charnawoti, Falampokhari and Masarpakha CFUG). At that time, forest resources distribution pattern were mainly guided by the interests of the rich people and local elite, and therefore, unequal. The decision making process was also under the interests of powerful people. CFUG funds were mainly used to fulfil the interests of these powerful elite. In general, interests of poor, women and lower caste people were not properly addressed in the OPs. However, this situation is now changing due to implementation of participatory planning and management of CFs. CFUG are providing timber free of cost (in Hawa VDC), firewood in 50 percent reduced cost and lending part of CF to grow fruits (in Shahare VDC) to the poorest users entangled with extreme difficulties. In Magapauwa VDC, a widow woman was rescued from losing her land kept in collateral by repaying the loan to the money lender. In Namdu VDC, CFUG members provided grain compulsorily collected from all of them to poorest members on subsidised rate. In Budhikhoriya CFUG, representative from lower/untouchable caste and poor people have been involved in a proportional basis for the OP preparation and made provision to allocate fodder plot in community forest to poor for their private use. These are the good example. In general, the level of awareness on equity is increasing due to strategic efforts of NSCF, DFO and NGOs like MP, training, workshops, representation of disadvantaged group of people in the CFUG, and executive committees, etc. The debate on access to forest resources to the poorest and disadvantaged group of people is widely started and gaining popularity. Equity concept is gradually translating into action after execution of the MPs. Most of the recently formed CFUG have made special provisions for disadvantaged group of people like access to forest products at subsidised rate or free of cost, access to loan from CFUG fund at low or no interest rate, special help for them at the time of crisis like natural calamities, etc. Interests and concerns of so-called lower caste people are incorporated in OP and constitution.

#### 4.6 Contribution of CF on empowerment

The empowerment is a broad political concept and ranging from economic empowerment, cultural, physical to social empowerment. Empowerment is essential to access to and control over the natural, physical and financial resources related to forest; to initiate and sustain a process of gaining sense of one's own worth and self respect; and develops strengths and power to deal with these resources; develops capacity to articulate their own interests, priorities, demands and to take action independently of poorest people and women (Upreti, 1999a).

The general indicators used to assess the empowerment situation are level of participation in public affairs, development of second generation leadership, access to information, self confidence, local initiatives and decisions, institutional pluralism like number of active local NGOs, self organised women groups, number of private forest entrepreneurs, development initiatives of local bodies, social movements like initiatives for social justice, efforts for gender balanced development, advancement of decentralisation, lower caste representation in VDCs, number of elected women in local bodies, existence of pressure groups, etc.

One of the major positive and direct impacts of CFP on empowerment is the developed capacity and increased level of awareness of users. For example:

- Some CFUG unanimously decided to compulsorily construct toilet in their house and plant bamboo in CFs. Those who will not perform these two tasks they will be expelled from the CFUG. The impact of this decision is very positive as all households have now toilet. The bamboo plantation in their CF is increased. They decided that the bamboo planted by the users in the CF can be used later by themselves.
- Some CFUG and forest protection committees are organising several awareness raising workshops in their own initiatives, financial resources and management/co-ordination capacities to create awareness about CFs. These workshops are: a) "concept and process of local development and networking of VDCs" to VDC executive committee members (chairpersons, vice chairpersons and women members), and community based organisations (e.g., Salleri and Maithan Harisidhi CFUG), b) legal aspects of CFs to VDC executive members, teachers, and other professional staff working in the VDC (e.g., Dortipakha Lukharka CFUG), c) CFs legislation and act, gender, women leadership development, forest management and income generation, d) cultural and literacy programme and orientation workshops on constitution and OP (Annex 2). Furthermore, some CFUG are implementing special literacy classes for women (e.g., Pauwa CFUG). In all training workshops CFUG mobilised DFO, FECOFUN and project staff, VDC and CFUG executive members as resource pe

- rsons and facilitators. This is a distinct signal of empowerment of users.

CF resources generate financial resources and reduce dependency on external financial support whereby economic empowerment is strengthened. This situation gives local people the opportunities to make independent decisions on development priorities of their area on their own. CFs are also safeguarding traditional knowledge and practices related to forest resources (upret, 1999a).

Empowerment and equity issues in both districts are fastly gaining momentum. Gender sensitivity is stronger in the study area than equity aspect. The debate, discussion and to some extent action is started. The need based access to forest resources to poorest and disadvantaged group is increasing. Their voice and interests and their involvement in decision making are increasing. However the level of equity and empowerment is yet inadequate and deserves wider scope for the improvement.

#### 4.6 Contribution of CF on poverty reduction

The forest products mainly fodder, fuel-wood, litters, NTFPs and timber are the major CF resources widely used by users. These resources play paramount role to satisfy the forest related need of users especially women and poor people and contribute to improve their living condition (Upreti, 1999a). Following are the major direct and indirect impacts on poverty:

- IG from forest products like timber, bamboo, medicinal plants, forest nursery, other NTFPs is started. The potentiality of broom grass, cardamom, turmeric, ginger, etc. in forests as a means of IG are explored, incorporated in many OPs and started to implement by some CFUG.
- The strong debate on potential contribution of CFs on poverty reduction among the actors is started.
- MP approach is not only creating employment opportunities for local people but also greatly contributing to sensitise uses on the economic dimensions of forests to reduce poverty.
- CFs are increasingly fulfilling basic forest needs of the poor people like fodder, fuelwood, litters and timbers if compared with the old forest management system where the lion-share of the benefits were obtained by powerful and elite people. This situation is changing and all users have access to the forest benefits and even equity issues are considered in some cases. This is a positive impact. Nevertheless, equitable access of the poorest on forest benefits still needs to be strategically promoted further to achieve the desired level of objective.
- In case of medium and rich people, the number of productive animals stock is increased or sustained whereby they are earning income from animal and animal products because they have availability of enough private land to obtain fodder, grasses and litters. However, the impact

of CFs on the livestock population of poor and disadvantaged group of people seems not positive. In some cases, they are forced to sell their livestock due to lack of fodder/grasses because of prohibition and or restricted access to CFs and no private forests available to collect fodder grasses. Therefore, in some cases restricted or limited access to CFs has negative impact on poor people. However, in recent days this problem is increasingly attracting the concerns of CFUG and other actors to mitigate the negative effects.

- CFs have also implications on agricultural productivity. The availability of Farm Yard Manure (FYM) and compost to maintain soil fertility is mainly determined by the availability of grasses, fodder and litters. Due to controlled grazing the availability of fodder, grasses and litters are increasing whereby the quantity of compost and FYM is increasing and leading to improve the condition of soil fertility status and ultimately increased agricultural production.
- It is remarkable to note that rich and medium farmers started to plant/protect forest/fodder trees in their private land to fulfil their demands. The challenge for them now is the gaining knowledge of suitable plant species, thinning/pruning and to mitigate negative effects of forest/fodder trees on crop production.
- Increased economic condition of entrepreneurs of small scale manufacturing industries like furniture, ayurvedic medicine, knitting, dyeing, etc.
- Poor and women living in the remote area, in leisure time, are involved to collect forest resources like mushroom and obtaining cash income for their survival.
- CF resources generate financial resources whereby the dependency level of communities and CFUG on subsidies and aid projects decreases. It also creates specific employment opportunities for poor, women and disadvantaged group of people like opportunities for wage labour, watchman, forest care takers and porters, etc.
- CF resources also promote export of products like medicinal plants, logs, handicrafts, textiles, fruits, oils etc. at domestic level from forest resources.
- Negative impact of commercialisation of forest products is also observed in some CFUG when they sold timber outside community without fulfilling the needs of users and even some time CFUG committee buy forest products at low price from on CFUG and sell them to other traders with large profit margin (e.g., Suspa CFUG) which virtually exploits the CFUG forest resources irrationally (NSCFP, 1998).
- Ukali magazine is also creating awareness on the contribution of community forestry on the reduction of rural poverty.
- Increased supply of drinking water by regeneration of natural springs as well as improved ecological situation.
- Rate of out migration is decreasing because of income opportunities available through forest resources in their own villages.



- There are several backward and forward economic linkages of CFs to promote poverty reduction.

Representation of poor in CFUG committees is about 25 percent. CFUG formed before 4-5 years have less representation of poor and backward people (Poudel, 1999). However, the situation is changing now. Representation of poor in newly formed CFUG is improved. Poorest's interests are started to express during the CFUG formation process. Especially the recently formed CFUG have included special provision for disadvantaged group of people in OP and some of them are executing these provisions in action (e.g. Swotibanarasi CFUG in Sunkhani has allocated part of CFs to poor women where they are growing cardamom and getting profit out of it). In Suri, CFUG members intensively discussed the problems of poorest and disadvantaged group of people to assist them. In Sundrawoti, poor and backward people strongly raised their voices to open the dried branches of the trees of CF all round the year and convinced all users to agree on their argument. CFUG members are also gradually respecting the voice of poor people raised in general assembly.

CFUG earn money from their CF products (both timber and NTFPs) by selling the rights to collect these products. Some CFUG have several thousands of Nepalese Rupees in their fund. These funds are utilised to develop forest as well as to execute community development activities and entrepreneurship development whereby many people obtain job. These funds also help to poor and needy people to access to financial resource as a low credit interest from CFUG fund to start IG activities. However, there are no any evidences of access to low interest credit for poor from the financial institutions and commercial banks.

Leasehold Programme (LP) is basically a poverty focused programme to uplift socio-economic condition of target population through creating opportunities. However, respondents from the Gupteshwor VDC of Ramechhap district expressed their worst experience on leasing land by powerful political leader and village elite. All actors except DFO staff expressed their dissatisfaction with the performance of implementation of leasing forests, especially in the identification of poor due to target oriented approach. To improve this situation it would be appropriate to incorporate leasing system within the process of community forestry. By doing so users themselves could identify the poorest of the poor, allocate part of CF for their use and promote poverty focused programme activities for poorest. In such a case, the existing mode of operation and legal mandate needs to be adjusted or modified at policy level.

CFP in the study area is showing positive results toward poverty reduction and social transformation (Upreti, 1999b). However, the windows of opportunities within CFP are still insufficient due to inadequate awareness about opportunities, lack of market information, lion share of profit from forest resources still captured by elite, limited technical as well as managerial

knowledge and skills, administrative and legal barriers, taxation system, and uncooperative behaviour of concerned authorities, etc.

#### **4.7 Contribution of CF on improvement in policy and planning**

The importance of participatory planning is increasingly realised by the CFUG members as well as facilitators. The procedural guidelines on participatory forest inventory assessment (Rai and Beek, 1998) are instrumental to raise awareness on the need of participatory planning. Participatory planning is widely practised in MPs (Annex 3). These practices are also disseminated to other development activities.

The older OPs were weak to address the equity issues and unclearly stating the poverty related activities as well as bio-diversity aspects. These OPs were mainly protection oriented and ambiguous. But now these weaknesses are overcoming. Old OPs are re-written after every five year to adjust the contemporary changes. These re-written OPs are addressing GEEP concerns and proper management and utilisation of forest resources. New OPs are more process oriented, focused on systematic contents and fully explained texts and encapsulation of open, informal decision making after a series of systematic discussions.

Co-ordination and market linkages, especially for NTFPs are weak. In the recent years some work like workshops, study and information collection is started. There is lot to do to develop market linkages and dissemination of information.

The creation of forums and platforms like PCC and DPCC, Forestry Sector Co-ordination Committee, etc. have positive contribution to improve the performance of CFP in the study area. The Community Forestry Radio Programme is sharing information, and increasing feeling of accountability. Work of HIMAWANTI, FECOFUN, like support groups are supporting the consolidation of community forestry policy (e.g., decentralisation of power to DFO/CFUG) and to develop coherence and synergy among the actors (Upreti, 1999b). Involvement of NGOs as intermediaries in CFP has positive results for social change through CFP. Gradually, local bodies are also involving to support the CF related activities.

The overall impacts of CFP on positive social transformation is perceived by concerned actors as positive and appreciated in both districts. Socio-economic condition of local people, in general, is improved. The gender sensitivity is increasing and concerns of equity and empowerment aspects are acknowledged. Democratic practices are exercising in rural areas. The gap between rich and poor is gradually decreasing but not yet drastically reduced. The main indicators used to assess the social transformation explained in the section four of this paper shows that the trend is positive.

#### 4.8 Contribution of CF on ecological awareness

Mass awareness on importance of forests on environmental and ecological aspects is increasing and helping to promote ecologically sensitive forest management plans and practices. Natural regeneration and vegetation is increased through protection and enrichment plantation. Both plant and animal diversity are increased. Conservation of extinguishing plants and animals in some CFs is started. Prohibition of hunting, forest fire control, protection for forest encroachment, etc., is helping to create favourable micro-climate for diverse types of flora and fauna. Some CFUG are also identified the species of ethno-botanical importance in their OPs. Water spring sources are maintained and even dried sources are recharging in the densely vegetated watersheds. The level of awareness on relationship between vegetation and water spring sources is raised. Plantation on and protection of water spring sources is increasing. Afforestation and regeneration of forests and fodder helped to decrease/ protect erosion and landslide and contributing for soil conservation. Due to the improved condition of forest, it is realised that the water retention capacity, texture, structure, organic matter and the porosity of soil in forest area and the surrounding are improved. Damage on farm and agricultural crops caused by landslide and flood is decreasing. Condition of CFs is drastically improving. Some plant and animal species and even some forests themselves are embedded with religious significance and pass down to successive generations and conserving them through indigenous knowledge and practices. These religious forests are greatly contributing to maintain the ecological benefits of that area. However, in some cases, the regeneration and augmentation of some forest resources are imbalancely affected by over exploitation (especially in NTFPs). Now, after full growth of planted pine forest, some people expressed their worries about the negative effect on soil condition i.e., increased acidification.

#### 5. Determinants of success and failure of CFP

- Migration, fluctuation or reduction on agricultural production, decrease in size of land holding, population pressure, social discrimination, conflict/interests clash (profit orientation versus subsistence) between stakeholders, weak translation of policies into practices, etc. might adversely affect the CFP.
- Improved literacy and schooling situation, local initiatives for forest management, decentralisation, availability of basic need facilities like drinking water, road, electricity, telecommunication, increased per capita income and employment opportunities, favourable environmental and ecological policies, favourable NTFPs and trade policies of government, etc. might have positive impacts on CF.
- Uncertainties about government policies, rules, decisions and notices might hamper the smooth implementation of CFP. The growing and

- organised interest of some senior officials of Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation to restrain the rights of forest users
- Discrepancies on policies and methodological procedures between the projects working in the community forestry sector might create confusion, conflicts and operational difficulties.
  - Cultural tradition to divide parental property (land) among the sons resulted into land fragmentation to smaller holdings. This situation creates a lack of land available for agro-forestry and private forests.
  - Imbalance or inappropriate dose and excessive use of chemical fertiliser use by farmers deteriorate soil fertility and decrease agricultural productivity in future. This leads to food shortage and negatively affects the community.
  - If Nepal obtains membership of World Trade Organisation (WTO) it has to implement articles and clauses including trade related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPs) and issues of patenting by 2004. In this case it might affect the CFP because of evolution of acts and regulations restricting CF and favouring the WTO's policies and procedures.
  - Nepal has signed on Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) initiated by the Rio Earth Summit (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development June 1992) in 1992, ratified in 1993 and entered into force from 1994. To effectively execute the commitment, there may be need to develop favourable policies, strategies, acts and legislation to conserve and develop biological diversity. In such a case, these efforts might have positive effects on CFP.
  - Special arrangement and mechanisms to involve poor and women in the planning, benefit sharing and decision making process
  - Micro project approach
  - Regular follow-up and monitoring mechanisms
  - Introspective evaluation and embracing errors
  - Awareness rising and capacity building of all actors involved in CFP

## **6. Synthesis: principal lessons learned and their relevance**

1. By considering the trend, methodology and the progress made so far, speculation can be made that it is absolutely possible to address equity concerns and empowerment issues in natural resources and bio-diversity management if utmost efforts have been made. To properly address the GEEP concerns special strategies, approaches, procedures need to be developed, facilitating staff needs to be properly sensitised and trained and the project must have high commitment. CFP has not only brought considerable benefits to the local people but also proved the managerial ability of local communities to sustainably manage natural resources and bio-diversity. If given critical consideration on equity, gender and poverty issues at present, the community forestry could drastically reduce gaps between rich and poor and promotes equity.

2. It is realised that concrete gender sensitive, equity-based and poverty focused CFP is hard to achieve without institutional capacity building and collective learning. Therefore, the attention needs to pay to develop capable leadership and self governing and self sustaining institutions to achieve GEEP sensitive and sustained forest management.
3. Sustainability of the most promising MP approach is a great concern. Vast majority of the intermediary organisations, who are facilitating MPs, are heavily depending upon the financial support of the project and still weak to explore other financial alternatives. If their capacity is not fully develop to sustain themselves, many of them might disappear in future. Therefore, the sustainability aspect of successful innovations needs to be worked out.
4. It is fully possible to materialise real participatory planning process in MNRB if due attention is given. Poorest and backward (untouchable) people and women are actively involved in holistic community forest management process. Therefore, CFP could be one of the most suitable approaches for rural social transformation, if facilitated properly.
5. Structural monitoring mechanisms like DPCC, PCC, bimonthly meeting, and introspective evaluation workshops are crucial to improve performance of CFP. Effectively organised monitoring system ensures the representation of poor and backward people through the MP approach of CFUG formation. These efforts still need to be continuously reinforced.
6. Heavy efforts have been made on software side of community forestry like user groups evaluation and award, users study tour, record keeping training, community forestry introduction workshop, CFUG forest management training, CFUG networking planning workshop, inception workshop, natural regeneration award, OP monitoring and evaluation, record keeping, biological soil conservation, agro-forestry/community forestry awareness training to involved actors, etc. They are very instrumental to increase knowledge and skills and to motivate all actors for the MNRB in the study area. There is great potentiality of replicability of these success stories for the scaling up the CFP.
7. High altitude resource rich forests need to be handed over quickly to CFUG for their better utilisation and management and long term sustainability.
8. Community forestry approach is recognised as an effective approach to the sustainable management and utilisation of forest resources to uplift the socio-economic condition of target population.
9. CFUG are bringing management goals into practice. The MP as methodological approach focuses on collaborative learning and collective action based on meaningful interaction through appropriate facilitation, conducive strategies, local institutions and critical self reflection.
10. Accountability and ownership are the important variables contributing to positive impacts of CFP. Democratic decision making process and active

involvement of all users in community forestry activities is developing trusts and generating feelings of ownership and accountability. Unless disadvantaged groups of people develop the confidence to assert their rights to forest resources, powerful member of users groups dominates the whole process and turns to feudalistic management system. The appropriate way to break such impasse is to develop common understanding and agreement through exchange of information, effective communication between the actors. Commitment and the adaptive attitude of all stakeholders are essential to have positive impacts of development intervention. CFP in the study area is helping people to practice the democratic process as they are bringing the devolution of power to the marginalised people.

11. Many executed solutions have characteristics of double loop learning, through which people reflect on and amend their action strategies. Double loop learning is a combination of action research and participatory learning process.
12. Private forestry activities are greatly contributing to fulfill the forest related livelihood requirements of the users.
13. Values, beliefs and trusts are other factors affecting the performance of solutions. A vertical social stratum created by the Hindu caste system and subordinate position of women in Nepal exerts enormous influence on the community forestry and inhibits the empowerment of poor and women. Through the effective facilitation the cultural resistance is weakening and culturally affected group of people are empowering.
14. Knowledge processes such as generation, transformation, exchange and use of both scientific and local knowledge about community forestry activities in the study area is greatly contributing to achieve positive results from the executed solutions. To make multi-stakeholders forest management effective, there is a need to institutionalise knowledge, information, feedback mechanisms and effective communication. A lesson from the study is not to control, but to learn, monitor the process and adapt, based on exchange of information and building trust and rapport between the actors.
15. Generally, elite in the study area are exercising their power as they are more aware on law, legislation, they have access to information and are capable to use them to their favour. The strategy to overcome this problem is to make the poor people aware on their rights and forest legislation. Besides that, political power is increasingly intruding into the local development process and major power-based social characteristic in the study area. The notion of power is political and institutionalised within political processes in social life, dealing with strategic relations, resistance, support and opposition, stability and cohesion in social order. However, it is not remarkably influencing the results of CFP mainly because of use of appropriate platforms, strategies and facilitation methodologies.

16. An interface between users and resources is a condition to create common platforms for MNRB and provide opportunities to work together by agreeing on a joint action plan and collective implementation. The role of platforms is crucial to bring resource users together to act collectively toward adaptive management of forest resources. DPCC, PCC, bi-monthly meeting, CFUG assemblies, introspective evaluation workshops, etc. are the concrete examples of such platforms. However, the role and performances of such platforms need to be further strengthened to tap the full economic potentials of community forestry.
17. Assistance to create and institutionalise support groups like FECOFUN, HIMAWANTI to advocate for the promotion of community forestry and the protection of users' rights is a pragmatic solution to achieve the desired objective.
18. Facilitation is a systematic methodological approach to improve the performance of the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of community forestry that promotes adaptive collaborative multi-stakeholder forest management to improve the living conditions, to empower the target population and to sustainably manage the natural resources. Facilitation process applied by the project at all stages from investigation, negotiation, implementation to review phases of planning processes to identify real users, their roles, commitments, and authority over forest resources are one of the strong aspects of CFP with high potentiality of replicability.
19. The success of CFP is mainly determined by needs, interests, strategies and initiatives of resource users and other actors involved in the process. Management capacity of the CFUG through comprehensive OP is contributing to make solutions effective and successful.
20. CFP is a dynamic socio-technical as well as managerial process. Therefore, the management approaches, methodologies and procedure should be dynamic and responsive to contemporary changes.
21. There is considerable information generated and experiences gained by the actors in the CF process. However, the systematic documentation of such innovations, experiences and information is insufficient.
22. It is not only essential but also possible to change the orientation of forest professionals to facilitators and catalysts to promote a sustainable forest management. Transformation of organisations working in the development sector to learning organisations (Upreti, 1998) is a precondition to address the GEEP concerns and to promote sustainable MNRB.
23. Design and promotion of strategic procedures (for example: compulsory involvement of poor, backward people and women in planning and decision making process) to ensure proper representation of targeted population (poor, disadvantaged and women) and to help them to realise their authority, responsibility and accountability are instrumental to have positive impacts of CFP.

24. The availability of progressive acts and regulations is necessary but not a sufficient condition to ensure the GEEP-responsive and sustainable CFP. Internal social structure and disposition of power to manipulate acts and regulations, understanding of local dynamics, local knowledge systems including social and physical parameters, donor's conditions and procedures, institutional arrangements, all have influential roles to play.
25. It is essential to acknowledge the indigenous knowledge to make CFP more responsive to GEEP concerns. Local people are capable, sense maker and judgemental in MNRB in their communities. Therefore, it is essential to develop capacity of local people through awareness rising activities and support to build the capacity of local institutions.
26. The innovative and successful approaches and methodologies developed by individual projects and institutions like NSCFP need to be shared with other organisations working in CFP. Otherwise, there is a risk of creating disparity between project implemented districts and non project districts.
27. Social fencing, a strong self motivated mechanism emerged from the commitment and developed feeling of ownership of users in the study area is a great community asset to sustainably manage the natural resources.
28. Documentation of successful cases and local innovations of the CFUG is very important and essential.

## 7. Conclusion

NSCFP, a donor funded project is significantly contributing to the promotion of CFP in the study area. CFP in Dolakha and Ramechhap districts has positive impacts on gender, equity, empowerment, poverty, bio-diversity and forest resources management which are significantly contributing to social change. The general socio-economic condition of the study area has been improved. The methodological approach practised to facilitate CFP is very effective to achieve the desired outcomes. Poverty, gender and equity aspects are now in strong discussion and debate at all level of involved stakeholders due to overwhelming contents in almost all training, workshop, assemblies, meeting and informal gatherings. The mutual learning between DFOs, NSCFP, CFUG, NGOs and other partners is one of the unique features of CFP and contributing to the positive social changes. Gender sensitisation is one of the most successful achievements. The equity aspect is strongly provoking debate at the level of actors on why and how equity. However, the result/impact is yet inadequate. The poverty reduction aspect is relatively weak as compared to the achievement made on gender and equity. Local people are empowering. Feeling of group ownership, group identity and solidarity among the users are drastically increased due to demand driven approach. Power, authorities and responsibilities are decentralising to the users and community forestry related activities in the study area are gearing towards balanced and optimised social,



economic and ecological benefits. These are significantly contributing to social transformation in the study area.

The level of awareness is increased whereby quantity and quality of participation of users, especially poor, women, Dalit, etc. is improved. Knowledge and skills of local organisations on facilitation and people's mobilisation is increased, local knowledge, skills and other resources are efficiently mobilised. Leadership skills, decision making capacity and conflict resolution skills of local people are developed, employment opportunities from forest resources is expanding. Dramatic improvement of forests resource management has been observed.

The role of facilitation is central to exert positive impacts on community and MNRB as it helps to bring about self-willed and learned transformations. CFP implemented in the study area is learning intensive to maintain adaptive responses to changing circumstances based on shared knowledge. From the study it is clear that the needs and the willingness of stakeholders, conducive policy contexts, effective facilitation, regular monitoring, valid knowledge and information, effective feedback, feelings of ownership and trust among the actors, common visioning and goals, and mobilisation of local resources are important conditions for making the CFP successful.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1: CFUG formation process

#### 1. Investigation Phase

- Sensitisation to local people and users,
- Identification of potential CF area and users,
- Hamlet (tol) meeting,
- Household visit and survey,

## 2. Constitution preparation phase

- Interest group meeting,
- Preparation and facilitation of general assembly meeting (GAM),
- Writing up constitutions and registration,

## 3. Operation plan preparation phase

- Forest boundary survey,
- Forest map preparation,
- Interest group meeting,
- Forest resources inventory,
- Hamlet meeting,
- Preparation and facilitation of GAM,
- Writing up the Operational Plan (OP),

## 4. Induction phase

- Orientation training to executive committee members,

## 5. Evaluation phase

- Joint evaluation

*(Source: Annex 16 of NSCFP Annual Report 1997/98)*

## **Annex 2: Contents of Operational Plan**

### Part one: Introduction

- CFUG name, address,
- Historical background,
- Socio-economic condition,
- OP preparation procedure and amendment process

### Part two: Description of forest

- Forest condition and management objectives, social and technical description,

### Part three: Block/sub block division

- Divided by users on the basis of condition and management objective,

### Part four: Forest inventory and data analysis

- Explanation of forest inventory methodology and sampling design and intensity,
- Area-wise growing stock,
- Regeneration condition,

#### Part five: Forest management

- Description of forest protection, silvicultural operation, harvesting and utilisation,
- NTFP and bio-diversity,
- Plan for forest products useful for users,
- Harvesting plan,
- Planning for forest product collection, harvesting and distribution considering gender and equity,
- Planning for agro-forestry (if insufficient production from forest),
- Planning for selling (in case of surplus production)

#### Part six: CFUG fund mobilisation

- Planned for forest and community development activities,

#### Part seven: Provision of fine and other punishment

- Description of conditions for fine and punishment,

#### Part eight: Monitoring and evaluation

- Considered as indispensable activity,

#### Part nine: Specific directives of DoF

- Mentioned if any,

#### Part ten: Miscellaneous

- Provision for prize and rewards,
- Bank account handling,
- List of prohibited activities in CFs, etc.

#### Part eleven: Annexes

- Forest boundary map,
- Forest boundary survey field book,
- Forest block/sub block division map with inventory sample plots,
- Map of important forest products explaining growing stocks, assumed increment rate, harvesting plan, etc.

*(Source: Annex 17 of NSCFP Annual Report 1997/98)*

### **Annex 3: Process of Micro Projects (major steps)**

1. Demand from beneficiary to NGO /CBO/DFO/NSCFP
2. Demand verification by intermediary with involvement of NSCFP + DFO if needed
3. Micro project proposal preparation by intermediary and NSCFP (+ beneficiaries)
4. Proposal submission to DPCC by NSCFP
5. Agreement on MP proposal among beneficiary, intermediary, DFO (if involved) and NSCFP
6. MP implementation by intermediary with the help of other stakeholders
7. Joint evaluation with the involvement of all partners

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<sup>i</sup>Micro project is a demand based approach adopted by NSCFP to improve the performance of CFP, in general, and CFUG in particular. Intermediary organisations are working to link between project and the beneficiaries at grass root level. Main activities implemented by intermediaries as micro projects are: community forestry awareness, pre-formation support to CFUG, technical advise to CFUG formation, agro-forestry, private forestry, non timber forest products management, conflict resolution within or between CFUG, empowerment and institutional development of CFUG, administrative skill building of CFUG like book keeping, minuting, fund mobilisation, etc. , revision of CFUG constitutions and operational plans (Lamichhane, et. al., 1999).

<sup>ii</sup>Social fencing is a process of conservation of community forests through the changed motivation and behaviour of users, not by fences.

<sup>iii</sup>Panchayat was the lowest political unit of the autocratic partyless Panchayat political system. After the restoration of democracy in 1990 in Nepal, the Panchayat was replaced by Village Development Committee.

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