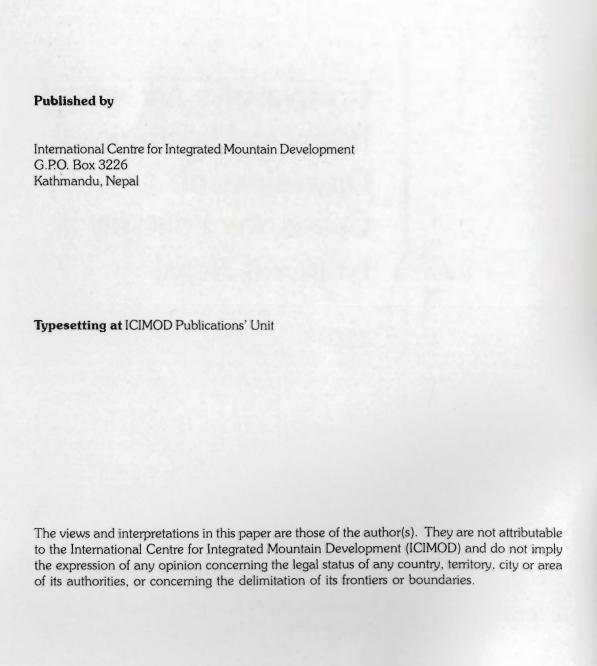
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Comparative Analysis of Policy and Institutional Dimensions of Community Forestry in India and Nepal

S. Palit



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S. Palit, I.F.S., is the Chief Conservator of Forests, Social Forestry, West Bengal



Community Forestry has been identified as the only viable forest management strategy in third world countries. Both Nepal and India are pioneers in this field, and development in this direction has been significant in recent years.

An analysis of the institutional aspects in Nepal shows that, both in policy as well as in legislation, complete support is necessary for community forestry. Another very bold step undertaken by HMG/N is that forests are being handed over completely to the communities.

These measures, though daringly progressive, are nevertheless premised on ground realities. The nationalisation of forests in Nepal proved to be a disastrous measure, mainly on account of the lack of resources and infrastructure. However, with the introduction of community forestry, these forests are now on the road to recovery, even though the required minimum infrastructural support is lacking. Other institutional aspects which need immediate attention are research and technology, introduction of scientific management, and promotion of support activities for the communities. Despite total commitment on the part of the government, the growth of community forestry has been sluggish. This is again due to the lack of resources and staff. Therefore, comprehensive planning and implementation are imperative.

In India, community forestry has been adopted in the form of joint forest management (JFM). However, JFM in India is also facing several limitations. While there is policy back-up, there is no legislative support. And although the issue of forestry falls into the concurrent list, i.e., it can be managed at the federal and state level independently, it is usually managed only by the states. There is, as such, no compulsion on the part of the states to adopt JFM immediately, although 15 states in India have already adopted JFM. The progress has been slow. Only about two per cent of the forest areas in India have so far been brought under JFM and, even where JFM has been implemented, the state still retains the major share of the revenue in most cases. India, however, has established institutional support in the field of forestry education, training, and research. It has a trained and committed bureaucracy. Despite state control on forests and the introduction of JFM, there has been no problem in the application of scientific methods to forest management. Forestry research in India is gaining momentum with the new security provided by the communities. Thus, through JFM, India can look forward to the restoration of degraded forests and improved productivity.

For a country of India's size, the installation of a sustainable forest management system throughout the country is a herculean task. Because of the liberal assistance of the donor agencies, resources may not be a constraint. Attitudinal changes amongst the implementors; acquisition of additional skills; purposeful collaboration with the NGOs; and, more importantly, a firm commitment on the part of the government and foresters will help ensure the establishment of JFM on a durable basis.

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Nepal is considered to be a pioneer in Community Forestry and India too has seen the emergence of similar processes in recent years with the introduction of Joint Forest Management (JFM) in several states, beginning with West Bengal. An analysis is made in this paper of the policy and institutional dimensions of community forestry in both Nepal and India in order to identify the areas of weakness, steps required to rectify these, and opportunities for exchange and learning.

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Abbreviations

APROSC Agricultural Projects' Services' Centre FAO Food and Agriculture Organisation

rad rood and Agriculture Orga

FUG Forest User Group

FPC Forest Protection Committee

HMG/N His Majesty's Government of Nepal

ICIMOD International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development

JFM Joint Forest Management

NGO Non-Government Organisation NTFP Non-Timber Forest Products UMN United Mission to Nepal

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