

INTRODUCTION

Community Forestry in Nepal differs from Joint Forest Management (JFM) in India primarily in that the forests of Nepal are completely handed over to the local communities, whereas in India this is only partly so. We can refer to both as Community Forestry.

The Community Forestry Hand Book of Bangladesh broadly defines Community Forestry as people-oriented forestry programmes or activities. In 1978, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO/UN) defined Community Forestry as "*any situation which intimately involves local people in a forestry activity.*"

The same document interchangeably uses Community Forestry with the terms given below.

- Forestry for local community development
- Village Forestry
- Social Forestry
- Rural Forestry
- Participatory Forestry

Without categorising the Community Forestry practised in Nepal and India as any of the above, it is safe to say that both are adequately covered by these definitions.

In the context of Nepal, Community Forestry is defined as "*forest management based on a partnership (agreement) between an FUG and HMG. The FUG assumes the responsibility on land owned by HMG in a sustainable manner.*"

Community Forestry should involve people. It should be designed to meet the basic needs for fuel, food, fodder, and timber and encourage self-reliance amongst the local people.

A community forestry programme should, therefore, be developed through consultations with the people and also be an integral part of rural development. This paper attempts to analyse how far these criteria are fulfilled in the two countries.

Despite the parallel developments that have taken place over the last decade and a half, the community forestry practised in Nepal and India differs in many ways. There are also broad similarities, both at the institutional and implementational levels. An analysis of the events leading to the adoption of community forestry at the policy level in both countries shows that this was inevitable. In order to comprehend these disparities, despite the broad similarities, the physiography, relative dimensions, political history, history of forest management, availability of resources, and other factors need to be taken into account in both countries.

In India, even though forest administration is almost 130 years' old, important policy-level changes have been introduced only during the last decade. In Nepal, similar changes at the policy level were brought about in the analogous period, without any history of systematic forest management. This paper discusses

whether this was purely coincidental or whether India took 130 years to learn what Nepal could in two or three years. It should also be taken into consideration that the need for a participatory approach to the management of natural resources was recognised only recently at the global level.

Rapid deforestation, especially in strategically important watersheds, and its concurrent impacts downstream in the form of loss of agricultural production, annual floods and draught, soil erosion, and failure of the system to contain these negative impacts in both countries, called for rethinking to devise methods of reversing the process. A growing number of foresters and planners in both countries have come to realise that, given clear rights and responsibilities, the local communities could work with the government forest departments and help regenerate the forests by regularising the access and use of these forests.

Some southeast Asian countries, for instance, Thailand, The Philippines, and Indonesia, which are endowed with large forest areas and are facing the problem of massive degradation and loss of forests, have already introduced changes at the policy level to secure the cooperation and participation of local communities in the regeneration of forests.

Of the 15 million hectares of public forest land in the Philippines, an estimated 10-14 million hectares are reportedly degraded. Attempts at reforestation of degraded tracts through substantial funds drawn on loan money have ended in failure, primarily due to the lack of response from the people living in the uplands (Poffenberger and McGean 1993).

Over the past decade, The Philippines has introduced a process of decentralisation through the enactment of laws and adoption of policies and programmes. These programmes cover community-based forestry projects (Sabban 1992).

Indonesia, which has the third largest tropical rainforest in the world, has suffered from immense deforestation at an annual rate of 700,000-1,200,000 hectares (Poffenberger and McGean 1993).

Such rapid deforestation, in addition to the lack of forestry staff and budgetary constraints, and the recognition that community groups living on the forest fringes can be effective partners, have convinced planners, scientists, and NGOs to adopt rapid and cost-effective alternatives to regenerate degraded forests in ways which also address community needs (Widardjo 1992).

Thailand had a forest coverage of 53 per cent in 1961, but this had declined to 27 per cent by 1991. The remaining forest is also considerably degraded (Poffenberger and McGean 1994). The Royal Forest Department (RFD) of Thailand now realises that successful forest management needs the involvement of local people. There are numerous instances of sustainable forest management by local communities in Thailand which are being studied and classified by the RFD in a bid to promote the same. This has been further reinforced by the recently proposed Community Forest Act (Amornsanguansin 1994).

Apart from the countries mentioned above, the possibility of involving local communities in the management of watershed forests is also being explored in Vietnam and China.

No discussion on forest management would be complete without taking into account the enormous loss of tropical forests in Africa. The annual loss of tropical forests in Africa amounts to 4.1 million hectares and is a matter of serious global concern.

Ismail Serageldin, Vice President of the World Bank, in referring to a comprehensive approach to forest management, stated "*The centre piece of a comprehensive approach to halting deforestation must be the local populations, whose welfare and participation are essential*" (Serageldin 1993). The key elements in an appropriate framework for pursuing an effective strategy for conservation and sustainable use of African tropical forests is the participation of people/communities; strengthening the role of women; participation by non-government organisations (NGOs); and determining the role of governments, forest services, and so on. The striking similarities in approach to deforestation and evolution of a sustainable forest management paradigm across the two continents of Asia and Africa indicate that sustainable forest management is not possible without involving the people; they also suggest that there are direct links between natural resource degradation and growing poverty and social conflicts.

It is estimated that in India some 10,000 formal and informal community groups are now protecting and managing approximately 1.5 million hectares of forest (approximately two per cent of India's total forest area) (SPWD 1993).

Similarly, in Nepal, about 107,600ha (Approximately 1.9 per cent of Nepal's total forest area) are being managed as community forests by some 2,699 FUGs.