ICIMOD

A REVIEW OF FOREST USER GROUPS: CASE STUDIES FROM EASTERN NEPAL

Dilli Ram Dahal

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Cover photograph: A View of Atmara Village of Handikharka FUG in Dhankuta District

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Foreword

This study is one in a series commissioned by ICIMOD to provide insights into community-managed forests. Continued access to forest resources is crucial for people living in mountainous regions, particularly those who have limited access to non-farm employment and markets.

The over-exploitation of limited resources and the sustainability or unsustainability of carrying capacities are matters of continual concern for all those who work for the betterment of living conditions in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas.

It is already becoming clear that the level of success of user group forestry varies, and that much depends upon the clear-cut identity of the groups, clearly specified user rights, and the bases on which these are determined. Conflict resolution would appear to be another important issue that needs serious consideration.

At what point any given user group becomes or became, institutionalised is another important perspective. Some groups have existed, whether formally or informally, for quite long periods of time and have survived all manner of reform-to emerge in the latter day as Forestry User Groups.

All this should indicate to us the overwhelming importance of studying the intimate relationship between forests and village dwellers throughout the mountainous regions.

What is becoming clearer as these studies emerge is that the indicators for successful management of a forest by a user group are not constant. Hence, ICIMOD's interest in looking for both the commonalities and the differences in User Group management.

ICIMOD organised these case studies on User Groups with a specific framework in mind; i.e., to identify key internal variables

(those within the community); and to identify key external variables (those outside the community). It is hoped that eventually ICIMOD will be able to record the different typologies and their practical implications for planning and management of natural resource use at different spatial levels.

This particular document looks at User Groups from three different areas of Nepal; Sankhuwasabha, Dhankuta, and Ilam, and appraises them in the context of success and failure with a practical perspective on what we can learn for the future in relation to problems and conflicts that are arising and which may arise. Obviously, a lot of teamwork has gone into putting this document together and I would like to thank Dr Dilli Ram Dahal and his team of researchers for the work they have put in. With the publication of this document a series of 4 studies on user group and local resource management systems is completed*. Dr Mahesh Banskota, Director of Programmes, ICIMOD was instrumental in organising and coordinating the studies and deserves a special mention here. Many thanks are due to the Ford Foundation (New Delhi) and Dr Jeffrey Campbell for the financial support to the studies and their publication.

ICIMOD is currently engaged in another 3-year programme supported by the Ford Foundation looking at all aspects of Participatory Natural Resource Management in several of its Member Countries. The questions raised in the present series provide salient issues to be addressed by this project. We expect a continuing close collaboration with the many organisations and individuals who are concerned about the well being of the villagers of the mountains and of their forests.

Egbert Pelinck
Director General

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* 1. User Group Forestry in the Far-western Region of Nepal
- *Ram B. Chhetri & Tulsi R. Pandey*

2. A Himalayan Enclave in Transition: A Study of Change in the Western Mountains of Nepal - *Bihari K. Shrestha*

3. Sustainable Management of Common Forest Resources: An Evaluation of Selected Forest User Groups in Western Nepal
- *M. Karki, J.B.S. Karki, & N. Karki*

4. A Review of Forest User Groups: Case Studies from Eastern Nepal
- *Dilli Ram Dahal*

Acknowledgements

This study is an assessment of the structure and functioning of forest user groups (FUGs) in the Districts of Dhankuta, Sankhuwasabha, and Ilam of the Eastern Hill Development Region of Nepal. It is part of a nation-wide review of FUGs undertaken by ICIMOD and the objective is to help identify mechanisms and processes that can promote more effective management and development of forest resources in Nepal.

I am grateful to Dr Mahesh Banskota, Director of Programmes, ICIMOD, who not only invited me to undertake this study but also meticulously went through the draft report and provided many valuable suggestions. The report has also benefitted from the comments of Dr Pitamber Sharma and Mr Balaram Bhatta of ICIMOD. My sincere thanks also go to my colleagues, Binod Pokharel, Surendra Mishra, Ganesh Ghimire, and Ram Ghimire, who not only accompanied me to collect data in the field but also helped in many ways while I was writing the report.

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I, however, bear the responsibility for the text as it stands.

Dilli Ram Dahal

Glossary of Nepali Words not Defined in the Text

jimawal	-	someone responsible for overseeing land on behalf of the owner.
panchayat	-	a political division of territory which prevailed during Nepal's previous one-party *Panchayat* System of government. The inhabitants of a village *panchayat* would vote representatives on to the village council. Council members were known as *pancha*.
pradhan pancha	-	chairman of the village *panchayat* committee.
VDC	-	Village Development Committee. After the success of the Movement for Democracy in 1990, and the establishment of a multi-party parliamentary system, the former *panchayat* areas became VDC areas.

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