

A Micro-level Study in Impact of Conflict in Community Based Forest Resource Management in Hills of Nepal

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Abstract

From historical time, forest resources are performing a vital role in the livelihood of Nepalese people and the national economy. Due to its importance, the institutions to manage those resources have been the main target of different political conflicts and wars. This study gives a micro-level evidence of the impact of current Maoist's movement on community based forest resource management in Nepal. The study uses the field study data of 2001 and 2005. It presents the effect of the conflict in household participation in community based forest management, changes in forest resource entitlement, effect in leadership, enforcement mechanism and it also shows how the Maoist movement has effectively capitalized on the forest resources and its dependents to make the movement effective.

The paper presents the study of two districts Lalitpur (urban and rural areas) and Dadeldhura of Nepal. Dadeldhura district is the most affected area by Maoist movement and Lalitpur is semi-affected area.

Key words: Nepal, Community Forest, Community Based Forest Resource Management, Participation and Arm Conflict.

1. Background

Each natural resource has unique qualities that determine the proneness to conflict. Forests resources possess several qualities that can link them to conflict, such as; its importance to people's livelihood, high economic value, and shelter for rebel groups. From historical time, natural resources, especially forest resources are performing a vital a role in the livelihood of Nepalese people. Due to complex and inseparable relationships between forests, farm and livestock in subsistence agricultural system in most of the hills and mountains of Nepal (Gilmour and Fisher 1991; Maharjan 2005), rights over the forest resources are playing a fundamental role in livelihood of rural people. Forest plays a vital role in maintaining ecological balance, and promoting economic development. The conserved forests like national parks and conservation areas of Nepal are the major source of tourist attraction (the second main source of national income), and offer goods and services as well. Forest used to be one of the major cash revenue source through selling hardwood to India contributing almost 15% of total revenue in the 1950s

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(Bajracharya 1986). Forests offer over 70 percent of rural energy requirement, 42 percent of livestock feed, leaf litter for animal bedding and composting, and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) for income generation (DFRS 1999). Nearly, 29% (4.3 million ha) area is forest and 10.6% (1.6 million ha.) is shrubs out of 14.72 million ha of total land area (DFRS 1999). All these characteristics of forest in Nepal have made vulnerable to link conflict and forest resource.

On 12 February 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) or shortly CPN-Maoist started its so-called "people's war" (*jana yuddha*) to cause the downfall of state power and to establish a new people's republic. Consequently, Nepal is facing armed conflict. Most scholars do not take the Maoist movement only as a political conflict. It is well known that poverty is both a cause and consequence of conflict. Nepalese society is rigidly hierarchical; pervasive social inequality based on caste, ethnicity, and gender that are deeply rooted in culture, religion, and centuries of feudal rule. Social inequality is comprehensive, including disparity in access to livelihood resources, government services, and economic opportunities. This has caused great resentment among the groups at the bottom of the social hierarchy, who are typically the poorest and least educated members of Nepalese society. In 1990, a popular movement led by underground political parties successfully forced the King at the time to change the form of government from absolute to constitutional monarchy, with multi-party democracy in place of the previous one-party system. This political change created expectations of greater social equality. But subsequent failure to highlight political, socio-economical, regional, and cultural imbalance among different identity groups, lack of democratic legitimacy and effective governance supported by growing awareness among the people about these issues have helped to escalate the Maoist movement in Nepal. Maoists are able to pin point those issues in their demands, and propagated them to get support from the people. By the middle of 2005, CPN-Maoist was able to influence large parts of the country, establishing the parallel government where they have control. They established their own local governing body known as People's Government in district and village level. The People's Government tried to establish their own institutions by enforcing new rules according to their objectives. In CFUGs also they introduced different rules. The CFUGs are under the pressure of both conflicting parties: the CPN-Maoist and the state military and police. The forestry infrastructures have been destroyed in many districts, forest securities have been forcibly disarmed, the Range posts have been evacuated, forestry staff working in the rural parts have been transferred to district level offices, and the evacuated infrastructures are changed to the shelters of Maoists. The CFUGs are compelled to pay dual tax to the state and to the People's Government of the Maoists. The People's Government of Maoist have put forward four conditions about Community Forest to CFUGs: (1) the CFUGs should register to the Maoists (People's Government) and should take permission while selling the forest products, (2) should name their CFUGs as the name of their Martyr, (3) the CFUGs' Committee should be formed under their supervision, and (4) all income of the CFUGs should be deposited. However, giving tax or any financial assistance to the Maoist, taking permission for any activities or making any kind of relationship with the Maoists is illegal, as the Maoists' Guerrillas have been declared as terrorist by the state. Any legal actions could be possible from the Forest Department and from the state military or police to CFUGs, if found that the CFUGs' have relations with the Maoist's rebels.

This paper presents the effect of Maoist conflict in CFUGs in term of participation, leadership, forest resource entitlement, taxation, and also about the most affected and the beneficiaries. It also presents how the People's Government was able to capitalize on the forest resource dependents at local level to make its movement effective.

2. Theoretical Framework

In the last few years, the relationship between natural resources and conflict has become a hot issue. There are especially three schools of thoughts, which relate conflict and natural resource. Collier & Hoeffler's paper on 'Greed and Grievance' (2004) has become one of the most talked studies in the field of conflict and natural resources within the resource abundance school which articulates that natural resources are a cause of conflict because they can serve as a financial opportunity for rebel groups. They argue that rebel's opportunity to finance a conflict or to acquire personal gain has more explanatory power than the grievance arguments, such as ethnic or religious hatred, political repression, political exclusion and economic inequality. Another position, (ii) the scarcity school, argues that scarce resources will cause conflict when two groups fight over the right to them. This does not necessarily refer to a direct scarcity of resources. It can also result from unequal sharing between groups (Homer Dixon, 1999). A third and somewhat less prominent link between natural resources and conflict is (iii) rough terrain as a safe haven for rebels (Buhaug & Gates, 2002; Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) has been instituted in forest resource management sector in Nepal as key policy after introduction of Forest Sector Master Plan 1988 which is legalized through Forest Act 1992, and Forest Rule 1995. In micro-level, Community Forest Users Group (CFUG) is an institutional body that governs the forest resource following CBNRM policies. The main policy of CBNRM is to establish a stable structure of local people participation by securing rights of forest resources locally by following decentralized forest resource management. The stable structure to human participation is affected during conflict. So, first, this paper hypothesizes that the participation in community forest has been affected by the armed conflict. In every CFUG, there is an executive committee, normally selected through elections, to do day to day work and to enforce the CBNRM along with others. So, second, this paper hypothesizes that the executive committee has been affected by the conflict. Third, as the results of the effect in participation the entitlement over the forest resources have been changed. Since ethnicity is one of the main issues in the present conflict, this paper presents its impact on the basis of the ethnicity and caste group.

3. Research Areas and its Characteristics

The paper discusses its findings on the basis of three villages from far western and central districts. Sirsa and Badarkot village are from far western district, Dadeldhura and Dal Choki village is from central district Lalitpur. The surveys were conducted in 2001/02 AD. In Dal Choki, the second survey and revisit was conducted in 2005/06 AD to do comparative study of the village. When the first survey was conducted, Maoist movement had not affected Dal Choki village. Bagarkot was affected mildly, while Sirsa village was highly affected. It is judged on the basis of the number of incidents, death, attack on village and other official buildings, and the view of the local people. According to local people, in 2000/2001, there were more than ten

incidents that killed 5 people in Sirsa areas. As a result, the local indigenous community, Raute² were displaced at the end of 2002. VDC building has been attacked twice. In Bagarkot, there were only three incidents, and only one person was killed. In Dal Choki, no incidents happened in that year. But in 2005 survey, VDC buildings were attacked. School students and teachers had been abducted and arrested. One person had been killed in 2004. Table 1 shows the socio-economic conditions of surveyed villages. Sirsa and Bagarkot are Chhetri dominated villages with illiteracy rate of 46.9% and 40.9 percent, and average land holding one hector and 0.59 hector respectively. Sirsa has higher average food self-sufficiency compared to Bagarkot. Dal Choki village is dominated by Bahun, Magar and Tamang. The illiteracy rate is 39.2%. Bahun and Chhetri are comparatively advantaged caste group in all the villages with large land holding, higher literacy and more food self-sufficiency.

Table 1. Socio-economic Characteristics of Study Villages

Attribute	Lalitpur District		Dadeldhura District			
	Dhalchoki		Bagarkot		Shirsha	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
<u>Population</u>	1410	100	3554	100	6366	100
Male	678	48.1	1890	53.18	3336	52.4
Female	732	51.9	1664	46.82	3030	47.6
<u>Cast/Ethnicity</u>						
Bahun	449	31.8	1010	28.42	1250	19.64
Chhetri	64	4.5	1611	45.33	3788	59.5
Magar	366	26	94	2.64	77	1.21
Nagarkoti	180	12.8				
Tamang	321	22.8				
Occupational	30	2.1	839	23.61	1109	17.42
Raute					142	2.23
<u>Education</u>						
Illiterate	468	39.2	1227	40.89	2439	46.89
Literate	189	15.8	518	17.26	1136	21.84
Formal Education	536	44.9	1256	41.85	1627	31.28
Nepali Language Ability*	1190	99.5	2852	95.03	4748	91.27
Mother Language Ability**	1130	94.7	2945	98	5202	99.4
<u>Occupation</u>						
Farming	685	86.27	1,251	79.6	2989	94.92
Business	14	1.76	50	3.2	18	0.57
Professional	17	2.14	28	1.8	34	1.08
Salaried	31	3.9	145	9.2	65	2.06
Skilled Labour	36	4.53	89	5.7	31	0.98
Manual Labour	11	1.39	8	0.5	12	0.38
<u>Land Holding(Number)</u>						
Land Less	4	1.6	53	10.2	27	2.97
Small	151	61.1	257	49.4	235	25.82
Medium	88	35.6	186	35.8	577	63.41
Large	4	1.6	24	4.6	71	7.8
Total Live Stoke (LSU)	748.7		2587.05		5106.6	
Avg Live Stoke (LSU)	3		5		5.6	

Source: Field Survey 2001

Note: * Number of people who undersatnd Nepali excluding children below 6 years.

** Number of

people who understand their mother language excluding children below 6 years. LSU=Live Stoke Unit.

² Indigenous people who take shelter inside forest and much depend on the forest resources for their livelihood.

Table 2. International Society & NGOs Involvement and Composition of Group According to Caste

Villages	No. of CFUGs	Total Sample Household	International Society Involvement in Villages	Members Composition	Leaders Ethnicity
Dal Choki	4	20	DFO/NRM-DANIDA, BWSP, ADB-N/SFDP	One homogenous group with all Tamang Caste, other Mix group of Bahun, Magar and Tamang	Tamang=1, Magar=1, Bahun=2
Bagarkot	8	41	DFO, Danida, BPEP, CBED, PDDP	Two Homogenous group of Chhetri, One Homogenous Group of Dalit, other are mix groups	Chhetri=3 Bahun 4 Dalit=1
Sirsa	8	22	Self/DFO, Danida, BPEP, CBED, PDDP, REDP	All mix group with majority of Chhetri	Chhetri=5 Bahun=3

**Note: ADB-N=Agricultural Development Bank of Nepal, SFDP= Small Farmers Development Program, BPEP=Basic and Primary Education Project, BWSP=Bagmati Watershed Project, CBED=Community Based Economic Development, PDDP=Participatory District Development Program, REDP=Rural Energy Development Program*

The study covers all together 20 CFUGs from three villages which cover 83 sample survey. The member of CFUGs are selected randomly and they were interviewed with structured questionnaires. Key persons interview with members of executive committee were also done along with other informal discussion. Table 2 gives the member composition according to caste/ethnicity, different donors involvement in CFUG programs, chairperson (leaders) ethnicity.

4. Result and Discussions

4.1 Participation: From the field research, it indicates that there is a decreased participation in different sectors of Community Forest program. The clear distinction from Table 3 and 4 of Dal Choki village indicates this. According to local villagers, the decreasing participation is mainly due to the present conflict. In Dal Choki, from 2004/5 an army barrack from the state has been established in Tinpani Thulo Ban CF. As a result, there is higher decrease in participation in the CF program. It does not only effect the participation in program implementation, like pruning, cleaning of CF, but also affect in monthly meeting when CFUG decides different program and activities for the month. It also affected the executive committee meeting where rules and regulation are made.

The higher participation in Bagarkot has something to do with supportive attitude of villagers to Maoist as well as Maoist people's government rule. The local people in Bagarkot village told that the Maoist circulated message to all the members of CFUG to participate compulsory in all programs. They also reshuffled the executive committee members.

The participation in Sirsa village is not good. This village is the most affected village. Since there is the presence of state army near by Sirsa village in Jogbudha village, Sirsa village was neither in control of Maoist nor in State government. So this village was more

vulnerable and people were afraid of being caught in crossfire. As a result, this village had lower participation in CFUG program during the survey.

Table 3. Average Participation Level in Different Community Forest in 2001

Village	Group Name	Participation in		
		Rules and Regulations Making	Program Selection	Program Implementation
Dal Choki	Ganeshchaur CFUG	3.8	4	4
	Mai Khotia CFUG	3.8	3.8	3.6
	Satkanya CFUG	3	3	3
	Tinpane Thulo Ban CFUG	3	3	2.8
Bagarkot	Bahumukhi CFUG	4	4	4
	Birade CFUG	4	4	4
	Dundeshor CFUG	3.8	3.8	3.8
	Kailpal CFUG	4	4	4
	Trishakti Betal CFUG	4	4	4
Sirsa	Adiwon CFUG	3.2	2.7	2.5
	Bhageshowri CFUG	2.5	2	3.5
	Durga Devi CFUG	2	2	3
	Ningla Saini CFUG	3	3	3.5
	Samaiji CFUG	3	2	2
	Shree Khudakot CFUG	1	1	4
	Singhnath CFUG	3.7	3.3	2.7

Table 4. Average Participation Level in Community Forests in 2006 at Dal Choki

Village	Group Name	Participation in		
		Rules and Regulations Making	Program Selection	Program Implementation
Dal Choki	Ganeshchaur CFUG	2.2	2.5	2.9
	Mai Khotia CFUG	1.9	1.4	3
	Satkanya CFUG	1.4	1	2.1
	Tinpane Thulo Ban CFUG	0.8	1.3	1.8

4.2 Difference in entitlement of Forest Resources: This paper also presents resource entitlement from forest at Dal Choki Village in three different periods of time (Table 5). The figure clearly shows the decrease in forest resource collection in the year 2005, which had increased in 2001 as compared to 1990 due to the implementation of community based forest resource management, which defined users rights to local people in community forest by providing incentives to participation (Maharjan and Joshi 2005). The one main factor that contributes to the decrease in resource entitlement is distorted property rights in conflict situation. Since there is decrease in participation (Table 4), the people also started to collect less from community forest. This kind of situation is especially true for the villages that are in between the State control and People's Government control. For the case of Bagarkot that is under command of People's Government it might not be true. They might have higher entitlements as compared to before. The other factor is the availability of electricity in some areas of Dal Choki village where people have replaced their traditional firewood stove with

electric stove for those who can afford it. But there are only few households using electric-stove for daily cooking. Alternative for the fuel wood has been replaced by Kerosene stove by the most of the households and as well as they started to collect fuel wood from the tree in their own land instead of going to community forest. In the case of fodder, it has been replaced by commercial feed as well as fodder from their land. One interesting point is the increasing trends of timber collection. The user right for timber is different from other forest resources. Normally, for fodder, they can collect one *bhari* for each household from the ground and grass, and for firewood one *bhari* from dried trees or only small branches of tree that has been decided by community forest. There were no such differences over these rules in 2001 and 2005. But for timber, each household can have 20 cu. ft. per year by paying Rs. 50 per cu. ft. to build house or animal shed inside the village. For this, they have to get permission from CFUG committee. But they are entitling more than that. The reason is increasing harvesting in private forest partly supported by harvesting in community also. Due to the growing demand of timber in Chapagau that is the nearest market place from Dal choki, aided by increasing market price of timber, the harvesting of timber is growing. Before, it was illegal to transport timber from one place to another place with out government license. But from 2005, the government check post has been removed as a result of conflict. So people were selling timber illegally from the community forest. Besides,

Table 5: Annual entitlement of forest products per household in the years of 1990, 2000 and 2005 at Dal Choki

<i>Ethnic/Caste group</i>	1990			2000			2005		
	Fuel wood (bhari)	Fodder (bhari)	Timber cu. ft.	Fuel wood (bhari)	Fodder (bhari)	Timber cu. ft.	Fuel wood (bhari)	Fodder (bhari)	Timber cu. ft.
Brahmin	198	153	11	276	209	49	187	186	59
Magar	181	263	10	249	291	30	197	261	46
Tamang	252	186	15	248	195	27	221	185	34
Occupational	234	137	11	258	139	16	231	151	35
Average	216	183	12	258	220	31	203	191	42

Source: Field survey 2000 and 2005, and USC-Canada Baseline Survey, 1990. 1 bhari is equal to 30 kg.

some of the villagers were building house in near by town, mainly Chapagau, Lele village so they brought timber from the community forest or private land.

- 4.3 Change in dependency in community forest: In Dal Choki, relative dependency in community forest has been decreasing for all caste groups, and it affected the private forest. There is significant decrease for Brahmins and Magar caste. The reason could be that there is low dependency on firewood (Table 5) due to the availability of electricity recently in some of the areas of Dal Choki, mainly occupied by Magar, and some Brahmins. And also due to recent increase in their economic status, they are using kerosene stove instead of traditional firewood stove. It is also due to the increasing presence of the Maoist, and army in 2005, which weaken participation in Community Forest activities. They did not say it was due to Maoist or the State Army movement but indirectly through communication with them, the implication is that the present conflict has a role. Table 2 shows difference in relative dependency according to different ethnic groups on private and community forests. The

private forest means any small or big patch of tree in cropland, or house yard, or in private land.

Table 6: Dependence ethnic/caste groups on private and community forests in Dal Choki Village

<i>Ethnic/Caste group</i>	In 2001 (%)		In 2005 (%)	
	Private forest	Community forest	Private forest	Community forest
Brahmin	43	51	50	42
Magar	31	69	41	55
Tamang	30	63	34	61
Occupational/Nagarkoti	9	87	11	83

Source: Field survey 2000 and 2005

4.4 Reluctant to expose themselves as leaders: Before Maoist movement, mentioning the position in CFUG Executive Committee was regarded as a pride and they loved to hold those positions. During field study, it was found that the most of chairpersons and other related post holders in CFUG Executive Committee were found to be reluctant to expose themselves as leaders or members of the CFUG Executive Committee. Some of the member even told that they had already resigned from the posts but the committee did not accepted their resignations. It is found mainly in Sirsa village. When talking to some of the executive committee members they revealed that Maoist People's Government wants to enforce their rules through them, and if they do not follow their orders they may be punished so it is better to be un-stated the involvement. From the State side also, the army may intrude and punish for giving donation to the Maoist or following Maoist rules. They normally said, "I was member of CFUG but I already resigned from committee of CFUG". It was not noticed in Dal Choki during 2001 survey. But field visit in 2005, some how shows similar situation but not very severe as in Sirsa village. The situation in Bagarkot was different. They express their position in CFUG Executive Committee. They mentioned that Maoist People's Government has all the information regarding them so they do not have to hide it and the presence of the State Government is some how nil. When exploring the reason, it can be argued that in Sirsa even if the severity of the conflict is high as compared to other villages it is not under full control of one actor. It is kind of in-between-zone during survey. But Bagarkot was in command of People's Government. Another reason could be non-supportive attitude of villagers in Sirsa to Maoist. In Sirsa, due to large number of large farm holders they are less supportive to Maoist as compared to Bagarkot.

4.5 Tax on forest product and capitalization of natural resource dependents: In Bagarkot, the researcher was able to collect details of tax collected by People's Government (de'facto rules in those areas). They were collecting tax on timber, *Khot* (resin), *tejpatta* (*Cinnamomum tamala*), citrus fruits, and other non-timber forest products. Tax on *khot* = Rs. 10/Kg; *tejpatta* = Rs. 50/*Bhari*, citrus fruit = Rs. 10/*Bhari*, and timber = Rs. 5 to 40 /Cu. Ft. depending on the type of timbers from household collectors. From CFUG, they collected on the basis of income from sell of forest products. It varies from 10% to 40% from total income. There are no defined rules to collect revenue from CFUG. It encourages the members of community forest to collect individually not only from government forest but also from community forest. The household members previously who had to go urban area specially Amargadi for labour are now involved in collecting *khot*, *tejpat*, and citrus fruits to sell in the market (mainly local contractor) by paying tax to People's Government. It has helped to uplift the

livelihood of those people in Bagarkot. Almost all caste and ethnic group people whose main job and side job were unskilled labour are involved in this job. The most benefited ethnic group is Magar whose main job is labourer (potters) and farm labour. They are earning much from *khot*, *tejpatta*, citrus fruits collecting and selling to contractors. They were paid higher than before.

On the basis of analysis, the donation collected during 2000, 2001 and 2005 in different village as shown in Table 7, and source of donation in Table 8, it is found that the main source of donations are forest based. There is not much difference in donation collection in terms of Ethnicity/Caste. But, the figure shows that Brahmin in Sirsa, who hold large quantity of irrigated paddy fields have highest donation, followed by Magars in Bagarkot, whose main occupation is unskilled labours like agricultural labour, part time resin collection, and potter. It is not clear why Magars have high donation rate. One reason may be that they travel frequently in search of labour which make them vulnerable to meet People's Government tax collectors. It is surprising to find that all sampled households (100%) of Magar in Bagarkot are paying donation. Sirsa have highest percentage of people paying donation. Dalchoki in 2000 have lowest households paying donation (12%) of total households. But it increased by 54% in 2005 survey. Most of the donation sources in Dal Choki is Selling animals and milk. Fifty eight percent of households in Bagarkot are paying donation and their main source is NTFP and timber. This shows that Maoist were capable of capitalizing on the forest resource dependents.

Table 7. Average Amount of Donation per Household According to Caste/Ethnicity						
Villages	Caste/Ethnicity					
	Brahmin	Chhetri	Magar	Tamang	Occupational	Grand Total
Sirsa	4313 (92)	1867 (91)	-	-	1400 (100)	2602 (92)
Bagarkot	657 (70)	1214 (55)	2000 (100)	-	810 (35)	958 (53)
Dal Choki in 2001	1450 (14)	2000 (50)	1600 (18)	500 (8)	-	1580 (12)
Dal Choki in 2005	1490 (56)	1854 (50)	1770 (76)	450 (16)	1300 (47)	1593 (54)

Source: Field Survey 2001 and 2005 for Dal Choki 05. Note: Values in parenthesis is percentage of household giving donations. US \$ 1 = Rs. 70 in 2001 and Rs. 74 in 2005.

Table 8. Main Source of Donation in Percentage						
Main Source	Selling Crop/Vegetable	Selling Timber and NTFP	Selling Animals & its Product	Labour	Professional Job	Unknown/Not specific
Sirsa	29	13	17	18	2	21
Bagarkot	3	58	14	9	3	13
Dal Choki in 2001	1	-	79	6	1	13
Dal Choki in 2005	2	3	69	15	4	7

Source: Field Survey 2000 for Dal Choki 00, 2001 for Sirsa and Bagarkot and 2005 for Dal Choki 05

The People's Government has authority to decide the issues in their village since centre level committee of Maoist have provided authority to decide at local level to the People's Government. This is true for the case of donation or what they called tax collection. There is no fixed rate. They are flexible enough to negotiate in household basis in amount of donation.

The household who can prove themselves to have very low income, land and cattle holding without family member working out side, they can negotiate as low as Rs. 50 per year.

Summary

From the study it shows that there is affect of Maoist conflict in different ways. The affect is different in different location depending upon who control the areas and what are the socio-economic characteristics of the areas. The conflict has affected the participation in CFUG as a result it affected the forest resource entitlements. The forest resource collection from the community forest has been decrease but forest resource collection from the private forest has been increased. As a result there is higher dependency in private forest in 2005 as compare to 2001. The conflict has also affected the leadership of CFUG as a result it affect the over all executive committee of CFUG. In some CFUG Maiost People's Government were able to introduce their new rules and policies, to establish new institution. There were collecting tax, and able to change in executive committee members of CFUG. They were also collecting donation from household and the main source of those donation is from forest resource.

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