

Taking into consideration of other institutions as well?:

Context of community forestry intervention in Nepal

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Abstract

It is stressed that community forestry intervention in Nepal, though in itself is an institution building process (for devising a sustainable and equitable forest management system) has, so far, tended to overlook the number of institutions that might have prevailed in the locality. Based on four Community Forestry Users Groups (CFUGs) in Gorkha, Tanahun and Parbat, the paper argues that a number of institutions (mostly non-forestry ones) may be associated in the local level and that community forestry intervention may not ignore this reality. Such institutions are seen to have been crystallised form of local 'interest groups' and hence may be used to help figuring out the local interests thus complementing the community forestry extension processes that are being practiced.

Background

Nepal's forestry policy accords highest priority to Community forestry (CF). Government intends to handover the management responsibility and the use rights of all accessible hill forests of the country to the local communities of forest user groups (CFUGs) 'to the extent that they are willing and capable of managing them' (HMG 1989). CF policy, has been very popular amongst the donor communities and that numerous projects have been involved in facilitating handover of the National Forests to CFUGs and in their subsequent management. To date over a million hectares of forests have been handed over to 12,000 user groups (CFUG data Base 2003) which are managing those resources as guided by the agreements reached between the government and the communities concerned (this, however, is not to suggest that there are no deviations).

Community forestry intervention as an institution building process

Handover of the national forests into community forests essentially involves interventions that focus on institution building process (than a blueprint) for achieving a sustainable and equitable forest management and benefit sharing system. Equitable benefit sharing systems has two important facets. First, the locally acknowledged use rights (in contrast to de jure rights) of the people who are dependent upon those resources are insured; second, the aspirations of all section of the communities (which is heterogeneous by nature) are taken care of. The District Forestry Office (DFO) rangers are supposed to play a pivotal role in the overall intervention process who are often supported from the donors and the NGO staff in carrying out the job. Operational Guidelines about the required field processes are available (HMG 2001) and are expected to be followed. The guidelines emphasise on a series of Interest group meetings and Tole meetings, which are essentially seen as a means of consensus building and empowerment amongst the people concerned. The end products of the field processes are production of a consensus based Operational Plan and accompanying CFUG Constitution.

Matter of concern

It may be striking that while CF intervention has essentially been accepted as a process of sustainable and equitable institution building, there has, so far, been little reference of the other institutions that might co-exist. Operational Guidelines were prepared as early as 1989 (HMG 1989) and have been revised for a number of times (HMG 1992, HMG 1995, HMG 2001). The latest revision was done in 2000-2001 by a task force that comprised of all major projects and programmes that pursued community forestry. It may be noted that even the latest version of the Operational Guidelines (HMG 2001) has failed to explicitly point out about the possible existence of such institutions and about their utility.

Indigenous systems of forest management are probably the only exceptions of such acknowledgements. Indigenous systems of forest management might be the result of a dynamic response of the local communities over the state of forest resource who indigenously institutionalise norms for forest management and benefit sharing (Fisher 1989). Such institutions, however, may or may not be evident in the form of organisation.

Lack of adequate level of awareness about the existence of institutions translates into the recommended extension modality, which sees that 'interest group meetings' and 'tole meetings' are essentially the means through which latent interests and aspirations of the weaker section of the community may be dug out.

Based on case studies in four CFUGs in Gorkha, Tanahun and Parbat, we argue that interest groups might not necessarily be formless in structure but, instead, could have been crystallised (or heading towards that process) into one or other form of institutions. This has a clear degree of implication on CF intervention process, which naturally would have to be carried out amidst a number of other local institutions either during the phase of hand over or the support phase that follows. A decision to ignore this reality would naturally be absurd and could be unhelpful at the best and counterproductive at the worst. While such institutions might have interactive dynamics within each of them, between one another and between them and the community forestry systems, our objective here is rather limited. We essentially want to highlight the reality that community forestry institutions might content a number of other institutions operating generally (but not necessarily) within the exclusive boundary of the group. We purposely leave out the more formal official institutions like VDCs and the Wards despite their relevance to the CF process. This is owing to the reason that it is already a debatable topic and there has been a lack of consensus about their involvement in practice, if not always in theory¹.

¹Local Sel-Governance Act 1999 and Rules 2000 see more direct role of the formal bodies like DDCs and VDCs in decision making process in all matters of local development. On the other hand the current community forestry development programmes and projects, in the hills in particular, see that indigenous use-rights boundary of the local people may not necessarily conform to the politico-administrative boundaries. They thus imply that communities of user groups are more relevant units for all types of decision-making about the local resources where the formal bodies like VDC and DDC might have relatively little role to play.

Cases

Below we present the four CFUGs cases. We deliberately keep the accounts of CF short to provide space for other institutions that co-exist. The last three cases have been presented relatively briefly both because the data were limited in those cases compared to the first one and also because we had to make a certain compromise in favour of an article of a readable length.

Biren Chok CFUG, Prithvi Narayan Municipality #9, Gorkha

This community forest user group is located on the Gorkha-Khairini road roughly at 7 km. from Gorkha Bazaar. The group holds two patches of forests namely, Deurali (63 ha.) and Jangale (18 ha.). Forest handing over was done in 2049 (BS²). Sal is the principle species in both of the patches. The road passing through the ridgeline roughly divides the major UG settlements and the smaller forest patch on the northwest with the major forest patch on the southeast. The user group currently consists of 165 HHs which are divided in 7 big and small clusters; five of which are on one side of the road and one cluster on the other. Biren Chok is the local business centre and is located just on the ridgeline on the road. Ethnic Magars are dominnat group. The other castes are Brahmin, Chhetri, Newar, and the occupational castes.

²Bikram Sambat (BS) dates have been used in all of the cases. BS calendar is roughly 57 years ahead of the Romon calendar.

A closer look at the community forest user group shows a number of formal and informal other institutions.

Fresh vegetable production group, Biren Chok

This is probably the oldest institution in the locality. There are currently 17 members in the groups all of which, are Magars. The concept was initially pushed by JTA as early as 2044 with a view that the farmers efficiency in producing vegetable could be improved if they form into group and concomittantly develop a habit of savings. The concept however remained dynamic in the sense that originally the entire population with the VDC boundary were the focus of the intervention but that in the due course of time the coverage was narrowed down to ultimately arrive at what is the situation now.

The group members though continue to produce vegetable, their emphasis now seems to have changed. Current thrust is on savings and credits. Each participating HH deposits Rs. 100 a month (Originally the sum was Rs. 10 which changed over time to Rs. 20, Rs. 50 and Rs. 100). Currently the group has Rs. 12,000 in their fund, which has not been able to rise for some time owing to discontinued savings. The members are entitled to borrow money for which 18 per cent interest rates are applicable. Lending does not require Collateral and is very attractive.

They have introduced a provision through which shares may be bought and sold. Current price of each share is 10,000. The demand for the share is very high but the group would like to restrict it within the Magar communities.

People may not like to sell shares but some times money requirements forces them to decide selling. Currently four individuals have sold their share.

Gandaki/Dhaulagiri savings and credits cooperative Biren Chok

These are female co-operatives, each of which currently consists of 73 members. The origin dates back to 2048 when the Lion's club people facilitated forming small groups to help income generation. This resulted into two groups comprising of poorer people consisting of 25 individuals in each. The club had then supported each of the groups through adult education/training followed by running a small-scale business (goat rearing, vegetable production and grocery shop keeping). Gradually the group started small savings and credits schemes and was ultimately registered with the District Co-operative Office as a financial co-operatives. The groups since then limited itself in savings and credit schemes and stopped the income generation component. The membership continued to rise to arrive at the present number.

Currently each member contributes Rs. 50 a month and the total savings with each of the groups has reached 7,00,000. The members may borrow the money for which an interest rate of 18 per cent is applicable. Borrowing does not require any collateral and is very attractive. Default is unusual.

The scheme is being very popular and they have opened the scheme for buying and selling of share. While they are quite liberal in terms of extension of membership, they are keen that it retains the identity of the female co-operative. The males have repeatedly tried for buying the shares but the women are adamant about their previous stand.

Jana Seva multipurpose co-operative, Biren Chok

The birth of this institution was actually the reflection of stimulus to join the above mentioned institution but those had denied accommodating them for one or another reason. This institution comprises 56 male (?) members and has been registered with the District co-operative office in 2053. All they essentially do at the moment is savings and credits. The 'multipurpose' function is not pursued despite the name. The name was given only to facilitate the registration process, as the co-operative office (which has the authority to register) would prefer not to see too many co-operatives under the same nametag. Each member deposits Rs. 50 a month who is entitled to borrow money from the funds thus collected. Money may be borrowed for a maximum of 12 months at an interest rate of 18 per cent. The share are transacted at Rs. 400/ (250?).

Biren Chok Pear group

This group, again, is the result of people to be a part of pre-existing institution

but were denied an acceptance for one or other reasons. They consequently decided to take advantage of the scheme of the DAO, which was prepared to provide support for fruit production. The current membership is 34 each of which is supposed to plant a minimum of 5 saplings of pear and deposit Rs. 50 in the group's funds (this amount was initially Rs. 30). The fund has now reached 130,000 and is monthly lent out to the members in rotation at a rate of 18 percent per annum. Limited fund and heavy demand meant that requests have to be made in advance and the ones who puts the requests first would get a priority.

Livestock Development Group, Biren Chok

Despite the name, this institution limits itself to buying milk from a number of farmers which would ultimately be supplied to milk co-operative located in Gorkha bazaar. It has received financial support from two sources. DLS had provided Rs. 75,000 for buying a buffalo bull with an official intent of improving the future breed of the local buffaloes. They, however, decided not to use the money for buffalo but to use the same for buying necessary gears required for milk collection and fat-testing. The amount thus procured, however, was not adequate and that the short money (Rs. 59,000) was mainly met from a number of institutions prevailed. The group has now been criticised for having taken undue profits contrary to the theoretical provision, which did not allow them to take any middleman margin.

Chandi Deurali Mother's group

This was formed in 2057 and has now around 25 members. This group can be considered to have emerged partly from desire of the Magar women to work for community solidarity and partly through uncomfortability they felt while being a member of the *women cooperatives* described above. Their uncomfortability is claimed to have roots in two things. Firstly, the cleverer Brahmin and Chhetris hold main responsibilities in the co-operatives and tend to be biased against the *Magars* who were mostly illiterate. They had greater hassles in borrowing the money and need to follow rigid deadline in paying back the loans in contrast to the Barhmings and Chhetris who get it done so easily and cleverly waived the deadline for the loan payment. Another reason is far more striking. The Brahmin and Chhetri women, who see themselves as people of upper status would not drink alcohol and are reluctant to make a company with Matwali. Particular problem arises when the Matwali women would like to go round the villages for Deusu and Bhailo, their major initiatives to raise funds.

They were keen to officially register their group but had failed to do so for some reasons. (They did not have confidence to personally go to the CDO for registration and approached the ward chairman (A Magar) for help. Apparently, a condition was attached in which it was expressed that they needed to take

membership of a political party other than what they were so far adhered to. This created a deadlock for taking the process further and the group remained unregistered. Failure to register must have affected their spirit but not to a point of a total collapse.

They raise funds annually from *Deusi* and *Bhailo* and invest the money in the construction of one or other type of temples. They do so, no sooner than they collect the money from such events and part of the reasons may be attributed to their inability to keep accounts.

Prabhat Kalin Magar Sangh, Birn Chok

This ethnic Magar association is part of national-level network, which was conceived in the year 2054 under the initiatives of District level association In Gorkha bazaar but has not been able to be registered to date.

Despite its unofficial status, the association remained relatively active for a couple of a year, which raised money through *Deusi* and *Ghato* (a Magar dance) and is known to have accumulated Rs. 12,000/- in its fund. The people agree that the association could not be active to the extent it had potential for. They complain to the behavior of the Magar community who do not find time for the meetings and say that the principle reason for the lack of activity is attributed to the same. Despite the lack of enough enthusiasm, the association ran in one form or the other until about a couple of years ago but ceased to operate when the district level executives of the network were arrested under suspicion of Maoist insurgents.

Drinking water and sanitation group, Biren Chok

This group was constituted in 2057 to respond to the critical need of drinking water in and around Biren Chok as well as the school there. While bulk of the group members consists of CFUG members, this is not exclusive. The ones who send their children to the school in Biren Chok are also closely affiliated in the overall group process and tend to contribute into the system.

The people were smart enough to form into a group, to buy the water source (located in private land) and to carry out all menial work voluntarily when they realised that the District Drinking Water Supply Office (DWSO) was prepared to extend financial support for rest of the activities. They take a pride over the fact that whole work was finished much earlier than the deadlines given to them. The land where the water source was located had been bought under the name of the school so as to facilitate the buying process. Money required for the purchase of the water source amounted Rs. 65,000 which was collected from the existing local institutions including CFUG. The DSO deposited a bulk sum of Rs. 60,000 in their account for maintenance. Each HH contributes Rs. 20

a month to pay for the watcher who gets a monthly sum of Rs. 2000.

Other institutions

There are a number of other institutions on top of what have been described. Those including the *high school, youth club, Red Cross, and Rural Development Bank's credit group*. Accounts of these institutions are not elaborated here owing to space.

Upallo Gyanjha CFUG, Manakamana # 8, Gorkha

This community forestry user group lies on Gynaja slope on the other side of Mugling Bazaar across Trishuli River. Ethnic Magars are the dominant groups. Shifting cultivation is widely practiced in the area.

Community forestry extension process had started as early as 2048 but was impeded when the ranger changed his mind and, instead, urged the people to take initiatives for tanking over parts of the land as leasehold plots. That is what ultimately happened. Patches of land in the area were divided into 25 HH as leaseland. The forest area that had remained got handed over as CF as late as 2059. Forest relates to two patches: one is just across Trishuli river near Mugling Bazaar and the other is further up. The operational plan and accompanied constitution guide their official institutional norms. While the forests are largely recuperating for last several years, sustainability aspect may be questioned. This is apparent when looked at the fact that the people are refrained from doing any silvicultural operation for fear that such operation might open up avenues for illegitimate removal of firewood to be sold in Mugling bazaar. A number of institutions are apparent in this CFUG.

Leasehold forestry groups

Five patches of forests under the CFUG boundary have been handed over as LHF to five groups. Virtually all of those people who have a membership in LHF have also the membership in CFUG. The groups are receiving government support in a number of heads including pasture, income generation and community development works. There is wide spread dispute regarding the LHF. People grumble that forest patches under the claim of the wider community and those under the shifting cultivation of the very poor HHs have been deceitfully given to the HHs who are not necessarily poor.

The other institutions in the area include a *primary school, Financial cooperatives (Male-1; Female 1), Youth club, and Magar Sangh*.

Darre Pandhera Community forest user group Vyas Municipality # 3, Tanahun

This CF is just on the other side of Gansikuwa across Buldi River near Damouli, the district headquarters. Probably a brief history of intervention may be worthwhile as a prelude. The forests with rather scanty trees, were widely used by some 70 HHs, which lay on the base of the forest tract. The people were actually doing some primary consultation so as to take over the whole tract of the land as CF. However, the ranger ignored their plea and handed over majority of the area leasehold blocks to 4 groups (26 members in all). Only the pocket that remained (area 8.4 ha) got handed over as a CF for the purpose of the whole community just over a year ago. The CF is governed by institutional norms written in the operational plan and the CFUG constitution. The people believe that the state of forest regeneration is getting improved since some year back and is being continued after the formal handover.

Leasehold forestry groups

A tract of land has been divided into 4 leasehold groups, each consisting of 5 to 6 members. All those who are members in this group are also members in the CFUG. Poverty alleviation cum environmental regeneration is the stated objectives of these groups. The people are stunned over the fact that DFO ranger had handed over the patches as LHF by disregarding the reality that those were actually used by larger communities. Their discontent is further proliferated by the reality that they had already taken initiatives to take over all tracts of land including what was handed over as LHF. This has a consequence on loss of indigenous use rights by many.

Darre Samaj (association of ethnic Darres), *Mother's group*, *Drinking water groups* and *primary school* are other institutions that co-exist within the boundary of the CFUG.

Gajoute Chisapani CFUG , Shivalya # 2/3, Parbat

Concerned CFUG is located just above the Pokhara-Baglung road near Kushma bazaar. CF area is 58 ha which consists of species like sal, pine and chilaune. Forest handing over was done in 2052. While 169 HHs were the original members, some 15 HHs decided to move close to Kushma bazaar and ceased to be members.

Forest cleaning is done in winter and the products thus acquired gets distributed to the members. While fuelwood is free of cost, construction poles incur money. Beside this, the forests are opened one time in during a Dasain and second time in the new year eve for collecting dead twigs and branches required for cooking. The group has employed a watcher for observing the set

norms.

The group is renowned for having a novel initiative in which it has been allocating certain CFUG funds for the purpose of poverty alleviation. The concerned programme is a process based programme in which wealth ranking is done through community consensus and a soft loan is provided to the members of community in rotation but with a priority to the ones who are at the bottom of the rung. Some 22 HHs are reported to have been benefited since the beginning of the concepts in 2056. The group funds have been used in two other: a) local development works and b) donation. The first essentially involved support to the school and to the drinking water scheme. The later initiative had received major support from some NGO. Donations involved contributions (rather a forced one) to the Children's Welfare Office building being constructed in Kusma under the initiative of the CDO.

A number of institutions are associated with this CFUG. Those include women *Micro-credit group* (formed under facilitation of a local club and District Women Development Office), *Mother's group* (Indigenous endeavour), *Drinking water group* (formed through facilitation of an NGO) and *Primary school* (Indigenous initiative which ultimately procured Government support).

Institutional types

It is obvious that a number of institutions co-exist with community forestry institution at the local level. The concerned institutions are essentially a mix of cooperative and voluntary endeavours intending to uplift the status of the participating HHs in a number of socio-economic matters.

These institutions, by function, may be grouped into: i) *Production/cum financial co-operative (PFC)* ii) *Financial co-operatives (FC)*: iii) *Self-help CBOs* iv) *Service institutions* and v) *Solidarity institutions*.

Fresh Vegetable production group and *Pear group* of Biren Chok typify the *production and financial co-operative* which though concentrate on agriculture based production, extend their activities to savings and credits. In fact savings and credits tend to be emphasised over co-operative venture in the agricultural production despite the theory which asked those to gear all their efforts towards co-operative agricultural boost-ups. While every member of the group is obliged to take part in savings and credits, it is not mandatory that the credited money needs to be invested in agriculture. The money, in practice, may be used in any HH purpose and it does not really matter much to the group as long as the credited amount is paid back as promised.

The male and female *savings and credit co-operatives* of Biren Chok and Gyanjha slope exemplify the financial co-operatives. These co-operatives while share characteristics with *production cum financial co-operatives* in terms of compulsory savings those, neither in theory nor in practice, specify that the money has to be used for a certain specific purpose.

Timely repayment of loan seems to be the only matter of concern and the people who have borrowed money could even make profit by distilling alcohol to be supplied in Gorkha bazaar (this, in fact, is known to be a very lucrative business amongst certain poor HHs). This is not to say that there is total indifference. The female co-operatives in Biren Chok educate the people not to waste the money in activities like drinking alcohol but to invest the money in areas that is financially beneficial. However, they do not really keep track of what would actually been done by the money they had borrowed.

Drinking water groups of Biren Chok and Gajoute Chisapani are the examples of *Self-help CBOs*. These institutions tend to emerge when they see that there is possibility for external support and which may be materialised by way of being organised into groups. Biren Chok CFUG as well as Ganjaute Pani CFUG formed into a group and acquired the prescribed financial support for the drinking water scheme they had in mind. They did so as soon as they knew that supports could be forthcoming if they were organised into groups.

The youth clubs typify the *Service institutions*. These institutions though may be inspired by some political ideology of individuals of being recognised in the community; the expressed concern tends to be the community service. The youths may come forward to take this sort of challenge partly due to their self-less interests to serve the community and partly to their potential interests to pave the way for future political career.

Mother's group, Magar sangh and Darre Samaj are the examples of *Solidarity institutions*. These institutions might emerge from an interest to have solidarity amongst communities (*Aama group/Magar sangh*). Such institutions might be prominent in areas of mixed ethnicity particularly if the higher castes have a dominance over the lower caste ethnic tribes who tend to react by way solidarity among themselves.

Institutions may also be divided on the basis of their emergence. While more than one factors may be responsible for the emergence of an institution, it may not be impossible to present a typology based on the principle factors which may have contributed towards its birth. Institutions, based on their origin may be classed under: i) *Indigenous* ii) *facilitated* iii) *induced* and iv) *sponsored*.

Indigenous institutions may symbolise a critical need for a communal solidarity. Those may be gender based or general. *Aama group* would typify a

gender-based institution and may be relatively old in origin. Solidarity for water supply may exemplify the general type.

Induced institutions though originate from initiatives right within the community it, in fact, might have actually been initiated through induction from elsewhere. Induction may be partly because the community leaders would like to copy the good examples from surroundings. The activities of the youth clubs can be the example of this. In other instances, it may emerge as a result of reluctance on the part of the existing community to extend the membership, thus forcing the excluded ones to opt forming a new institution altogether. The *Pear group* of Biren Chok can exemplify the latter type of induction.

Facilitated institutions may be the most dominant form of institutions. Emergence of this type of institution seems to have taken place particularly after the dawn of the multiparty democracy in the year 2046. Master Plan for the forestry sector 2046, Co-operative Act 2048, and the APP 2052 seem to have triggered a number of facilitative interventions under the initiative both of the GOs and the NGOs.

The term *Sponsored institution* may be considered misnomer in one sense. No institutions may be unilaterally sponsored unless there is some degree of local interests that would plea for its need. However, institutions like wards and schools might be considered more as a sponsored institutions than indigenously occurring when looked at the fact that bulk of government support may be available for the construction and running of these institutions. Schools might represent one of the oldest institutions in the locality except for the ward, which tend to have even older history.

The following table presents how different local institutions might emerge through variable types of support system.

Institutions and their source

Local institution	Supporting organisations	Policy source (current)
Community forestry user group (CFUG)	District Forest Office	Master Plan For Forestry sector (MPFS)1989/ Forest Act 1992 /Forest rule 1995
Financial co-operatives	Lion's club	Co-operative Act 2048
Rural Development Bank's Women's Credit Groups	Rural Development Bank	?
Agricultural groups/ co-operatives	District Agricultural office	APP 2052
Livestock group/co-operatives	District Livestock Service (DLS)	APP 2052
Ethnic groups (e.g. Magar, Darre etc)	National ethnic federations	Institution Registration Act 2034
Mother's group	Indigenous/Induced	Institution Registration Act 2034
Self help CBOs (e.g. drinking water)	Indigenous	??
Service institutions (Clubs)	Indigenous/induced	Institution Registration Act 2034
Community Development Group (CDG)	DSCO	Guidelines from department of Soil Conservation
Leasehold Forestry Group (LFG)	District Forest Office (the theoretical collaborators are ADB/N, DLS and NARC)	Forest Rules 1995
School	Indigenous/sponsored	Education Act 2049

Territory

It is apparent that the institutions at the local level tend to have an 'epicentre' at CFUG. This is to say that institution tend to occur within the territory of the CFUG and normally is not the other way round. Probably the only major exceptions are the schools and financial institutions, which might extend their members or the beneficiaries outside the boundary of the CFUGs. Apparently

the forests provide basis of livelihoods to a number of people residing in a relatively large geographical area and people covered by such group tend to form social bonds within. Those in the whole group may split for the specific purpose but might not normally see a need to join the institutions lying within the boundary of other CFUG altogether. While saying that micro-institutions normally fit within the boarder of CFUG institutions we do not mean that the memberships are independent and exclusive. To the contrary, the memberships largely overlap between the institutions within a fixed boundary. CFUG can actually be considered as a 'solar system' under which a number 'institutional planets' tend to operate some times independently but often in an overlapping fashion. This is not to suggest that all micro institutions are part and parcel of the CFUG but that those may certainly have relations and interlinkages with the CFUG in several matters. Those range from commonality in memberships as well as in products and service one might likely to provide to each other.

CF-LHF memberships provide a striking example that illustrates the accommodative nature of CF. The mere 8.4 ha. CF in Darre slope accommodates as many as 71 HHs while LHF with more than triple (?) area accommodates only 25 of those. It may be striking to further note that all the HH with membership in LHFUG have also the members in CFUG but not vice versa. This is to say that all LHFUG members are the CFUG members but only a small section of it have a membership in LHFUG despite the much bigger size of the resource with the latter. This actually tends to be the general case. CFUG tends to accommodate a number of people and the related institutions but normally not the other way round.

Occurrence/frequency

We have noted that the institutions do not occur to the same extent every where. Biren Chok CFUG represents a site with most numerous institutions while the rest have institutions of much lesser extent are are variable.

A look at these cases would provide some clues. Nearer the headquarters, more tend to be the institutions and more remote is the area lower tends to be their number. This may be attributed both to consciousness level of the people near the headquarters who see advantage in organising themselves and to the facilitating agencies who find easy to focus their interventions in such areas. By the same token, accessibility tends to determine how active is the group. Besides, prevailing institutions might induce formation of several other new institutions particularly if they are of effective form with a potential benefit to the larger section of the community. This may be attributed both due to potential benefits in being institutionalised and due to increased awareness level in the surroundings particularly through members who overlap.

Possibly the other important factor is diversity of people. Higher the diversity, higher may be the frequency of the institutions. Diversity in terms of economy,

ethnicity as well as other social matters may determine institution. Economic diversity tends to result into oppressive behaviour on the part of the rich to the poor, thus prompting the later to act together. Similar may be the case with ethnic diversity. The higher castes tend to oppress the ethnic castes who tend to respond the situation by way of being united. Elitism though might act in a specific way, might often work for an institution some times for power and prestige and in others merely for satisfaction that could be derived from having made a social contribution.

Dynamism

Institutions are dynamic both in origin and in their operation. In the operational phase dynamism persists in their intra-institutional as well as inter-institutional arrangements and also in the activities they conduct.

The institutions are generally reflections of their internal aspirations. Aspirations are determined by social, cultural and economic factors all of which remain dynamic and hence the aspirations. When born, they instigate the others also to come into being. A new institution gets formed when they grow large and cannot accommodate more members. Some times conflicts are responsible for a split of the existing institution, which may be responsible for the emergence of a totally new one.

While some institutions are liberal enough to extend membership, the others are conservative owing to their ethnic interests.

Some institutions remain dormant on wake of financial (e.g. youth club) or political (Magar Sangh) crisis but may revive as the situation turns favourable.

Institutional arrangements get changed. The entry condition including fees, qualifications etc tended to remain dynamic. Support conditions for the members including interest rates of the financial institutions may get changed. Institutions while tend to start simple those may start carrying out more complicated function when got confidence. From production base those have tended to turn into saving and credit co-operative and finally into commercial enterprise (e.g. dairy). Institutions tend to be efficient in terms of capturing resource from outside.

Conflict and complementarity between institutions

Institutions within a specific place may conflict in certain areas and complement in the others. Main areas of conflict might be in terms of membership and the related resource. While some institutions tend to compete with others in terms of attracting more members, this is not always the case. In certain situation individuals may get hard times to buy the membership.

Competition for attracting membership has roots in the presence of a large number of institutions, many of which tend to have savings and credits schemes. Limited cash with every HHs in a certain locality would mean that there could be a virtual 'tug of war' between the institutions to attract new members. Just opposite might be the situation when individuals show their desire to buy membership in financially more profitable institutions but that it could be reluctant to allow a new entry for one or other reasons.

Probably the major institution that tends to conflict with the CF system is LHF. The latter tends to compete with the former in terms of the scarce forest resource base but that the field interventionists would like to favour LHF.

The institutions tend to complement each other by the way of providing support in terms of financial matters and in terms of improving the awareness level of its members. Support in financial matters is sought through guarantee of payback in case of default. The case of CF trying to get a payback guarantee from financial cooperatives provides an example. Improving the awareness level of the members is due to fact that the institutions are often overlapping and hence their members who tend to be more informed of their rights due to improved communications.

Community forests may be the source of free *land bank* for constructing office buildings that any other institutions might require for their administration. Likewise those may be the source of free timber for construction purpose. This is practiced in a real life despite the official restrictions. Schools have used lands for free from CF in all places where it required land for the construction purpose. The youth club in Biren Chok had gone ahead with constructing an office building in collaboration with CF but has lately been adjourned for some reasons.

Discussion and policy implications

It is obvious that there could be a number of micro and some meso level institutions within (sometimes outside but constituent members overlapping to a large extent) the macro level community forestry institutions occurring indigenously as well as through support from outside. It may also be noted that nearly all institutions have an 'epicentre' at CFUG but with variable forms of 'ripples' mostly with several overlaps.

This is to say that nearly all institutions and their members tend to occur within the CFUG frontier but with great degree overlaps and interconnections in terms of membership and function. These field realities might have two major policy implications: first to do with community forestry intervention itself and second with broader field of community development.

A clear question stands: if community forestry intervention is an institution building process for equitable and sustainable forest management systems, can we afford ignoring institutions simply because those are non-forestry institutions? After all, communities at the local level act with forestry and non-forestry systems alike and those two are intricately inter-linked. While a number of implications may be evident, the most conspicuous one may be to do with community meeting processes that is intended for achieving broad-based consensus. Community forestry expects *interest group* meetings as a powerful tool in bringing out the latent community interests to the surface so that it could be discussed more thoroughly for attaining an equitable and sustainable community forestry system. In this background a clear question may be asked: can we simply overlook these conspicuously occurring institutions in a bid for finding *interest groups*, which are more latent, abstract and obscured? The underlying idea behind the guideline's recommendations for '*interest group*' meeting is that local interests are more abstract and hidden than crystallised and conspicuous. The cases have clearly shown that interest groups are not necessarily hidden but may have already been crystallised into a more visible institutional form. So, it may be necessary for the forestry intervention to focus on existing institutions before trying to dig out the more latent interests. While doing so, special emphasis has to be given to the ethnic and other voluntary institutions as those may represent the interests of the weak and vulnerable groups.

This however does not mean that *meetings with existing institutions* might replace the *interest group meetings* that are in practice. Institutions may not be a matter of universal occurrence or that of same frequency. Where they do, those may be of differing vigour and frequency. Emergence of institution might have actually been hindered due to community dynamics within and outside. We have seen that weaker community's interests for creating a formal institution might have been hindered both from the more powerful neighbouring communities and from the power politics, which might discourage the official registration process. Intra-community conflicts as well as inaccessibility may have hindered institution building to the extent that those might not have yet got a chance to be crystallised in the form of institution. This would clearly imply that an extension focus on prevailing institutions might not necessarily replace the *interest group meetings*. But we can say for sure that they can surely be a powerful complement to the facilitative intervention in the situations the institutions physically occur. To ignore something that exists and to concentrate just on other, which does not have a clear shape and form, might not be worthwhile, if not counterproductive.

There may be another equally important aspect to be considered. We are aware that there is a general consensus amongst the development agencies that CF, though important, could be only one of the powerful constituents of rural community development. Given this reality we, the community forestry interventionists, may not simply get away with the excuse that all we want to

do is to help communities in the forestry matters. At least the morality factor would pressurise us to be more holistic. So the real need of the time is to rethink the community forestry intervention as a constituent component of rural community development.

It is even tempting to consider whether the *Community Forestry Operational Plan* of a certain CFUG could take a form of *Community Development Operational Plan*. In the said plan the foremost section be covered by 'community forestry plan' followed by community 'health plan', 'educational plan', 'drinking water plan', 'poverty alleviation plan' and the like. This essential means choosing CFUG as a developmental unit at the grass roots. Some might say why CFUG be picked up as a developmental unit when there are so many groups operating in the local level. But we have seen that other groups tend to be formed within the CFUG unit but not generally vice versa.

Surely some confusion is bound to occur about which intervening agency will take a lead in helping the communities prepare such integrated operational plan covering so many aspects of rural development. Will it be Forest Office or Soil Conservation office or Agriculture office or Livestock office? Given that CFUG might accommodate so many institutions (not vice versa), it might not be out of context to propose that DFO currently assumes this role at least to start the initiatives in a pilot scale. We will learn more only through such 'learning by doing exercise.'

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