

Federation of Community Forest User Groups in Nepal: An Innovation in Democratic Forest Governance¹

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Editors' note:

The contribution of forests to poverty reduction through community forestry is not automatic. One important factor is increasing the influence of forest users through networking or building federations of users as a form of civil society supportive of forest users. This case of FECOFUN (the Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal) explores some experiences in building such a federation.

Introduction

Despite the proliferation of participatory governance discourse and devolutionary policy innovations in recent years, the forest sector continues to face recurrent democratization challenges, especially in relation to how concerned groups of citizens can effectively participate, influence, and innovate at different scales of governance and decision making. While community forestry-related innovations in different parts of the world have provided significant opportunities to local people to exercise control over forest management and benefit sharing, there are still limited innovations as regards how local forest-dependent citizens can effectively exercise their voice in local to national policy development processes. This is especially critical in view of the top-down and technocratic approaches to forest policy making that prevail in many countries. As a result, participatory and decentralized policies of forest governance have actually been an extension of centralized approaches, with limited freedom and opportunity being made available to local communities over forest management and benefit sharing.

Since the early 1990s, community forestry user groups (CFUGs) in Nepal have been mutually networking to build a federation. The nationwide Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal (FECOFUN) has evolved over the past decade. This paper analyzes how FECOFUN has organized itself as a multitiered network nationwide, and the trajectories through which it has now become an important civil society platform to augment citizens' voices in governance discourse. We discuss how the Federation challenges undemocratic discourses, policies, and practices, and brings in people's visions, images, and ideas for the future of forestry in Nepal. We also reflect on the ongoing internal governance challenges of FECOFUN. Through this analysis, we arrive at lessons in relation to how, when, and under what conditions, and through which type of leadership, a citizens' federation can emerge and actively engage itself in promoting civic participation in forest governance, especially in a

¹ We acknowledge the contributions of Hari Dhungana, Ghanashyam Pandey, Bhola Bhattarai, Bharat Pokharel, and Mani R Banjade. This paper also draws from Ojha and Timsina (2008). The views expressed in this article do not constitute the official view of FECOFUN and ForestAction but are entirely the opinions of authors.

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context where people's dependence on forests for livelihoods is high. We also outline the contribution of Federation activity in poverty alleviation.

Evolution of FECOFUN

In a shift away from the centralized management of forest resources in Nepal, after the advent of multiparty democracy in 1990 the elected parliament provided significant legal autonomy to local forest-dependent communities.⁷ This allowed for the expansion of citizens' activity in forestry governance, and by March 2008, over 15,000 CFUGs had been established, along with the emergence of their federations at different levels.

Factors Triggering FECOFUN

The emergence of FECOFUN as a nationwide network of forest user groups in Nepal was triggered by the advent of multiparty democracy⁸ in Nepal in 1990. In that year, the people of Nepal were successful in gaining power from the monarchy and constitutionally establishing the sovereignty of the people. Under the pressure of popular uprising (*Jana Andolan*), the King had to listen to and agree to the demands for a constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy. This marked a significant shift away from the *Panchayat* political system that was directly controlled by the King. After 30 years of the party-less *Panchayat* system,⁹ the people of Nepal obtained a significant level of political freedom, which was institutionalized in the newly promulgated Constitution of 1991. This Constitution guaranteed civil rights to organize peacefully for social and political causes.

At a time when significant political change was taking place (i.e. in the 1990s), the agendas of devolution, community participation, and decentralization were also peaking in development discourse and aid strategies. By the mid-1970s, there was already the beginning of a paradigm shift in natural resource management. Foreign donors became increasingly concerned with environmental protection and this was further accelerated by the projection of the "Theory of Himalayan Degradation."¹⁰ The increased publicity of the problem of deforestation in the Himalayas also acted as a stimulus to a shift in paradigm in forest management in Nepal (Malla 2001; Ghimire 1992). The continued failures of State attempts to restore denuded hills led to a realization within the Government that the solution to the problems lay in recognizing local communities as legitimate actors in forest management (Gilmour and Fisher 1991).

As stated earlier, FECOFUN is a federation of CFUGs. CFUGs are registered with District Forest Offices (DFOs) as perpetually self-governed bodies according to the Forest Act, 1993 and Forest Regulations, 1995 (GON/MFSC 1995a,b). They are legally recognized as self-governed local organizations for the management, conservation, and utilization of forests in Nepal. Villagers who depend on forests for their livelihoods are organized into a CFUG and are entitled to manage and utilize part(s) of accessible national forests as community forests according to their operational plan (OP) approved by the DFO.

⁷ The Forest Act, 1993 provides autonomous legal status to CFUGs and 100% use rights over community forests.

⁸ We think there is no single notion of democracy. When we say "democracy" without any qualifier, we refer to the representative model of liberal democracy that is common in practice.

⁹ King Mahendra promulgated the *Panchayat* system in 1961 by dismissing the elected government under a multiparty system. In 1957, a popular movement was successful in putting an end to the Rana oligarchy that ruled for a century, with significant political support from British India.

¹⁰ See Eckholm (1976) for the statement on the Theory.

Following the inception of the *Panchayat* forestry program in the late 1970s, there was a rapid expansion of community forests throughout the country, particularly in the middle hills (Kanel and Kandel 2004). With the increase in the number of community forests (now called CFUGs) to a few hundred in the early 1990s, the idea of CFUG networking emerged among CFUG leaders, project staff, and DFOs. Localized informal networks of CFUGs then emerged initially in Dhankuta and Bhojpur districts in the east of Nepal.

These preliminary networking experiences were self-initiated in the beginning but later were supported by bilateral forestry projects.¹¹ The intention of these efforts was to create fora for learning and sharing among CFUGs. The supporting projects responded to such local initiatives positively as networking mechanisms were considered as a potential means for providing postformation services to CFUGs and for effective program planning.

Such local-level networking experiences were followed by initiatives in the form of national-level CFUG networking meetings. With support from donor forestry projects, several discussions and gatherings of CFUG representatives were held between 1993 and 1995, including a national workshop of CFUGs in which 40 CFUGs from 28 districts participated. These events provided representatives of CFUGs from around the country with the opportunity to identify ways and means to promote and advocate the community forestry agenda and users' rights over forest management, and to explore the need for a users' national level institution to work proactively to this end. Later, these initiatives were merged and FECOFUN was formed in 1995. Box 1 outlines key milestones and events in the evolution of FECOFUN.

Box 1. Key Events and Milestones in the Evolution of FECOFUN

First demand by a CFUG for networking: On 2 July 1992, representatives of Sildhunga, Patle Pangsing, Pancha Kanya, and Sansari–Suke Pokhari CFUGs in Dhankuta Municipality, eastern hills of Nepal, asked the staff of the DFO and Koshi Hill Community Forestry Project (a bilateral undertaking of the Nepalese and British governments) about the number of community forestry groups and their working approach and how they could best share experiences between CFUGs. In response, the project staff, DFO staff, and users themselves decided to hold a workshop and formed a nine-member organizing committee.

First inter-CFUG sharing workshop: From 24 to 26 July 1992, the committee organized a workshop for CFUGs with two representatives from each of the CFUGs within Dhankuta District.

Convening CFUG networking workshops: Learning from the first networking workshop, several other networking meetings were organized in the district and later the DFO also included networking as one of the activities of its annual program. Similar networking workshops were organized in Bhojpur and other districts in the Koshi Hills. The networking process rapidly spread from the Koshi Hills to other areas of the country.

The first national CFUG networking workshop: In February 1993 the first national workshop for CFUGs was organized in Dhankuta District; 41 representatives from 40 CFUGs of 28 districts participated. Networking was perceived to be a means to solve problems and to fulfill the needs of users.

¹¹ Key projects included the Nepal-UK Community Forestry Project funded by DFID and the Nepal-Australia Community Forestry Project, both of which lasted for over a decade in various forms.

The second national CFUG networking workshop: The second national CFUG workshop was organized from 23 to 26 February 2003; the conclusions and lessons learned from the Dhankuta 1993 meeting were presented. This workshop was a milestone in the movement for CFUG networking throughout the country.

Formation of the FECOFUN ad hoc committee: In May 1995, a nongovernment organization (NGO) called WATCH organized a workshop for community forestry and private forestry plantation user groups at Budol, in Kavre District (near Kathmandu). This workshop elected a 13-member ad hoc committee for FECOFUN, Nepal. In June 1995, an ad hoc FECOFUN committee was formed at a gathering of CFUG representatives from 35 districts and NGOs. This workshop decided to establish a contact office in Kathmandu and formed a committee to prepare a draft constitution for FECOFUN.

Formal registration of FECOFUN: In September 1995, the Federation was registered in Kathmandu District Administration Office and became a legally recognized entity.

Holding of the first General Assembly: The first General Assembly was held in March 1996 with representatives from 38 districts. The General Assembly elected a 27-member national executive committee.

The second and third general assemblies of FECOFUN were held in 2001 and 2006 respectively. Now, it has 74 district chapters and various local networks all over the country.

Sources: Ojha (2002); Ojha and Timsina (2008); Souvenir of FECOFUN (2001).

Shrestha and Britt (1997) identified four types or stages of CFUG networking and federation. Ojha (2002) reinterpreted these stages with some modifications. As Table 1 shows, the *first stage* was locally initiated informal networks that were small and confined to CFUGs located close to one another. The *second stage* came when projects and DFOs started to use these networks for planning and information extraction. The *third stage* of network development emerged when CFUGs started to cluster around specific themes or issues (e.g. resin networks of CFUGs in Dhankuta and Terhathum). Finally, the *stage of federation building* started with the formation of an ad hoc committee, which then extended membership and facilitated the formation of district chapters.

Supporting Factors

Once FECOFUN began to emerge, at least four supporting factors were crucial in its development: a) committed and politically competent leadership; b) access to advisory and technical services from a wide range of national and international organizations; c) flexible financial support; d) crisis in the political system and the emergence of social activism as an alternative arena for political activists.

The founding members of FECOFUN had long experience in political activism. They had been key local leaders of various national political parties, who fought through three decades of political struggle against the autocratic *Panchayat* system. They introduced the styles and tactics of such political activism to FECOFUN. This approach enabled FECOFUN to broaden the idea of social organization beyond the mainstream development NGO practices. Through a number of workshops, training activities, and advocacy campaigns, FECOFUN leadership has been able to cultivate critical and civilian perspectives on forest governance, contrary to the historically dominant technocratic approaches. This ideology has created an alternative institution of knowledge, power, and identity extraneous to the Government's technobureaucracy. In addition, the founding FECOFUN leaders continued to work in close collaboration with a wide network of advisers, well-wishers, and decentralization activists. This association helped them to explore resources, analyze issues, identify strategic courses of

action, and organize training events and study tours for the emerging cadre base of the network.

As the central FECOFUN gradually expanded its district chapters, a critical mass of local cadres emerged throughout the country, further expanding the idea and philosophy of FECOFUN. For thousands of local political workers, CFUG platforms and FECOFUN became attractive, partly because they were more socially acceptable institutions from which they could pursue their political interests, and partly because there was a tendency to move from politics to social sectors.

Fund-raising occurs mainly at two levels: the National Executive Committee (NEC) secretariat, and district chapters. At the NEC secretariat, funding is sought from international foundations, funding bodies, bilateral and multilateral projects, and a portion of the levy charged on CFUGs.¹² At the district level, however, it is mainly the bilateral agencies and field-based projects that provide project or activity-specific funding. Overhead costs are generally charged for funds received at the Secretariat, while for district branches, it is either with or without the overhead charges.

At present the following are the principal forms of FECOFUN funding:

- Donor grants: support for FECOFUN's organizational strengthening and consolidation, and for financing of projects
- Membership of CFUGs: levies charged for membership of CFUGs
- Donations from CFUGs/other visitors to the NEC secretariat office
- The tendency for district branches to seek grants received at the central office

The current structure of FECOFUN: FECOFUN is structured by a Constitution formulated (and modified three times) by the General Assembly (of delegates from around the country). The Constitution stipulates that:

- There are three layers of federations at village or town levels, district levels, and the national level
- At the national level, four units of federation are organized—the General Assembly, National Council, Central Executive Committee (EC), and Steering Committee (SC). Every three years the General Assembly meets to elect a new EC. The National Council meets once every one-and-a-half years to discuss plans and agendas put forward by the EC. The SC acts as the central secretariat of FECOFUN
- Apart from the Constitution, different rules also exist, such as election rules, organizational management rules, financial rules, and staff management rules. Such rules can be formulated by the EC
- There is provision for no-confidence motions against FECOFUN officials by members
- CFUGs that are registered with concerned Government authorities according to laws are eligible for FECOFUN membership
- Provision for creating different divisions within the central secretariat¹³

¹² Ongoing projects at FECOFUN—policy advocacy campaign (USAID Nepal/via CARE Nepal); women's participation in the constituent assembly (supported by the Meccanel Foundation/USA); Jana Awaj (People's Voice) (supported by CIDA via CECI); and other small-scale support from Action Aid, the Asia Foundation, and the Asia Network for Small Scale Bioresources.

¹³ Current units within the central secretariat of FECOFUN include: public advocacy; organization, extension, and consolidation; women's empowerment; nonwood forest product (NWFP) development; a resource center and information dissemination; administration and monitoring.

In recent years, there have been significant improvements in the internal representation processes of FECOFUN. The selection system of representatives for the General Assembly is fixed in the FECOFUN Constitution. The Election Regulation of central FECOFUN is also an important document that regulates the procedural aspect of representative selection.

According to this procedure, every district committee of FECOFUN has to conduct a meeting of district ECs in the presence of 60% of other EC members. In the 2006 General Assembly, a public notice was also published in a popular national newspaper (*Kantipur*) informing the district chapters about the General Assembly. In preparation for this General Assembly, the central FECOFUN also provided guidelines to the district FECOFUN for selection of representatives for the General Assembly, encouraging them to select representatives from *dalits* (untouchables under the Hindu caste system), indigenous/ethnic communities and other disadvantaged groups. A special proposal was unanimously passed at the third General Assembly in 2006 to make the constitution of the national EC more inclusive. Three five-year general assemblies by 2007 and four national council meetings, along with more frequent gatherings of lower committees of FECOFUN have all contributed to maintaining its integrity and dynamism. The multilayered structure of FECOFUN, with equal gender participation, has allowed democratic linkages between different levels and has made it possible to organize actions within different arenas.

Federation Action in Democratizing Forest Governance

Since its inception in 1995, FECOFUN has been playing a key role in forestry sector policy development and governance practices. Along with NGO alliances, it has been challenging the dominant technocratic view by introducing civic perspectives and pushing for local participation in policy-making processes. Perpetuating CFUG rights over forest resources by resisting any regressive amendment proposals in the Forest Act, 1993 has been the most commendable involvement of FECOFUN. Its actions have sought to: promote the civil rights agenda on forestry; create civic resistance to top-down Government decisions; augment service delivery; influence policy development processes; and contribute to national/international/conceptual discourse on forest governance.

FECOFUN has progressively expanded its sphere of activities ranging from its own institutional growth to the wider political movement in the country; this can be broadly categorized into three major stages based on their foci and contributions: a) institutional growth and federation building; b) transforming top-down forest policies; c) democratizing national polity. Table 1 summarizes FECOFUN actions in key policy decisions. In the following sections, we further elaborate the strategies and processes through which FECOFUN has been able to influence the policy and practices of forest governance in Nepal.

Table 1: Forest Policy Decisions and Contributions of FECOFUN in Nepal

Forest Policies and Decisions	FECOFUN Arguments from Civil Society Perspectives	Actions Taken by FECOFUN
<p>1998: The Timber Corporation of Nepal, a parastatal, granted a “one window” or monopoly rights over the sales and distribution of timber in the district, as well as nationally and internationally (GON decision, 9 February 1998).</p>	<p>The decision undermines the development of alternative, small-scale, and locally suited institutional arrangements for timber trade. There is a widespread concern over the continuing misappropriation of resources and corruption through such arrangements.</p>	<p>Organized many protest campaigns against the monopoly of timber corporations.</p>
<p>1998: First Amendment of the Forest Act, 1993 (GON December 1998).</p>	<p>The amendments of the Forest Act, 1993 sought to restrict some of the rights of CFUGs and give more power to the DFO.</p>	<p>Users, FECOFUN, and NGOs heavily reacted to this move and raised questions on the motive of the forest bureaucracy and its faith and commitment to enhancing democratic space.</p>
<p>1999: Ban on green felling (MFSC decision, 1 November, 1999).</p>	<p>The rights of thousands of CFUGs were being curtailed.</p>	<p>FECOFUN and NGOs reacted through press releases, demonstrations and protests. The media highlighted consequences in the field. They drew the attention of the research community and generated analyses of the issue.</p>
<p>2000: Circular restricting community forestry in the Terai (MFSC decision, 28 April, 2000).</p>	<p>The handing over of the community forest was suspended.</p>	<p>FECOFUN initiated a movement against the decision in collaboration with other stakeholders.</p>
<p>2000: Special forest policy for the Terai, Chure, and Inner Terai; declared new management regimes for block-system production forestry in the Terai and inner Terai, and a strict protection approach in the Siwaliks (foothills) (MFSC decision, 28 April, 2000).</p>	<p>Curtailing of user rights.</p>	<p>FECOFUN launched a campaign demanding that Terai forests should also fall under community forestry policy and the forest near the villages must be handed over to local communities. This is the right given by acts and legislations.</p>
<p>2001: Revision of community forestry operational guidelines (DOF 2001).</p>	<p>Imposition of additional technicalities on CFUGs’ management of forest, without the accompanying delivery of needed services. Provides room for manipulating through technical reasons.</p>	<p>FECOFUN pressurized the DOF to simplify the forest hand over process.</p>
<p>2001: An attempt for a second amendment of the Forest Act, 1993.</p>	<p>Some of the rights of users were to be further curtailed.</p>	<p>It was heavily protested by FECOFUN and civil society organizations and could not reach the form of a bill in Parliament. However, many of the provisions that were supposed to be amended were</p>

2002: Nepal Biodiversity Strategy (GON July 2002).	The action plan undermined the community approach to biodiversity conservation.	enacted through various decisions with the Ministry (personal communication with Dil Raj Khanal, 2004). FECOFUN and other stakeholders protested the strategy.
2003: Government financial ordinance for levying 40% tax on CFUG forest product sales (GON 1 July 2003).	The GON introduced an order through the Ministry of Finance (effective from 1 July 2003) without any consultation with concerned stakeholders and tried to restrict the rights of users to use their resources.	Heavy protest campaigns were organized; as a result the Government reduced the tax to 15%.
2003: Collaborative forest management (CFM) guideline (MFSC 2003).	Pushed by donor projects with some token consultations. There are ongoing pilot projects to bring it into the public sphere and deliberation through two projects (LFP and BI-SEPT) that have limited scope in the facilitating process because of their modalities The government's failure to implement OFMP in the Terai was followed by the implementation of collaborative forest management which does not allow adequate community participation.	FECOFUN and NGOs: The potential community forest area should follow the community forest program; the rest could be managed through CFM. However CFM facilitation could not be managed by the current capacity and orientation of forest bureaucrats. Donor projects are not viable solutions to bring it into the public sphere and deliberative dialogue.

Sources: Ojha and Timsina (2008) and FECOFUN (2001, 2002, 2003).

Raising Civic Consciousness in Forest Governance

As Ojha and Timsina (2008) observed, FECOFUN has contributed to raising critical awareness on policy, legal, and practical aspects of community forestry among ordinary citizens. Its mass awareness campaign through mass meetings, the media, publications, training, exposure visits, and mutual exchange programs has raised considerable local awareness among the rural population including those areas where there is little external support either from bilateral forestry projects or from the Government. Its approach and strategies for awareness have differed from those of bilateral projects; it focuses in those areas and communities generally neglected by the external agencies, and its message employs people's perspectives as opposed to technocratic views. Awareness-raising activities in some cases have been tailored to specific Government plans and proposals that were considered to be detrimental to local interests and the long-term sustainability of the forest ecosystem. Key messages from FECOFUN have helped to strengthen local legal and customary rights on forests. FECOFUN's weekly radio program has also widely disseminated ideas and information with a different perspective compared to conventional radio programs sponsored by the Government. These activities have helped to enhance the political capital of CFUGs beyond the traditional patron-client relationship¹⁴ with the Department of Forest (DOF).

FECOFUN has been able to extend its network throughout the country, encompassing most of the existing CFUGs in nearly all districts. This has allowed CFUGs to share experiences and

¹⁴ See Malla (2001) for detailed treatment of patron-client relations in Nepal's forest governance practices.

ideas among themselves and learn from each other. It also aims to develop the institutional capacity of CFUGs. The central-level executives of FECOFUN and professional staff facilitate the networking process through its village/municipality/range post, and district-level federations. FECOFUN also facilitates the process of forming user groups, preparing operational plans, and maintaining CFUG accounts. FECOFUN has also conducted activities that contribute to the development of institutional capacities of CFUGs, district FECOFUN chapters and local facilitators, and CFUG leaders and motivators (both male and female). FECOFUN leaders and facilitators have played a crucial role in the resolution of conflicts (such as those related to forest product harvesting and distribution, the taxation of forest products, withdrawal of community forests by DFOs, and boundary disputes between community forests) within and among CFUGs and other local actors.

Another FECOFUN capacity development service is the provision of training. Approximately 12 types of training courses have been conducted for CFUGs and district and range post chapters of FECOFUN, pooling resources and trainers from within the FECOFUN system and outside. Training topics have ranged from training of trainers, policy and legal awareness, forest survey, agroforestry, CFUG formation, facilitation skills, motivation, leadership, and accounting and record keeping. Likewise, workshops on various themes such as networking, orientations of community forestry, district FECOFUN assemblies, women in community forestry, and NWFP-based enterprises are organized regularly. The type and number of training events have expanded in recent years.

FECOFUN has also provided legal consultation services to member-CFUGs facing legal problems. Several cases have been filed opposing the Operational Forest Management Plan (OFMP) prepared by the DOF and the curtailment of local rights, illegal tax burdens, and the transfer of community forest lands for other purposes. According to FECOFUN's legal officer, in the fiscal year 1999–2000, a total of 15 cases were filed by FECOFUN at district, appellate, and Supreme Court levels relating to community rights and the conservation of forests and the environment.

Organizing Civil Society Resistance to Top-Down Government Decisions

Resistance to the Government's top-down policies and its guidelines, decisions, and circulars that curtail people's rights to forests or undermine communities' autonomy and authority has been an important area for FECOFUN. For example, FECOFUN opposed the Government's plan to amend the Forest Act, 1993 as well as associated Government orders and circulars that proposed several restrictions on the rights of forest-dependent citizens. FECOFUN organized several mass demonstrations including one in Kathmandu in 2000 demanding the transfer of forests as community forests according to the legislation (Britt 2001, Shrestha 2001). It has also organized meetings with Members of Parliament to sensitize them on local people's rights over forests. It has submitted protest letters to the Prime Minister and concerned Ministers demanding the proper implementation of community forestry policies throughout the country. Resistance against the implementation of the OFMP, one of the Government's plans to commercially manage large tracts of Terai forest, is widely known in Nepal and elsewhere. The OFMP was prepared by technical forestry experts for the 17 Terai districts of Nepal, where the country's most valuable sal (*Shorea robusta*) forest is found. District-wide block (relatively large continuous patches of forest) management plans were devised for Government-managed forests. This was opposed for not providing adequate opportunities for the participation of local people in planning and decision-making processes. FECOFUN and local communities were able to force the Government to withdraw the OFMP.

The National Secretariat of FECOFUN and district branches organize demonstrations and press conferences periodically. In 2005, Bardiya, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Sarlahi, Mahotari, Chitawon, and Nawalparasi district branches organized a demonstration to protest

Government-managed Collaborative Forestry policy and directives. Likewise, Bhaktapur, Jhapa, Dang and Doti district branches demonstrated against the intervention of the military and administration on community forest and the legal rights of CFUGs. The CFUGs of Lalitpur District and local communities of Chitawan, Palpa, and Arghakanchi districts have been organizing policy advocacy campaigns and movements against the illegal operation of mining in community forest areas. CFUGs and district branches of FECOFUN often submit memorandums to Government agencies and hold press conferences to highlight local-level policy issues on community forestry. They send copies of the memorandums to the FECOFUN center as well and 42 were received in 2005.

In the process of policy advocacy campaigns, the local branches seek support from the FECOFUN center in preparation of campaign materials, slogans, and techniques.

FECOFUN has prepared the following guidelines and regulations to conduct movement and advocacy programs in a proper manner:

- Clearly understandable slogans to be written on placards
- Sticking to devised slogans during the movement
- Simple, respectful, and persuasive language during addresses
- Paying attention to discipline, the norms and regulations of FECOFUN and the Government
- Developing memorandums and applications to be submitted to Government agencies
- Strategies for signature campaigns
- Strategies for motivating stakeholders and the media
- Mobilizing human resources (volunteers, supporters, journalists) and their participation and respect
- Management of unexpected incidents
- Negotiation, review of movements, dissemination of information at concerned levels, and preparation of reports
- Monitoring, evaluation, and continuation of Federation or advocacy campaigns

These guidelines help district branches and CFUGs to implement advocacy programs more effectively and make them more accountable to their roles. The district branches and CFUGs reserve the right to modify them according to their local situations and Federation and advocacy needs.

Ensuring Citizens' Voices in Policy Development Processes

FECOFUN has been able to augment and amplify citizens' voices in forest policy processes; as a result different policy decisions have incorporated citizens' perspectives to varying degrees. Some specific cases in which FECOFUN actively participated include: the Forest Act, 1993 first amendment 1998; second amendment of the 1993 Forest Act in 2001 (postponed by the Government); the Nepal Biodiversity Action Plan; the Terai (including the Inner Terai and Chure) Forest Management Policy; the Government decision to empower the Timber Corporation of Nepal (TCN) as the single legitimate supplier of forest products; the circular banning green tree felling; and imposition of 40% royalty on forest products sold by CFUGs. In all these policy development activities, FECOFUN has clearly put forward its perspectives, given suggestions to concerned policy-making authorities and, in cases, strongly resisted Government decisions. The principal ways in which FECOFUN has contributed to policy processes include participating in meetings and providing critical feedback, contacting the authorities both in person and also through written petitions, and organizing rallies and demonstrations.

FECOFUN has become an active participant in all key forestry deliberations and processes at the national level, such as in the Forestry Sector Coordination Committee (FSCC) and the Nepal NTFP Network (NNN). Principal forestry sector donors, such as the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) recognize FECOFUN's valuable contributions in bringing local perspectives to national policy processes and consequently provide financial and technical support. In the past five years, FECOFUN has strengthened its presence in the agendas and programs of institutions working in the forestry sector and FECOFUN's name is found in almost all community forestry-related reports and documents in Nepal.

Making the Service Delivery System Responsive to Users' Needs

FECOFUN has influenced the strategies of service delivery in community forestry by clarifying the appropriate forest management services at the local level. Key service areas promoted by FECOFUN include group formation as well as institutional strengthening and legal capacity building of CFUGs. FECOFUN has established collaboration with diverse groups of organizations, particularly NGOs, in facilitating the delivery of needed services at the local level.

By bridging community perspectives with other institutions, FECOFUN has influenced the agenda and priorities of service provider institutions. Through FECOFUN, critical areas of services needed at the local level have been highlighted. It is now commonly recognized that many CFUGs that are not functioning well because of the inadequate provision of extension services at the time of formation and during the early stages of CFUG development.

In recent years, FECOFUN has also directly provided livelihood services to the forest-dependent poor. In particular, FECOFUN has supported marketing of NWFPs, establishment of CFUG cooperatives, forest product certification, and management and cultivation of NWFPs. In addition, some of its activities have focused on mobilizing CFUG resources for the benefit of poor groups within communities.

Influencing Political Party Agendas

FECOFUN has lobbied with political parties, lawmakers, the media, and wider civil society to establish people's rights on community forestry. Several interactions with these groups have made them aware of the importance of community forestry not only as a process of forest management, but as a model of democratization in Nepal. As such, FECOFUN has created links between ordinary citizens and elected politicians on matters of public concern.

FECOFUN has played key roles in sensitizing local government bodies on participatory forest management and the rights of forest users. This has been particularly important in the context of nationwide deliberations on decentralization and local governance, and the enactment of relevant acts empowering these local government bodies to control and regulate local forest resources. As a result of interactions with FECOFUN and other NGOs, these local bodies now have a general understanding that community forestry is one step ahead in the process of decentralization, and that they should provide better support to community forestry through CFUGs rather than interfering with it.

At the CFUG level, people hold regular annual assemblies that elect executive committees. The law has recognized only the "group" as an entity and the EC as its coordination mechanism. The CFUG assembly is more deliberative than the national parliament: community forestry leaders are increasingly aware of the need to ensure that the voices of minorities, the oppressed, and *dalits* are heard and addressed (Ojha and Pokharel 2005). In many groups, *Tole-* (hamlet) level discussions take place prior to the assembly as regards what should be discussed.

Contributions to Wider Discourse on Governance and Development

FECOFUN has also promoted the community forestry agenda through international networking. FECOFUN leaders have participated in international forums in the United States, Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia; this has helped to widely market their ideas and bring in additional perspectives and lessons. Many institutions within and outside the forestry sector have appreciated the achievements of participatory forest management. People and institutions outside the forestry sector have also begun to recognize that community forestry is one of the very few successful development programs in Nepal.

All such activities have contributed to increased surveillance by local communities over the forests, and resulted in an increased level of responsiveness from the Government, local bodies, and civil society to participatory forest management. In addition, intensive interactions and negotiations between the DOF and local communities have resulted in a more favorable power balance between communities and Government authorities; all of these factors are positively related to sustainable forest management. In recent years, FECOFUN's contribution has gone beyond the forestry sector and has played an important role in political movements against feudal monarchy for establishing a democratic system in the country.

Viability and Effectiveness of the Federation

The viability and effectiveness of FECOFUN is assessed in terms of a) the actual outcomes it has generated, both at the level of governance as well as livelihood opportunities; b) strategies and tactics for harnessing citizens' power and augmenting citizens' voices in different policy layers; c) changing political context and shifting space for social movement; and d) the ability to handle internal challenges.

Outcomes of FECOFUN Actions

Over 13 years of CFUG federation building has consolidated the power of local people who depend on forests, and contributed to the reorientation of power relations between Government authorities and local communities. The relationship has begun to change from the traditional patron-client modality towards a form of equal stakeholdership. The new power relations have made unilateral and controversial Government decisions virtually unenforceable, thus underscoring the importance of pluralistic dialogues, deliberations, and negotiations in forestry. The services provided by FECOFUN are critical and address the political roots of the issues and problems. FECOFUN has established itself as a constructive force of opposition, as well as a collaborative partner to the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation and the DOF. This situation, in a sense, has provided a mechanism for checks and balances in the governance of forest resources, while at the same time fostering social learning in the governance process.

Federations of forest users are an innovative example of an addition to common property forest institutions, which are typically seen as consisting of resource user groups appropriating benefits from, and regulating access to, common forest resources. In terms of access to and dependency on forest resources, federations are positioned one step away from the CFUGs to address issues at a larger geographic scale. The case of FECOFUN demonstrates that federations may serve three crucial functions: achievement of economy of scale (in pursuing common agendas), consolidation of power (to negotiate and safeguard interests), and sharing and dissemination of knowledge, skills, and information. The pattern

and types of FECOFUN interventions indicate an unequivocal focus on the consolidation of the power of the people in gaining access to control over forest resources.

The specific outcomes of FECOFUN action are:

- Minimizing tax on community forestry products
- Forcing the Government to withdraw the amendment of the Forest Act in a centralized way
- Empowering Terai CFUGs to stop the Government from implementing top-down forest management approaches
- Contributing to periodic (five-year) Government development plans (the Herbs and NTFP Development Policy 2005 made community-oriented)
- Releasing frozen CFUG bank accounts (frozen illegally by Government authorities)
- Forcing the Government to withdraw military occupation of community forest areas
- Forcing the Government to stop expansion of conservation areas in existing or potential community forest areas
- Forcing the Government to stop licensing private leased forest and mining factories on existing/potential community forest areas
- Forcing the Government to dissolve the policy of converting community forestry into private land
- Contributing to controlling illegal exploitation of valuable forest resources
- Resisting the intervention of the Government and Maoists on community forest during the armed conflict
- Forcing the Government/Ministry to start the consultative/participatory policy process to develop the new policy for the forestry sector

In this way, the campaigns conducted by FECOFUN have been instrumental for not only in policy development and implementation but also in protecting CFUG rights over forest resources. Government agencies are not involved in monitoring and evaluation of FECOFUN; however, the campaigns organized by FECOFUN for the last 11 years have become models for civil society in other sectors of governance in Nepal, such as irrigation, drinking water, and community electricity. FECOFUN is the largest civil society organization in Nepal, with its nationwide spread of over 15,000 member-CFUGs, over one third of the total population of the country. It is considered a defender of community rights on forestry and a strong political actor in democratizing environmental governance in Nepal.

The stakeholders in the forestry sector acknowledge FECOFUN as an advocate for CFUG rights. Different groups have recognized FECOFUN differently. Donors consider FECOFUN to be a strong pillar of good governance, an extensive channel of information dissemination, and a legitimate body for donor activity. Advocacy NGOs consider FECOFUN to be a frontline lobbyist for policy, providing legitimacy for funding of collaborative projects. Development NGOs consider FECOFUN to be a service delivery vehicle and a legitimate channel for funding of collaborative projects. Political parties consider FECOFUN to be an important political space to be colonized. Research organizations/researchers consider FECOFUN to be an innovative political institution for environmental governance, which deserves analysis and research. The Government accepts FECOFUN as one of the main stakeholders in forestry policy processes.

Alliance and Solidarity in the FECOFUN Movement

FECOFUN has mobilized support from five types of organizations and groups—NGOs, bilateral projects, international NGOs, government organizations, and multistakeholder organizations. FECOFUN has awarded special membership to six NGOs working in forest, environment, and social justice arenas in order to maintain good relations with them.

FECOFUN often solicits feedback and suggestions from the representatives of these and other concerned NGOs. Likewise, FECOFUN has become a member of various forums associated directly or indirectly with right-based advocacy and the community forestry movement where discussion takes place on community forestry issues and where reviews and feedback are available on accomplished activities. As a member of advisory committees in a few community forestry-related projects, FECOFUN has been continuously sensitizing donors and projects on the need for action and advocacy in the field of forest governance. In addition, FECOFUN has been emerging as a focal point and an appropriate forum to discuss, share, and review forest sector restructuring initiatives that have been taking place in the recent past.

FECOFUN has been a member of the Forest Sector Coordination Committee since 1996 and has been lobbying for the protection of CFUG rights and benefits through this committee. The committee recognizes FECOFUN as a prominent civil society group working to advocate the rights of CFUGs. Likewise, as a member of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Review Committee, FECOFUN has been advocating for community rights on biodiversity and bioresources on several fronts. FECOFUN disseminates important decisions made by all these committees to all district branches and other units so that the latter can benefit.

FECOFUN has established linkage with a number of global fora and associations to explore new ideas and seek solidarity in community-based forest governance. Being a member of the Global Alliance for Community Forestry (GACF) and the Rights and Resources Initiatives (RRI), FECOFUN has been achieving international support and recognition on right-based advocacy in community forestry and its learning process. This has made it easy to disseminate information on community forestry policy issues internationally. FECOFUN participates in the United Nations Forum on Forest, in which it promotes the agenda of community-based forest governance. FECOFUN's affiliation with the SmartWood program has made it possible for FECOFUN to promote community forestry products on the international market. By participating in the International Association for the Study of Common Property (IASCP) and the World Social Forum, FECOFUN has been able to promote the agenda of community forestry globally. Likewise, the Regional Community Forestry Training Center (RECOFTC) has been constantly supporting FECOFUN to discuss and review various aspects of community forestry development, as well as supporting FECOFUN to highlight Nepalese experiences internationally.

Changing Political Context and the Emerging Crisis of Space

The political discourse in Nepal is heading towards inclusive democracy. This has emerged in response to the widespread failure of representative democracy under the aegis of a constitutional monarchy, and the Maoist-led civil war through the 1990s and afterwards. Space for civil society action like that of FECOFUN was considerable immediately after the advent of the democratic political system in 1990, following the party-less autocratic system.

At present, there is almost a consensus that the representative model of democracy cannot provide a means for augmenting the voices of more than 100 ethnic groups, as well as low-caste, women's, and geographically marginalized groups. In the face of inclusive governance discourse, the way FECOFUN is structured—both organizationally and symbolically—does not indicate the adaptive capability of FECOFUN to continue to resurrect its political space. Several of the recent social movements for *jana jati* (ethnic groups), women, *dalits*, and *madhesi* (plainspeople) provide a clear indication of the political representation potential of political parties that claim to represent the people. In this context, given the current strategies and actions, FECOFUN's space is bound to be squeezed, especially because of the social movements and discourses encompassing social inclusion.

Currently, FECOFUN is dominated by high castes, economically middle classes, and hill people; inclusion of *madhesi*, *dalits*, and *jana jati* is nominal (see Annex). There is still

underrepresentation of marginalized groups. In many instances, it has been observed that FECOFUN has still to be fully owned by the member CFUGs. Despite the fact that most forest users fall into the poor and marginalized categories, they are still inadequately represented on FECOFUN committees. Although the members of the EC are attempting to lobby on behalf of these marginalized groups, hierarchical relationships within Nepalese society in general prevent these interests from being properly articulated within FECOFUN itself.

In recent years, particularly after the third FECOFUN General Assembly in 2006, inclusion has been receiving increasing priority within FECOFUN. Yet, the actual trend is far less than what is being anticipated. Of the total number of participants at the third General Assembly (317), only 15 and 96 came from *dalit* and indigenous/ethnic communities respectively. According to the constitutional provision of FECOFUN, in all committees there should be at least 50% female representation, but the actual level of women's participation in decision making and governance practices is not commensurate with quantitative representational equity.¹⁵

Internal Challenges

As FECOFUN is growing bigger and more complex, it is experiencing several internal challenges. In recent years, various agencies and researchers have conducted an analysis of FECOFUN and have identified various strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and threats (Table 2).

Table 2. Strengths and Weaknesses of FECOFUN According to Various Organizations

Evaluator	Strength	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
RECOFTC	Can maintain CFUG rights	Lacks effective monitoring and evaluation	Introduced as a decentralized civil society organization	Unstable in maintaining policies on natural resource management
Institute for Integrated Development Studies	Conducts advocacy on national issues with determination	Incapable of mobilizing district branches strongly for movement and advocacy purposes	Recognized as a capable and responsible civil society organization	Insufficient poverty alleviation-oriented programs in community forestry
Ford Foundation	Utilization of the media and mobilization of volunteers	Less consideration of second generation issues in community forestry	Own resources in user groups for advocacy	Obtaining minimum trust from partnerships
Social Welfare	Conducts empowerment	Lacks long-term planning	Adequate production of	Lacks coordination between district

¹⁵ A women's rights activist associated with the Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAVANTI) suspected this at the opening ceremony of the third General Assembly of FECOFUN in December 2006.

Council	on advocacy processes	on movement and advocacy	volunteers	branches and stakeholders
FECOFUN	Production of facilitators for advocacy	Lacks advocacy planning in district branches	Availability of support/assistance for empowerment	Interference/domination by Government agencies and traders on CFUGs

Source: Dil R. Khanal.

We conducted further analysis and found the following challenges that face FECOFUN:

❶ It has not always been able to handle external pressures. The donor agencies or other agencies providing funding assistance to FECOFUN influence the latter. By funding selected objectives, these agencies influence FECOFUN’s sphere of action in a way that is consistent with the mandate of funding bodies. In addition, the personnel within donor agencies or other organizations who provide financial assistance are assumed to be more “expert” than FECOFUN members, and their counselling constitutes the core of FECOFUN’s knowledge base. This creates a risk of FECOFUN being externally driven.

❷ As opportunities within FECOFUN are growing both nationally and internationally for FECOFUN activists, it is increasingly a challenge to address how such opportunities are regulated without creating frustrations, while at the same time enhancing the morale and motivation of the committed activists. This is especially relevant in the context of the possibility of misunderstandings and division between various factions and interest groups working with FECOFUN.¹⁶ Likewise, in the increasingly complex network society, FECOFUN’s success in influencing policy and practice depends on the capability of its activists. In recent years, there have been increasingly limited opportunities for training on basic conceptual orientation and political schooling.

❸ As the political space around FECOFUN has grown tremendously over the years, there is increasing interest among political parties to patronize this force. The linkage with parties is further strengthened as most FECOFUN activists are also members of various political parties. The involvement of political party members is inevitable because there are very few social activists who have been groomed outside of any affiliations with political parties. Also, having a large number of FECOFUN activists linked to political parties means that FECOFUN is in a good position to mobilize political parties in support of community rights over forest management. But the problem arises when parties begin to influence FECOFUN processes, rather than vice versa. There are two implications of such influence. First, the FECOFUN leaders have an incentive to become accountable to political party leaders rather than the constituent members. Second, when FECOFUN power is co-opted by political parties, which are part of the State, then the value of independent civil society organizations will be compromised. So long as the leaders feel that power from the patronage of political leaders is greater than the power derived from representing and augmenting the voice of forest-dependent people, there is a danger that FECOFUN will be co-opted by the political parties.

❹ FECOFUN activists are struggling to redefine the structure and boundary of the collective action that is consistent with the goals and interests of the forest-dependent people.

¹⁶ In the third year (1998) after the emergence of FECOFUN, some groups tried to split FECOFUN or create parallel federations, but they were unsuccessful.

FECOFUN is more like a linearly coordinated organization than a federation in its true sense. Although publicly declared as a federation, FECOFUN is in essence a centrally managed institution. The Nepali word *Sakha* (branch) is used to denote district committee, implying that the latter is a subordinate part of the national committee. There is no need to register the local chapters of FECOFUN independently, as they all flow from the centrally registered FECOFUN. This form of governance structure has sometimes limited the practices of internal deliberative interface. If the FECOFUN structure allowed for district and lower branches in the true sense of a federation, then the FECOFUN representatives would be in a better position to deliberate freely, identify new lessons, and respond to citizens in a more decentralized and collaborative way.

⑤ The structure of FECOFUN's organization is related to another challenge of self-monitoring of practices and behavior to ensure ethical standards. In recent years, there have been some instances that once local-level FECOFUN activists gained political power through FECOFUN activism, they sometimes misused this power for unethical personal gains. The challenge is how FECOFUN can devise and enforce ethical codes of conduct. There is already a judicial committee at the central level to look after cases of violation of FECOFUN rules but it is still not clear how such mechanisms can be extended to maintain ethical behavior among FECOFUN activists.

⑥ This is related to what Argyris (1993) calls "defensive routines" in organizational practices, which are hardly reflected in practice. These are becoming embedded within FECOFUN. For instance, many FECOFUN activists have been absorbed within the mainstream development/*vikase* paradigm, with limited disposition to mobilize citizens' participation in governance. Another defensive routine can be seen in the way many FECOFUN activists view the community forestry program, which is the breeding ground of FECOFUN. They tend to see the community forestry modality as an end in itself, rather than exploring and refining means to other stated ends—the rights of local people over forests. For example, when alternative discourses emerge to respond to the inherent limitations of communities managing forest resources—for instance as regards block management of forest, management of protected areas, etc.—FECOFUN's formal political stance allows limited space for its leaders to creatively articulate their concerns that they are for community rights and not specific institutional modalities of forest governance. As a result, FECOFUN is seen as the defender of a particular modality of forest governance, rather than taking a broader stance on promoting the rights of local people in all contexts. Although in recent years many of the leaders have increasingly appreciated pluralistic institutional modalities, FECOFUN has yet to fully recognize and begin meaningful dialogue with actors of non-community forestry, decentralized forest management modalities (Ojha 2008).

⑦ Many of FECOFUN's close allies and well-wishers have observed a subtle trend towards projectization of the organization. In recent years, FECOFUN has been approached by an increasing number of development agencies, mainly NGOs, for collaborative work. FECOFUN leaders have themselves sought such collaborations, which can allow them to implement development projects identified by NGOs or donors. A significant part of FECOFUN activity is related to delivering technical services. Such efforts in delivering technical services may divert attention away from advancing political and civil rights agendas. From a learning perspective, it is essential to undertake research projects to understand the political and institutional conditions that limit technical research, rather than research on technical aspects per se. For example, instead of conducting technical research on some aspects of forestry, FECOFUN may seek to understand why the Department of Forest Resources and Survey, which has a mandate to lead forestry-related research in Nepal, has actually very limited research engagement.

⑧ This is related to financial sustainability. FECOFUN is operating within a financial system that is largely unsustainable, and there is limited financial contribution from constituent user

members to FECOFUN. At present, FECOFUN has very limited resources of its own. While it depends on outside donor-funded field projects for the support of most of its programs and activities, it has yet to mobilize resources and build its capacity to raise its own funds and to function as an independent and financially self-sustaining organization (Timsina 2003). FECOFUN's core (organizational) agenda as well as development activities are mainly financed through donor agencies, bilateral and multilateral projects, and NGOs. With increasing recognition from donors and other organizations, FECOFUN is likely to be pulled into the role of a development organization (primarily focusing on service delivery). From the financial sustainability perspective, it is worth quoting a former FECOFUN chairman as saying, "If each CFUG contributes a piece of wood to FECOFUN, hundreds of thousands of rupees can be deposited in its funds" (Timsina 2003). However, how FECOFUN will translate this into reality is yet to be seen. It may have a plan, but most members are unaware of it.

Since its establishment in 1995, FECOFUN has continuously received support in the form of grants from donor organizations. While the initial support from donor organizations was mainly to support its organizational strengthening, expansion, and consolidation, subsequent grants have been received mainly to finance a wide variety of projects—including women's empowerment, community forestry advocacy, and constituent assembly awareness raising. During the initial years of establishment, FECOFUN also received individual contributions from CFUG members, but gradually these contributions have been replaced by project-based donor funding.

⑨ FECOFUN's current campaigns appear less informed by the long-term vision and mission. Instead they constitute reactive responses to the Government's centralized, regressive policy decisions. Consequently some of these immediate decisions and responses appear less mature and even create confusion among allies and even within FECOFUN's own structure. FECOFUN sometimes has a tendency to please its members and allies rather than pursue the agenda critically with a long-term vision. This is evident in the FECOFUN stance on Terai forestry—defending community forestry as a particular modality of forest governance, rather than ideals and principles of devolution and people's rights, irrespective of modalities. Therefore, FECOFUN has to prepare a straightforward and long-term strategic plan on action and advocacy for community forestry to be suitable from the national to the local level. Similarly, specific planning processes and methodology need to be developed to monitor and evaluate the advocacy programs. Currently, they are mainly based on learning processes rather than specific indicators for monitoring and evaluation, therefore records of outcomes cannot be maintained properly.

Opportunities Confronting FECOFUN

Despite having several internal and external challenges, FECOFUN has several opportunities to consolidate itself as an even more effective and inclusive federation of CFUGs:

1. Enhancing the knowledge interface to generate critical insights into the political, organizational, and tactical aspects of FECOFUN activities.
2. Developing a strategy for a balance between internal and external sources of funds, especially by prioritizing the use of external funds and knowledge base to a selected range of organizational and developmental areas.
3. Having a proper fund-raising strategy—developing the ability to proactively secure funds—on the priorities defined by FECOFUN members.
4. Focusing on the ability to identify and resolve resentments and tensions, both within and across the tiers of the organization, for receiving and allocating funds.
5. Expanding the internal source of funds.
6. Developing a strategy for organizational learning: developing shared understanding among members in a systematic way, documentation and dissemination of learning, and better articulation of experiences.

Lessons Learned and Conclusions

Several theoretical and practical lessons can be gained from the study of FECOFUN in Nepal. In the theory and practice of common property natural resource management, federations are crucial for success. While there has been an emphasis on local-level organization of resource management groups in the common property natural resource management theory, the case of FECOFUN clearly demonstrates that a federation of resource user groups can be a crucial part of resource governance. The Federation is crucial in advancing the interests of the resource users beyond the group level—in policy-making as well as economic arenas, such as forest product marketing.

One-off legal/policy reform is not enough; there is a need for constant civil society vigilance. While CFUGs in Nepal received strong legal support and recognition at the beginning, several subsequent Government attempts sought to revise policies and legislations and curtail rights. The Federation played a crucial role in defending the rights of local people in such attempts at policy change, and was successful. This means that even when Government policies emerge, there is a strong need for the Federation and the network of citizens' groups to defend likely policy reversals.

Federations are attractive symbolic space for activists to provide leadership to civil society movements. One of the factors leading to the sustenance of the Federation is that activists continue to see the social and political space around the Federation as being attractive symbolically and politically. This is one of the reasons why politically active and capable leaders continue to remain within FECOFUN. Since its inception FECOFUN has been led by activists who have experience of working with, and continued access to, leading political parties. The retention of capable political leaders within FECOFUN is attributable to the prestigious social space created within its domain.

Federation building can expand from a small-scale to a large-scale network. The FECOFUN case shows that the Federation can start with a small network of forest user groups, and then if supported by appropriate allies, advisers, and resources, can expand itself to all of its potential constituencies. But this is only possible when committed leadership exists to provide vision and mobilize masses of citizens around the issues of democratization in forest governance.

There is the danger of co-option of the space by elites from both within and outside. Since the Federation has wide networks and outreach, as well as the power to augment political agendas, there are inherent threats to the Federation from both inside and outside. Political parties from outside have at times shown their temptation to capture or patronize the Federation. Also, political and professional elites may seek to capture the symbolic image of FECOFUN for various vested interests. But if the leadership of the network is capable enough to understand these dynamics, the integrity and independence of FECOFUN can continue.

The organization itself becomes a constraint to learning and transformation, i.e. the development of defensive routines. When institutional boundaries, operational procedures, and particular depositions are developed over time, a federation is also likely to generate internal barriers to learning and change. This is sometimes seen within FECOFUN, and as a result, it appears too slow to respond to emerging issues and changing contexts. The reasons are highly rhetorical instruments, institutional strategies, and operational frames of the past that continue to define the thinking and action of FECOFUN. The answer depends in part on the extent to which Federation activists engage with diverse groups of alliances and deliberative forums, and to what extent they are able to critically reflect upon their institutional legacies.

Since FECOFUN primarily relies on donor resources, even for its basic operations, there is a continued risk of financial bankruptcy. This means that even a strong people-based movement like FECOFUN has yet to achieve financial sustainability. Part of this problem is related to the imported models of organization rather than the invention of modalities that can be sustained by forest users. It is still not clear how and when the modality, structure, and processes of FECOFUN will adapt to fit into the resources, time, and efforts which the local forest-dependent users can and are willing to mobilize in the long run, even without any development funding.

The dynamism within FECOFUN is to a large extent determined by a perception of crisis—such as the threat from Government policy change. It appears that the Federation cannot remain equally functional all the time but its functions vary according to the perception of crisis in the external environment. The most active moments of FECOFUN were at times when it sensed that the Government was preparing for some policy decisions that would curtail the rights of people. Likewise, it also actively mobilized its members against the anti-democratic political moves by the monarchy. The issue is whether a network like FECOFUN should be considered as an issue-based movement (with activity limited in times of crisis) or as an organization with sustained activity towards goals and mission that is defined proactively.

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Annex: Representation in the FECOFUN National Exec. Committee, 2006–2009

Selection Criteria	Total	Dalits (now)	Indigenous/Tribal/ Ethnic(now) (Including Newar)	Others	
				BC	Minorities
Consensus or competition	28	0	4	24	-
Inclusive Mechanism	20	4	7	4	1 (Muslim)
	4 are not selected/elected				
Nomination from NEC	5	Not nominated yet		-	-
Program Development and Monitoring Committee	3	-	1	2	-
Judicial Committee	3	-	1	2	-
Total	59	4	13	32	1

Note: BC = Bahun and Chattri.