Capacity Building in Community Forestry Management

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1. INTRODUCTION: WHY BUILD CAPACITY?

Whenever opportunities and constraints are discussed in the forestry sector, the need for training is invariably mentioned. Many authors have described Nepal's foresters' lack of basic social and technical skills and their poor education qualifications which affect the sector's ability to realize its true potential. Other authors have focused on the skills needed by diverse forestry user groups as they begin to manage their recently received forests for the development of their communities. Donors in the forestry sector continuously receive requests from rangers, district forest officers, and Kathmandu officials for long and short term, national and international training opportunities, indicating a continued interest in training and self improvement.

A recent as yet unpublished report by David Sowerwine, a consultant working with the World Bank and other donors, estimates that Nepal could realize a net present value of NRs 92 billion per year through intensive management of its forestry resources (Sowerwine, 1994). This sum is approximately ten times the annual amount of Nepal's foreign exchange borrowing. Sowerwine notes that if such a management regime is adopted, Nepal will need 4,500 additional trained foresters ten years from the regime's inception. This figure is approximately 50% of the present staff numbers in the Department of Forests. Capacity building is desperately required at all levels to upgrade the knowledge of people working in community forestry.

The law pertaining to community forestry in Nepal, the Forest Act 1993, defines a community forest as a "*national forest handed over to a user group..... for its development, conservation and utilization for collective benefit*". As of December 1994, around 2,800 user groups had received forests under the provisions of this Act. Many more user groups exist but are not counted until the complex process for obtaining a forest is complete. First, the user group must register itself and then submit a constitution and an operational plan on how to manage the forest in question. These user groups range in size from 13 to 588 households, and their forests cover areas of between 1.04 and 2,885 ha. (CPFD, personal communication). Community forestry management in Nepal takes place exclusively through such user groups, and geographically is more or less confined to the 51 predominantly hill districts, although the Act applies equally to Terai districts as well.

This paper will first attempt to describe the present capacity of the main actors in community forestry - user groups, forest guards, rangers, DFOs, and the central administration in Kathmandu - to manage community forests sustainably under the terms of the Forest Act (Figure 1, point a). The focus will be on in-service training for government employed foresters, such as that offered by the Community Forestry Training Project. Certain training issues which have arisen through implementation of CFTP will be discussed. Finally, the paper will present a vision of what point b on Figure 1 might look like.

2. PRESENT CAPACITY: COMMUNITY FORESTRY EDUCATION IN NEPAL

2.1. User Groups

No comprehensive study has been undertaken to allow one to characterize the forestry education standards of the thousands of user group members. Dahal (1994) has some illustrative data from user groups formed in eastern Nepal. The few respondents he examined had literacy rates ranging from 64% to 100%, but females

were mostly illiterate. The majority of members had schooling only at the 1-5 grade levels. The better educated members were predominantly male Brahmins who came from those groups close to the bazaar areas. This typology of generally poor education levels among user group members both male and female is especially the case amongst poor females. The exception to this is high caste males who generally have higher educational qualifications as borne out by anecdotal evidence across the Kingdom.

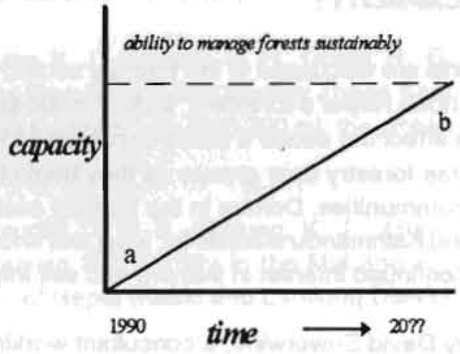

Figure 1. Capacity building in forestry.

2.2. Forest Guards

Forest guards form the largest group of the estimated 9,000 individuals employed by the Department of Forests. While forest guards in the Terai spend most of their time protecting the resource, in the hills they are slowly assuming community forestry tasks. CFTP views forest guards as having tremendous potential to promote and facilitate community forestry. On average, each hill district has around 30 forest guard positions, although frequently many of these are not occupied. Most forest guards are now recruited with at least some level of literacy, but there are many guards from older times who are still unable to read and write. Forest guards may, at some time in their career, receive a "Basic Training" which qualifies them for more responsible duties and somewhat greater remuneration, but district budgets often restrict the number of postings for these more qualified individuals. The "Basic Training" curriculum has been revised recently, and now covers, in a two month course, such community forestry topics as extension, surveying and mapping, nursery techniques and appropriate silviculture. CFTP, which has trained 638 guards over the past 18 months, estimates that only 10-20% have received basic training, but that a further 30% may not be trainable because of age or low literacy levels.

2.3. Rangers

Each hill forest district has on average 12 ranger positions, but as with guards these positions are often unfilled. Rangers fall into two categories with regard to education: those with an ISc and those with a BSc. ISc (Intermediate Science) certificates are given by the Institute of Forestry, which has two campuses in Nepal, at Hetauda and at Pokhara, and involve a two year course of study focusing on the basic sciences with some forestry taught from an academic stance. Those passing an ISc may then continue towards a BSc, which involves a further three years of study. Competition for the 30 or so places a year for BSc students at IOF is fierce: this year over 500 aspirants planned to take the entrance exam. IOF has recently revised their forestry curriculum so that it concentrates more on community forestry and extension, but the change began only this year and no rangers currently employed in government service have been through it. CFTP has observed that technical standards, even for rangers with BScs, are low. Dahal (1994) writes that rangers had no knowledge of biomass, were unable to identify tree species and were ignorant of policy in their field. While CFTP believes

that 50% of all rangers are capable of implementing community forestry, only 20-30% are both capable and willing.

2.4. District Forest Officers

Since 1984 when IOF began graduating BScs, the recruiters of HMG forestry officers have taken people who have studied within Nepal. Prior to this date, students would normally attend the forestry school at Dehra Dun, in India. Consequently, around half of the current DFOs are Indian-trained, while half are from IOF. DFOs' technical education is supplemented by brief courses at Nepal Administrative Staff College. Increasingly now DFOs are being selected for overseas courses, some at the Masters level, in aspects of forestry. Many of the Masters graduates have taken courses in social and community forestry in the Philippines, the UK, Australia or the USA. Low pay, a conservative bureaucracy, frequent transfers, and low morale all combine, however, to reduce the productivity of this group once they return to work in Nepal. CFTP still encounters DFOs who have a mediocre understanding of the philosophy behind community forestry, perhaps on account of poor policy communication between Kathmandu and the districts.

2.5. Central Administration Kathmandu

Class I officers, and senior class II officers employed in Kathmandu have invariably taken overseas Masters degrees, and sometimes even PhDs. Many of them have also been on study trips to other countries. Most of the administration has at least an academic understanding of community forestry, and whenever individual officers have been exposed to field conditions they have been able to make impressive contributions to the development of sound community forestry policy. Once again, however, bureaucratic demands on their time restrict the scope for making contributions.

3. COMMUNITY FORESTRY TRAINING PROJECT

The evolution of the Community Forestry Training Project began with a joint World Bank-DANIDA appraisal mission which visited Nepal in November 1988. The mission presented its findings in a Staff Appraisal Report which outlined IDA support to what is now termed the Community and Private Forestry Division of the Department of Forests in the areas of research, forest resource management, institutional support, and training. DANIDA decided, on the basis of the appraisal, to give support to the training component. While the development objective of CFTP is to conserve and expand the forest resources needed to sustain traditional farming systems and livelihood in the hills, its immediate objective is the improved technical and managerial capabilities of both DOF staff and communities involved in community forestry to undertake community forestry in the hill districts. CFTP works now in 38 of the 51 hill districts. The project has established five Regional Training Centres across the country which deliver and fund training at the district and regional levels. Currently, CFTP organizes around 500 training events a year, reaching around 5,000 trainees, mostly at the district level. Table 1 lists the type of district level training supported by the project for the current fiscal year. Similar courses are offered in non-CFTP districts under a variety of different funders. Figure 2 shows the proportion of trainees by group.

3.1. CFTP Strategy

Recognizing the limitations imposed upon it by the low educational standards in Nepal, CFTP developed a strategy to support HMG's community forestry program. This strategy acknowledges that the primary resource managers are women and men from the communities, but that they need the support and understanding of HMG foresters. Furthermore, the project views DFOs as managers of their district's forest resources and

facilitators of the handover process. Their training needs lie more in business management, monitoring and evaluating progress, and planning and budgeting activities than in technical skills which the project believes should be taught primarily to rangers. All HMG staff should be re-orientated towards participatory management ideas. User group needs are diverse and, in some districts where many community forests have been created, overwhelming. The project reaches only very few user groups directly through study tours and awareness creating events. Support to user groups must come through ranger and forest guard field work, or through other well-established groups, perhaps under the rubric of user group federations. CFTP recognizes that the potential for non governmental organizations to work in community forestry is enormous. Finally, inherent in the project's approach is the belief that long term investment in training in community forestry is justified by both economics and equity considerations, for there is the potential that vast amounts of forest equity will come to reside in village elite groups at the expense of poorer villagers unless the implementors of HMG's community forestry policy understand the technical and social issues involved.

Table 1. District level courses, seminars, study tours and workshops currently offered by CFTP.

Forest Guard Community Forestry Orientation
Nursery Management Course
District Level Community Forestry Orientation
Range Post Community Forestry Seminar
User Group Member Community Forestry Management
School Teacher Community Forestry Seminar
Women Community Forestry Seminar
User Group Networking Workshop
User Group Member Study Tour
Women Study Tour
Within District User Group Member Study Tour

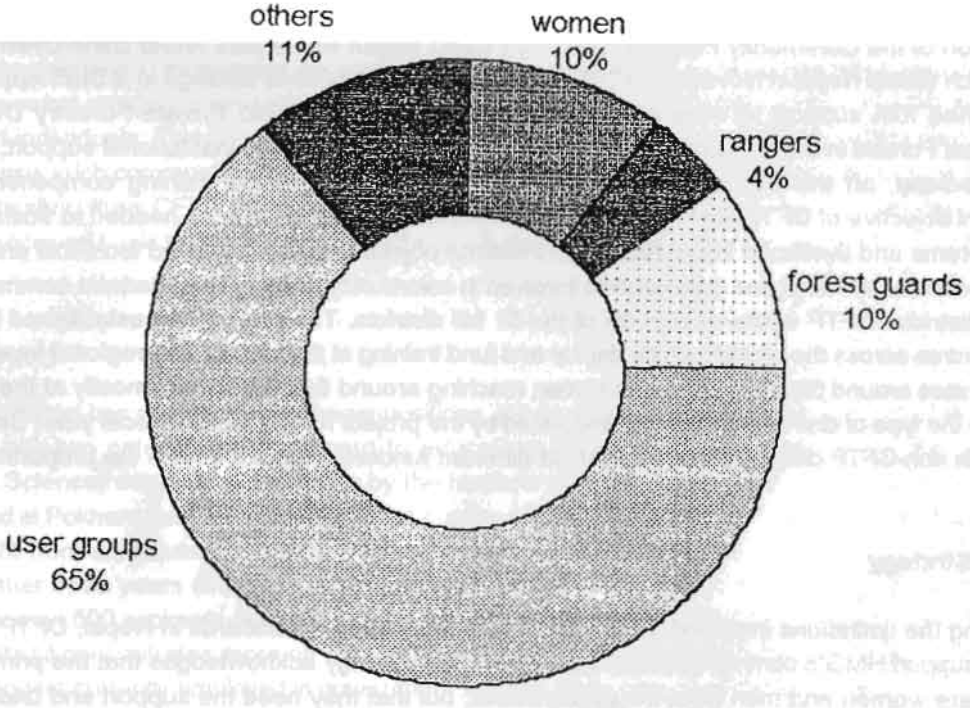

Figure 2. CFTP trainees served by trainee group 1993/4.

4. TRAINING ISSUES

Over the course of the project's five years of experience, certain issues have arisen. The project makes no claim to have solved these questions but notes that any future capacity building exercise will have to face these issues sooner or later.

4.1. Technical Versus Social Content of Training

Is community forestry an art or a science? How much social content should enter into any course, and how much technical content? CFTP has conducted large numbers of re-orientation courses in the past, and the project estimates that 80% of the ranger cadre have taken such a course. However, if the rangers are later assigned forest protection duties, they may never get the opportunity to practice their social skills, which necessitates re-emphasizing them in subsequent courses. Many foresters maintain that there are scientific aspects to community forestry management which must be taught, implying more of a technocratic approach. Others maintain that communities typically have sufficient indigenous knowledge to enable them to manage forests, and the task of a ranger or forest guard is to tease out this knowledge, but how much of this skill can be taught in short training courses?

4.2. Lack of Skilled Trainers

There is a dearth of trainers in Nepal, especially those skilled in participatory training techniques. It is generally accepted that people trained in the traditional lecture type format, in which a "professor" instructs students, will tend to deliver lectures to user group members in the same manner. Most community forestry projects are moving away from this pedagogy and are instead focusing on encouraging discussions among trainees. The role of a trainer is seen more as a facilitator. Unfortunately, however, both high school and university courses taught in Nepal invariably use the more traditional approach, which means that projects have to re-educate trainers before launching training programs. Changing trainers' attitudes may take longer than the project life.

4.3. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of training programs could be improved. Evaluating the impact of any training program is difficult since so many outside variables have to be considered. If a district has handed over forest to apparently solid, sustainable user groups, who appear to be actively managing the resource according to a sound Operational Plan, is that happy state of affairs due to training, or is it due to the leadership of the DFO, or his motivated staff, or the state of the resource at handover, or to the proximity of emerging markets for forest products, or the user groups' homogeneity, or...? Conversely, if a district is not doing well with regard to community forestry, how much of the blame lies with a poor training program? Most of the evaluation of CFTP impact must therefore be based on qualitative evidence gained from interviewing field practitioners. This methodology has obvious drawbacks, since given the acknowledged incentive value of training and the desperate need for it, very few people are likely to be critical of a training project. How much resources should be devoted to evaluation of these types of training programs?

4.4. Trainers' Career Path

Little consideration has been given to the career path of training officers in the Department of Forests. The Regional Training Centres were established with support from DANIDA CFTP in the early 1990s. In February 1990 they were staffed by class III HMG officers. If a class III officer wishes to progress to class II status, he has to leave the RTCs and seek a class II DFO position. Only then, having served time as a DFO, can he hope

to be transferred to one of the few class II training positions in Kathmandu. Training staff is an important but comparatively minor part of any DFO's work, especially in the forest protection areas of the Terai. Thus the present system ensures that the few ambitious trainers available to the DOF will sooner or later leave to posts where their skills will become rusty through lack of use, and that they will be replaced by comparatively inexperienced trainers who will not be able to deliver, administer, or monitor training effectively.

4.5. Trainee Selection

Selection of people to be trained, especially from among user group members, is haphazard. This is particularly true for study tours, in which the tendency is to choose participants who come from already active user groups. Selection is viewed as a reward for their work. The effect of this is to dilute the impact of study tours, which are really intended to encourage adoption of community forestry management practices in groups not yet active. Bunch (1982) makes the point that people chosen for training should agree to train others, and thus spread the technologies far beyond the contact group of an extension worker. There are no such preconditions set in CFTP.

4.6. Incentive Value of Training

In an ideal training project one might expect that trainees would value training opportunities to such an extent that they would be willing to invest time and money in attending classes. It is only at the user group level that CFTP has seen this situation - a few members have attended training without any remuneration, and one user group has even organized its own study tour without any support from the project. All HMG staff, from the central administration down to forest guards, expect some kind of "training allowance" before they attend training, and these allowances are often set well above the costs involved in attending training. HMG staff see training as an opportunity to bolster a meagre income, and expect "compensation" for time spent. This uneconomic, artificial situation creates pedagogical problems in projects, and selection problems in the districts, since one is never sure who is genuinely interested in training and who attends training only for the allowances. Should CFTP now proceed to cut training allowances?

4.7. "Untrainables"

There are many constraints to community forestry implementation which cannot be addressed through a training program. CFTP refers to these items are "untrainables". Untrainables have generally to do with the rigidity of the HMG bureaucracy as well as the lack of development in the Nepalese hinterland. They are low pay levels for staff, general lack of incentives to perform quality work, frequent transfers of staff from one district to another, budgetary restrictions on field allowances, poor housing conditions, lack of facilities in the more remote districts, and general isolation. Can and should a training project address these "untrainables"?

5. SUMMARY: COMMUNITY FORESTRY AT A CROSSROADS

Community forestry in Nepal has reached a crossroads. The signposts point to a utopian vision of user groups managing and harvesting forests and investing their profits in rural development. This is the high road promoted by donors which can only be reached with a sustained investment in human resources, including training, at both government and community levels. Travel on the high road and one comes immediately to the "untrainable" barriers which must be somehow crossed. Branches from the high road lead to user group federations, private forestry, NGOs, and marketing coops. Another signpost points to the low road, which skirts the untrainable constraints, yet allows some measure of community forestry to proceed by dint of the legislation and policy initiatives. This road passes through several serious resource conflicts, as some community groups

realize that they have been cheated out of their rightful share of a diminishing resource. On the low road training is still very much in evidence, but its impact is weakened because of low morale among the government foresters, and the lack of time for training caused by the sheer volume of work to be done.

6. REFERENCES

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