

Community Forestry in Nepal: Achievements, Opportunities, and Challenges: A Case Study of Gadibaraha Community Forest in Dang

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Abstract

Although community forestry has made commendable achievements and provided unprecedented opportunities to rural communities, attempts to address the issues of empowering women and marginalised groups and to alleviate poverty achieved only limited success. Currently, the insurgency situation prevailing in many areas is hindering the smooth implementation of the programme and affecting the functioning of many community forest user groups (CFUGs), including that of the Gadibaraha CFUG. Both the security personnel and the insurgents are vying for control of the forests because of the income that they bring or for security reasons. The local people are afraid to enter the community forest, primarily due to threats from the conflicting parties. Although the policy and legal environment in Nepal is very favourable towards community forestry, its implementation is seriously jeopardised due to the lack of recognition and respect for the CFUGs as legal entities by the responsible sectors and actors in the field.

Introduction

The age-old, isolated and deserted hills have a new scenic view covered with green forest. There is a considerable and remarkable improvement in the forestry arena. With the concept of community forests in mind, millions of people have been mobilised into conservation and promotional activities for the improvement of deteriorated forests. Among the development activities implemented in Nepal, the Community Forestry Development Programme is regarded as one of the most successful and participatory programmes.

Nepal is the land of Mount Everest and the birthplace of Lord Buddha, a man of profound peace and solace. Moreover, the country is equally famous at global level as the 'country of community forests'. Candidly speaking, the success of community forestry has given rise to improvement in the condition of forests; a substantial amount of the income generated from community forests is used within and outside the community; and supports poverty alleviation measures and strengthening of democratic norms at local level. In this process, about 14,000 community forest user groups (CFUGs) are involved in the sustainable management of about 1.1 million hectares of forest in Nepal (CFD 2005).

Through time-bound experience, study, and analysis of the achievements made and challenges foreseen, one can surmise that with strategic development towards good governance, sustainable livelihoods, and sustainable forest development, noteworthy improvements in community forestry development will be achieved (Kanel 2004). It is important to note that the community forestry programme with its twenty-five years of experience is currently engaged in the process of meeting the Millennium Development Goals on poverty reduction and ecological improvement.

The Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal (FECOFUN) is the representative as well as the national organisation of all community forestry user groups in the country. More than 9,000 CFUGs, representing 64% of the total CFUGs, are affiliated with FECOFUN. Since its establishment in 1995, FECOFUN has concentrated on advocacy to safeguard users' rights over forest resources in a peaceful manner. Basically, FECOFUN is launching various programmes in coordination with local government, political parties, community forestry projects, non-government organisations, civil societies, and government for policy advocacy.

Despite such successful scenarios in community forestry, there are also emerging challenges and constraints. Among these challenges, some are related to nation-level policy issues and others concerned with the micro-level. The prime objective of this case study was to explore the major achievements and challenges of community forestry in Nepal. At the same time, the study aimed to identify the field reality of community forests in reference to the implementation of community forestry policy.

Policy framework of community forestry in Nepal

The community forestry programme in Nepal is based on various policies such as the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990, Master Plan for the Forestry Sector 1989, Forest Act 1993, and Forest Regulations 1995. The policy and legal frameworks for community forestry are outlined in the following passages.

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 follows the principles of decentralisation. In the process of policy-making, rights from the centre are to be delegated to local-level authorities to ensure their active participation.

Article 26, clauses (3) and (4) of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal are related to natural resources. Article 26 (3) mentions that the State shall pursue a policy of mobilising natural resources and the heritage of the country in a manner that might be useful and beneficial to the interests of the nation.

Similarly, Article 26 (4) states that the State shall give priority to the protection of the environment and also to the prevention of its further damage due to physical development activities by increasing the awareness of the general public about environmental cleanliness; and that the State shall also make arrangements for the protection of rare species of wildlife, forests, and vegetation.

Likewise, Article 26 (10) says the State shall pursue a policy that will help promote the interests of the economically and socially backward groups and communities by making special provisions for their education, health, and employment.

Master Plan for the Forestry Sector of Nepal

The Master Plan for the Forestry Sector (MPFS), implemented since 1989, is the main policy document for the forestry sector. It recognises the rights of the local community and the aspirations of the people at policy level. The mandate of the MPFS is to promote local and national economies through the sustainable management of forests by the involvement of local communities. Out of the six main programmes, community forestry is given first priority by the MPFS (HMGN1989).

Forest Act 1993 and Forest Regulations 1995

After the restoration of democracy in Nepal in 1990, the government formulated the Forest Act of 1993 and Forest Regulations of 1995 to implement the Master Plan for the Forestry Sector. The Act and the Regulations have both given strong legal grounds for implementing community forestry, and thereafter it gained momentum in terms of handing over to local users, forest management, and fulfilment of the needs of user groups for forest products.

As mentioned in the Forest Act, a community forest is part of the national forest which is handed over to the CFUG for management, conservation, and use of forest resources. The district forest officer (DFO) is authorised to hand over a portion of the national forest as community forest to user groups and issue certificates accordingly. Moreover, the DFO, in mobilising the CFUG, may render technical and other necessary support to facilitate the establishment of user groups and to help them prepare operational plans. The CFUGs are registered at the district forest office (DFO) in accordance with the law. The CFUG is considered to be an autonomous, corporate body which has its own official stamp, determines the prices of forest products, and uses the funds realised.

The Forest Act of 1993 recognises community forestry as the priority programme over other forestry sector programmes. However, it also states that the forest is to be used without affecting environmental and community interests.

Case Study: Gadibaraha community forest

Methodology

The case study described here was carried out in Gadibaraha Community Forest of Dang district (mid-western part of Nepal) in order to analyse the achievements and challenges of community forestry at micro-level. At first, relevant secondary information and literature were reviewed. Most of the data and information were collected from official records such as the minute book, accounts, constitution, operational plan, annual programme, and report of this CFUG. Field observations were carried out with CFUG members. This report has been prepared, based on group discussions, meetings, and interviews with members of CFUGs. An attempt has been made to reflect the achievements and challenges visualised in the process of community forestry management in Nepal.

Location

Dang Valley is located in the Mid-West Region of Nepal and lies between two hill ranges: the Mahabharat hills (mid-hills) to the north and the Siwalik hills to the south. Gadibaraha community forest is located in Tulsipur municipality of Ward No.2, Dang District. Gadibaraha is known as Thulo Damar (a large plain). For the last 30-35 years, the area has been covered with dense forest which is the habitat of valuable flora and fauna.

Until 1975, Gadibaraha area was covered with intact virgin forest. There were only 15-16 houses inhabited by Chettri, Newar, and Biswakarma families. Subsistence agriculture with animal husbandry was the source of their livelihoods.

In the 1970s, people from majority caste groups, such as Brahmans and Chhetris, migrated to Gadibaraha from Rukum – a remote hill district. Due to increasing

population pressure and political pressure, the forest was gradually converted into agricultural land and pasture. After 1987, in order to retain the panchayat (partyless political system), local people with political backing started to clear the forest haphazardly for agriculture and, consequently, most of the forests of Gadibaraha were turned into degraded forest and barren area during 1988/1989.

At present, Ward No.2 covers the hamlets of Majuwa, Naya Basti, Sunoulipur, Rachhya chour and the Dang Eye Hospital. During 1990, the local villagers became aware of the negative impact of deforestation, and they appointed a forest watcher and paid him with their own in-kind contribution. In 1993, with the introduction of the Forest Act, people started the process of community forestry in the name of the god Baraha: the name of the user group is Baraha Community Forest User Group. The group prepared a constitution and operation plan and registered officially in the District Forest Office on March 15, 1996. The group covers 496 households and 216 hectares of forest area. The total population of the group is 2,144; 1,094 women and 1,050 men in 496 households. The caste combination is mixed and consists of Brahmans (418), Chhetris (630), indigenous groups (617,) and disadvantaged groups (479).

Programmes

Well-being ranking

Targeted programmes were carried out on well-being ranking of members of the CFUG, using participatory rural appraisal. The assessment criteria were classified into four components: very poor, poor, middle class, and rich. Among 496 households, 96 households were identified as very poor, 116 as poor, 111 as middle class, and 103 as rich.

Table 1: Indicators of well-being

Very Poor	Poor	Middle Class	Rich
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land squatters (people having no house) Livelihood based on selling forest products Livelihood based on stone crushing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hand to mouth existence only, for three to six months People having less than 0.30 hectares of land Working as artisans and labourers Working on another's land as a labourer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possessing 0.33 to 0.66 hectares of agricultural land Temporary service holders Engaging in cattle farming and agriculture Retailers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce surplus food grains from own land Have good houses Permanent service holders Possessing private vehicles Having more than 0.66 hectares of agricultural land Good income source from business/ trade

Source: Gadibaraha CFUG Reports (2000 -2004), Dang

The well-being ranking was carried out on the basis of the indicators shown in Table 1. The well-being ranking provided the basis for launching a focused programme for the poor, women, and disadvantaged groups.

Income-generation programme for poverty reduction

Forest protection, management, and community development are common programmes. Recently, a fund was allocated to improve the social and economic conditions of 14 poor households living below the poverty line. Eight households received funds of NRs 2000 each for goat farming, four households NRs 6600 for beekeeping, and two households NRs 2000 for pig farming. Additional funds have also been provided by SAMARPAN (Strengthening the Role of Civil Society and Women in

Democracy and Governance) – a project of CARE Nepal, the Small-scale Economy against Poverty Programme, and the Livelihoods and Forestry Programme. The income-generating programme has been implemented successfully and has raised the income level of these poor households in the CFUG.

Capacity building

In addition to forestry development, the CFUG is playing an important role in enhancing the capacities of community members, especially those of marginalised people in the group. The CFUG held different training sessions, including seminars, workshops, and meetings, from 2000 onwards. The capacity-building programmes were carried out by the CFUG itself and in collaboration with various supporting agencies. The participation of people from marginalised groups and women is encouraged. Out of the total 47 persons who participated in capacity building training over a four-year period, Dalits (disadvantaged groups) made up 4.2%, indigenous groups 14.9%, and women 29.8% (Table 2). The participation of various caste groups in terms of type of training is shown in Table 3.

Table 2: Year-wise people's participation in capacity -building programmes										
Year	Participants									
	Brahman		Chhetri		Indigenous		Dalit		Total	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
2000	0	5	1	0	0	3	0	0	1	8
2001	0	3	1	2	1	1	1	0	3	6
2002	3	5	3	9	0	2	1	0	7	16
2003	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	3	3
Total	5	14	6	13	1	6	2	0	14	33
Source: Gadibaraha CFUG Reports (2000 -2004)										

Table 3: Programme-wise participation in capacity -building events											
Training/ Seminar	Supported by	Participants									
		Brahman		Chhetri		Indigen-ous		Dalit		Total	
		F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Seminar on constitution & operational plan	User Groups	0	3	1	5	1	2	1	0	3	10
Advocacy training	User Groups	2	2	1	4	0	2	1	0	4	8
Forest management training	District Forest Office	4	4	3	13	7	0	4	2	18	19
Advocacy literacy	SAMARPAN FECOFUN	11	0	8	0	4	0	2	0	25	0
Community literacy class	Community Dev. Centre	9	0	4	0	2	0	7	0	22	0
Good governance	SAMARPAN	11	0	4	0	1	0	10	0	26	0
Leaf-plate preparation	User Groups	11	0	4	0	1	0	10	0	26	0
Source: Gadibaraha CFUG Reports (2000 -2004)											

Achievements

Sustainable forest management – The user group strictly enforces the rules and guidelines on forest harvesting, collection of grass, and other forest products. Domestic animals are not allowed to graze in the community forest, thus the users practice stall-feeding. In 2001, a nursery was established to grow the seedlings required and an afforestation campaign was launched with the assistance of CARE Nepal, the District Watershed Conservation

Office, District Forest Office, and other agencies. In 2003, 27 plots were established for fruit farming on three hectares of land. A demonstration plot was also established.

Nursery management – Over the last five years, this CFUG has been producing various types of plants in its own nursery. To date, this CFUG has produced one hundred thousand plants and distributed these plants to other CFUGs and to the private as well as the public sector for the afforestation programme.

Community development – With the financial and technical assistance of various organisations and contributions of volunteers, this CFUG has completed many community development programmes such as construction of a CFUG office building, community building, school building, and maintenance of roads and culverts.

Strengthening good governance – Over the last three years, the CFUG has maintained good governance by focusing on transparency and accountability, and participation of CFUG members with the assistance of SAMARPAN, FECOFUN, and the Human Welfare and Environment Conservation Centre. It has had a positive impact on community forestry. As a result, participation of women, disadvantaged, and marginalised groups has increased in community forestry programmes.

Advocacy campaign – The CFUG has been running an advocacy programme on community forestry issues and participating in the programmes launched by the district and central level of FECOFUN. Consequently, the user group members actively participated in district and national-level movements against the unreasonable taxation imposed by the government on products from community forests.

Promotion of traditional culture – The CFUG has also been supporting local, traditional culture.

Supply of forest products – With management and promotion of the community forest, the user group has been supplying forest products to meet the demands of forest users. For the fiscal year 2003/04, the collection and distribution of timber and other forest products are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Collection and distribution of timber															
Timber		Danda		Bala		Pole		Khama		Wood		Grass		Fodder	
cft	HH	No.	HH	No.	HH	No.	HH	No.	HH	No.	HH	L	HH	L	HH
1159.81	96	1139	80	12	10	1	1	54	26	2395	342	40	20	622	124
cft = cubic feet, HH = households, No. = number; L = headload															
Note: Danda, Bala and Khama are different sizes of small timber used for house construction															
Source: Gadibaraha CFUG Reports (2000 -2004)															

Awards

The user group has been awarded for its commendable work. A selection of the awards received is given in Table 5.

Self-assessment of the group

The CFUG held an interaction workshop for self-assessment and to assess the weaknesses and challenges of the CFUG in a participatory way. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified are shown in Table 6.

Table 5: Awards received by the CFUG			
Date	Events	Organiser	Awards
1999	Quiz Contest	Tulsipur CFUG and Mahila Namuna CFUG	First
2000	Essay contest	Tulsipur CFUG Coordination Committee and Saraswoti CFUG	First
2000	Dohari Geet	Tulsipur CFUG Coordination Committee,	Second
2000	10-metre race	CARE Nepal	First
2000	Quiz Contest	District Watershed Office	Second
2000	Poem competition	Tulsipur CFUG Coordination Committee	Third
1999/2000	Follow-up and Evaluation	Tulsipur CFUG Coordination Committee	Second
2001	Quiz Contest	Tulsipur CFUG Coordination Committee	First
2001/2002	Follow-up and Evaluation	Tulsipur CFUG Coordination Committee	First
2001	Poetry competition	Tulsipur CFUG Coordination Committee	First
	Follow-up and Evaluation	District Forest Office	First, NRs. 3000
2001/2002	Follow-up and Evaluation	Tulsipur CFUG Coordination Committee	First
2003	World Environment Day Essay Contest	District Watershed Conservation Office and Tulsipur CFUG Coordination Committee	First
2003	Dohari geet (male-female two-way song competition) festival	Link for the Agricultural Development Association	Second
2003	District jhanki (cultural demonstration) programme	Link for the Agricultural Development Association	First

Source: Gadibaraha CFUG Reports (2000 -2004)

Financial situation

The CFUG is trying to strengthen its financial situation in order to carry out community development and poverty alleviation programmes. For this purpose, it has been diversifying its income sources. The financial situation of the CFUG is shown in Tables 7a and 7b. The main source of income is the sale of forest products. Other income is generated from grant assistance and miscellaneous sources. From this income, the CFUG has spent a substantial amount on forest management. The remainder was used for community development and administrative work.

Current challenges

Insurgency is one of the most serious challenges to community forestry in Nepal. Due to this insurgency in a rural setting, both the security personnel and the Maoists are trying to increase their power by capturing the natural resources and the income from them. The forests are battlegrounds for both parties: the security personnel and the Maoists. The local community people are afraid of entering the community forest, primarily because of lack of security.

Impact of conflict on the community forest

A Royal Nepal Army camp has been established in Tulsipu; it is one of the biggest army camps in the district. It is prepared to control large areas of Gadibaraha, Shree

Table 6: SWOT analysis of the CFUG

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement in forest condition due to conservation Smooth supply of forest products to its users Income generation programmes for disadvantaged groups, women, and the poor Strengthening the working modality of user groups and social awareness Improvement in biodiversity and environmental conservation Improvement in watershed and soil conservation Improvement in community infrastructure Linkages with government and non-government organisations Human resource development Construction and implementation of a forestry management demonstration plot and nursery Advocacy programme for women's empowerment. Community and adult literacy programme Good governance strengthening programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timber demands of users are not adequately addressed. The forest user group fund is not sufficiently mobilised for poverty alleviation Smuggling of forest products by some users
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A lot of scope for employment generation and income generation for the poor, women, and disadvantaged groups. A good forum for exercising democratic norms A good institution for strengthening the capacity of women, the poor, and disadvantaged groups A good mechanism to conserve sub-watersheds and for soil conservation A forum for implementing community development programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seizure of the community forest by security personnel and the Royal Nepal Army Maoist pressure to contribute donations from the users' fund Unavailability of technical support for management of the forest Frequent changes in forestry laws and guidelines against the interests of the user.

Table 7a: Income status of the CFUG

Income source	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	Total
Fees from forest products	149,438	157,114	151,912	19,665	478,128
Grant assistance	28,153	13,000	116,579	11,000	168,732
Other income	70,222	15,557	7,682	9,690	103,151
Total income	247,813	185,671	276,173	40,355	750,011

Source: Gadibaraha CFUG Reports (2000 -2004)

Table 7b: Expenditure statement ^a

Expenditure	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	Total
Forestry management	41,402	49,818	44,200	22,513	157,933
Forest protection	13,799	43,500	41,482	-	98,782
Administration	15,473	58,122	37,385	43,216	154,195
Community development	-	-	110,610	17,843	128,453
Total	209,928	151,440	233,677	83,573	539,363

[^a Note: Some of the values in this table are inconsistent with the total values, ed.]

Source: Gadibaraha CFUG Reports (2000 -2004)

Ganesh, Dharapani, Jarayo Takuri, and Gairakhali Hariyali community forests on the grounds of security.

About 20-25 years ago, these forests were barren land and deforested areas. The local communities invested a lot of their time and resources in conserving these forest areas. The forest condition has improved remarkably. Therefore, these CFUGs are not ready to give up their rights over the forest areas and are lobbying with civil societies and requesting the central government to intervene on their behalf. If the security personnel take over the community forests, any one of the following may occur.

- The local community will not be able to collect and use the basic forest products.
- The Royal Nepal Army will lose the trust of the local communities.
- It will directly affect the trust in the community forestry movement and people's participation.
- It will be an encroachment on the rights of the community forestry user groups against the provisions laid down in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990, Forest Policy 1989, Forest Act 1993, and Forest Regulations 1995.

Recommendations

During the case study, the researcher faced many problems, but the most important issue was army intervention in the community forest. Therefore, the researcher makes the following recommendations.

Identification of alternative areas for military use – There is lots of other land which is not being used or is underused. The following types of land could be used for the army camp.

- Lands registered under the various government agencies but not used
- Barren and uncultivated common lands
- Land located near rivers and streams
- Areas of national forest not handed over as community forest

Peace talks – Peace talks are the only possible solution to the conflict in Nepal. Political parties and civil society organisations should put pressure on the government and the Maoists to hold peace talks to manage the conflicts in the country.

Conclusions

Community forestry has made some marvellous achievements, and there are unprecedented opportunities. Attempts have been made to address the issues of women and marginalised groups and poverty alleviation. Gadibarah CFUG is facing the serious challenge of losing its forests to security personnel along with other CFUGs in Nepal. Although the policy and legal environment for community forestry in Nepal is very favourable to CFUGs, it has yet to be respected by all sectors and actors.

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