
3. Background of the Study Area

The Far-western Development Region

The present study attempts to fill the knowledge gap in forest resource research in the FWDR of Nepal. Of the total land area (1,944,287 ha) in the FWDR, about 51 per cent is under forest, whereas only 15 per cent is under cultivation, 11 per cent is grassland, three per cent is shrubland, and the rest is classified as non-cultivated inclusions and other lands (Table 1). This region happens to be the least populated of the five development regions of Nepal (CBS 1987)⁵. The two districts of Baitadi and Achham, which are also within the Community Forestry Development Programme, were selected from this region for the present study.

The forest resources in the FWDR are in better condition in comparison to those in other development regions (MPFS 1988). Besides, *"two-thirds of FWDR's land resources have good potential for development and management as forests. Of these, over three-quarters are natural forests, ..."* (MPFS 1988:42). According to the same report, the FWDR as a whole had an estimated net decrease in forests and shrublands of 7.3 thousand hectares from 1979 to 1986. However, in the high mountain and middle mountain areas of the region, where the present study was carried out, an estimated 3.4 thousand hectares' net increase in forest and shrubland areas during the same period is said to have occurred (HMG 1988: Table 29). While it is not clear at the cost of what other category of land this net increase occurred in forest and shrubland, it suggests that forest cover had been

⁵ In terms of the land area, the Mid-western Development Region ranks first with a land area of 42,378 sq. km., followed by the Western Development Region with 29,398 sq. km., the Eastern Development Region with 28,456 sq. km., the Central Development Region with 27,410 sq. km., and the Far-western Development Region with 19,539 sq. km. of land area. The distribution of population by regions is: Eastern Development Region-3,708,923, Central Development Region-4,909,357, Western Development Region-3,128,859, Mid-western Development Region-1,955,611, and Far-western Development Region-1,320,089 (CBS 1987).

increasing during the 1980s. This is perhaps a relief for those who are concerned with the protection and management of depleting forest resources in Nepal. Whether this suggests a recent upsurge in the number of local user groups or success in HMG/N's CFDP efforts is an open question.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Land Use in Baitadi, Achham, and the Far-western Development Region as of 1986*

Land Use Category	Baitadi	Achham	FWDR
Cultivated Lands	21.2	23.2	15.1
Non-Cultivated Inclusions	12.8	12.0	5.7
Grasslands	12.9	8.9	11.1
Forest lands	40.9	48.8	50.9
Shrublands	12.0	3.2	3.1
Other Lands	0.2	3.8	14.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

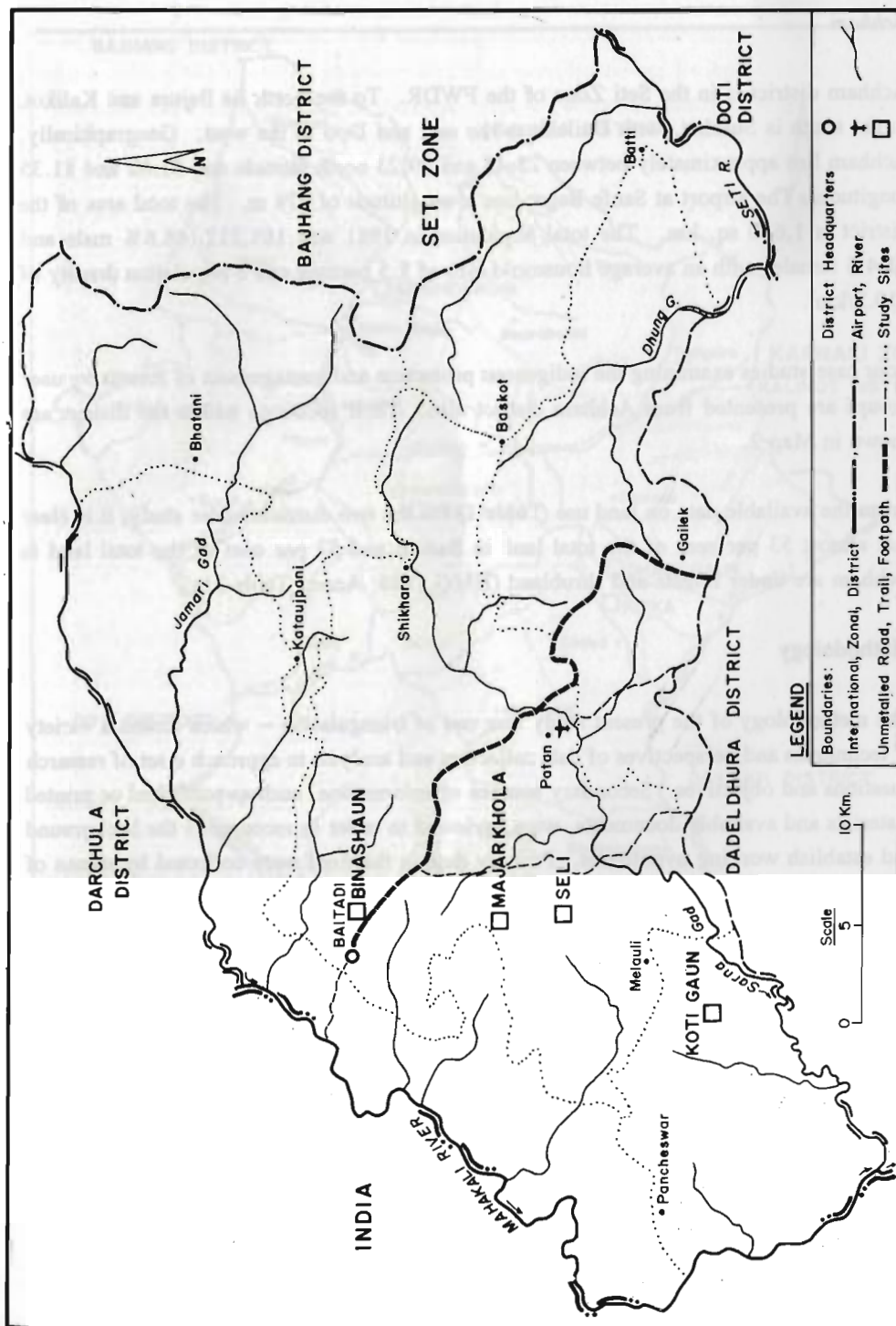
Source: Master Plan for the Forestry Sector, Nepal, HMG 1988, Annex Table 21a.

* Percentages are based on the total land area in the respective districts and the region--the total land area in Baitadi = 148,678 ha; Achham = 169,224 ha; and FWDR = 1,944,287 ha.

Baitadi

Baitadi district is located in the Mahakali Zone of the FWDR. The Mahakali River forms the border between Baitadi, Nepal, and the Indian State of Uttar Pradesh. Baitadi is bordered by Darchula in the north, by Bajhang in the east, and by Doti and Dadeldhura in the south. Geographically, the district lies approximately within 29.20 and 29.40 north latitude and between 80.14 and 80.55 longitude. There is a seasonal airport at Patan, at an altitude of 2,060 m. The total area of the district is 1,519 sq. km. According to the 1981 census, the total population of the district was 155,925 (50.7% male and 49.3% female) with an average household size of 6.7 persons and a population density of 117.9/km² of the total land area.

Four cases--three having indigenous protection and management systems and one case in which user groups can be defined but in which protection and management systems are yet to be institutionalised--of user group forestry from Baitadi district are presented in this study. The four study sites from this district are shown in Map 1.



Map 1. Baitadi District: The Sites Under Study, 1991

Achham

Achham district is in the Seti Zone of the FWDR. To the north lie Bajura and Kalikot, to the south is Surkhet, with Dailekh to the east and Doti to the west. Geographically, Achham lies approximately between 28.45 and 29.23 north latitude and 81.02 and 81.35 longitude. The airport at Sanfe Bagar lies at an altitude of 579 m. The total area of the district is 1,680 sq. km. The total population in 1981 was 185,212 (48.6% male and 51.4% female) with an average household size of 5.5 persons and a population density of 110.2/km².

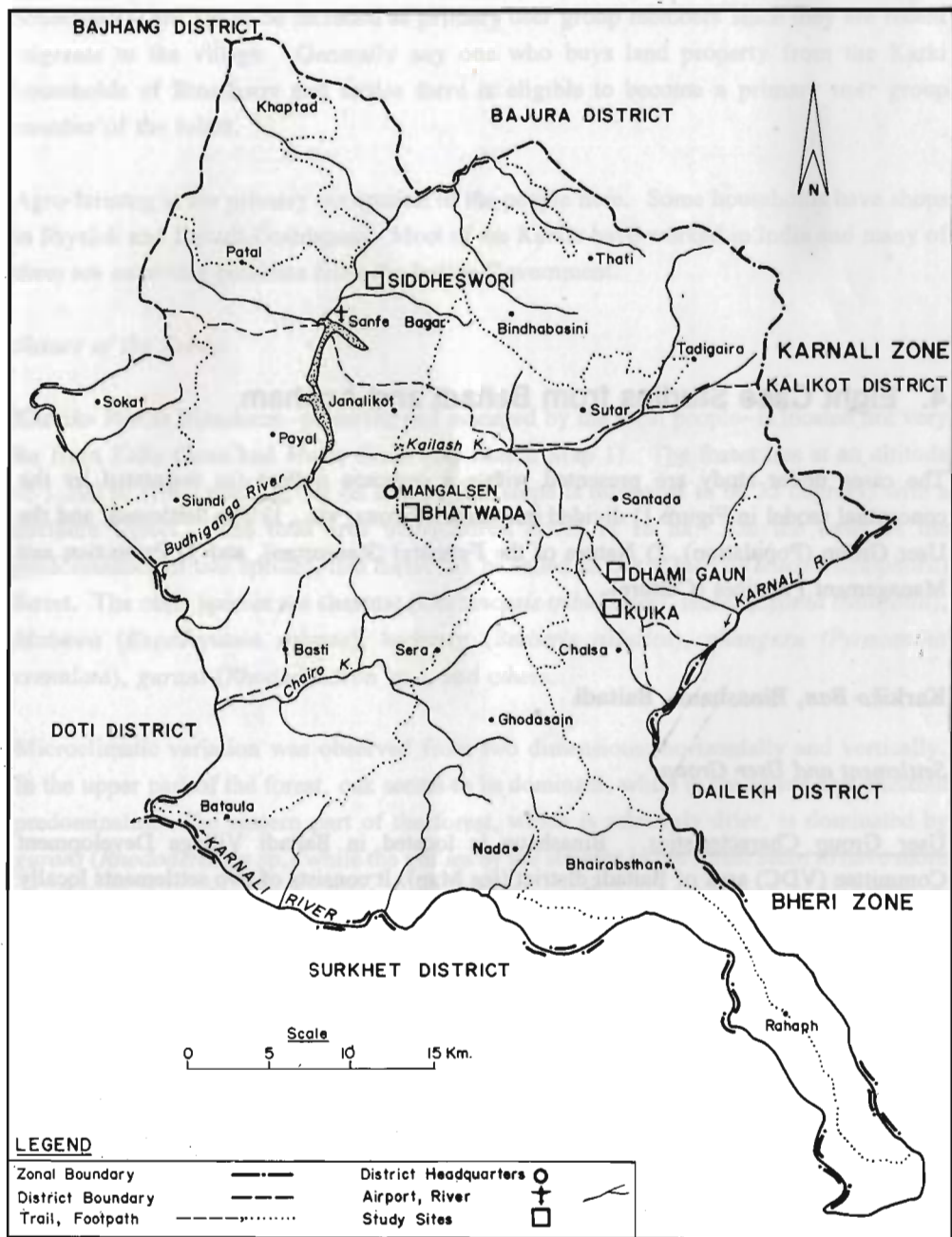
Four case studies examining the indigenous protection and management of forests by user groups are presented from Achham district also. Their locations within the district are shown in Map 2.

From the available data on land use (Table 1) for the two districts under study, it is clear that almost 53 per cent of the total land in Baitadi and 52 per cent of the total land in Achham are under forests and shrubland (HMG 1988: Annex Table 21a).

Methodology

The methodology of the present study was one of triangulation -- which means a variety of techniques and perspectives of data collection and analysis to approach a set of research questions and objectives. Secondary sources of information, such as published or printed materials and available documents, were reviewed in order to reconstruct the background and establish working hypotheses. Primary data in the field were collected by means of observation, group and individual interviews, and informal discussions with villagers. While in the field, unstructured and semi-structured interviews were also conducted (with users, user-group committees [UGCs], non-users, DFOs, and other officials from the District Forest Offices of Baitadi and Achham). For every case study site, sketch maps were prepared and relevant statistical information on population (human and domestic animals) and the data required to assess the demand and supply of forest resources (i.e., timber, fuelwood, fodder, leaf litter, etc) at the household level were collected.

Oral histories of the condition of the forest in the area were obtained by interviewing elderly people. These people also shared their knowledge about the protection and management activities of their community. Some elderly people could also recall the predominant tree species in their forests at different time periods. The information on the procedural aspect of this study comes primarily from such interviews and discussions.



Map 2. Achham District: The Sites Under Study, 1991