

Impacts on the Jalbire Women's Community Forest Group

Social and Gender-related Impacts

The main impact has been on the motivation and interest of women members. The women had taken the initiative to enter into an agreement with the DOF to protect and manage the forest area. In this, they had faced much scepticism and resistance from the men in the village. The dispute has caused the women to lose face at the household and community levels; men are using the dispute to deride the women members. In addition, a lot of time has been spent by the women in the resolution of this dispute.

Loss of Confidence in the DOF

The uncertainty caused by the dispute has resulted in loss of confidence in the DOF. Today, members are unsure about the future and are less enthusiastic about participating in meetings and sharing responsibility for the protection of the forest. The long-term consequences of this factor will have to be assessed in the future.

Economic Impact

The substantial delay in the resolution of the dispute caused the harvested timber to lie in the open for a long time, exposed to the elements. Approximately 25 per cent of the timber decayed, leading to considerable loss of income for the women's group. Had the dispute been resolved earlier, either locally or by the DOF, this could have been avoided. In addition, the JWCFG paid a sum of Rs 59,391, out of its total income of Rs 304,591, as sales' tax. Past and current practices indicate that sales' tax is levied for the state treasury on the income from timber only if it is auctioned by the District Forest Officer in the district. Analysis of similar incomes from other community forestry user groups in Nepal also reveals that sales' tax is not levied on products from community forestry areas or from the sale of timber from private lands. It is obvious that the lack of information among the women led the group to incur a loss of Rs 59,391, which could have been avoided.

Institutional Impact

This unfavourable experience has demoralised and weakened the village-level institution. Group processes can empower members and strengthen their ability to cope with crises, but, in this case, the gulf between the women's group and the DOF has affected the sustainability of the group; at times, its very survival has been at risk. The final decision has placed restrictions on felling even trees of advanced maturity for the next five years and insists that the entire income from the disputed timber and 75 per cent from future products can only be used for forest protection and development. This is a disincentive to the group, making members question their future role in forest protection and management. It will take the group some time to consolidate and learn from this experience and work towards building an institution for effective forest protection and management.

Ecological Impact

The level of interest in and protection of the forest area by the JWCFG resulted in rapid regeneration. The dispute and accompanying problems have lessened their commitment. If the forest area reverts to an open access grazing area, this will hamper regeneration and lead to further degradation and, consequently, a lack of revenue.