Advances in Participatory Forest Management in South Asia

Learning from Field Experience in Bhutan, India and Nepal

Jochen Statz, Rajan Kotru,
Hans Beukeboom, Golam Rasul,
Elisabeth Kerkhoff, Madhav Karki

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About the Organisations

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is an independent 'Mountain Learning and Knowledge Centre' serving the eight countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas – Afghanistan 🇦🇫, Bangladesh 🇧🇩, Bhutan 🇧🇹, China 🇨🇳, India 🇮🇳, Myanmar 🇲🇲, Nepal 🇳🇵, and Pakistan 🇵🇰 – and the global mountain community. Founded in 1983, ICIMOD is based in Kathmandu, Nepal, and brings together a partnership of regional member countries, partner institutions, and donors with a commitment for development action to secure a better future for the people and environment of the extended Himalayan region. ICIMOD's activities are supported by its core programme donors: the governments of Austria, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, and its regional member countries, along with over thirty project co–financing donors. The primary objective of the Centre is to promote the development of an economically and environmentally sound mountain ecosystem and to improve the living standards of mountain populations.

The German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) is an international cooperation not for profit enterprise for sustainable development with worldwide operations. It provides viable, forward-looking solutions for political, economic, ecological and social development in a globalised world and promotes complex reforms and change processes in order to improve people's living conditions on a sustainable basis. The GTZ was established in 1975 and mainly work for the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Currently, GTZ is implementing some 2,300 development projects and programmes in 126 countries. It has its own offices in 67 of these countries. Its development projects and programmes cover a wide range of themes and tasks. Its main thrust areas include rural development, natural resources management, food security, private sector development, technology transfer, good governance, social development and capacity building. It is one of the pioneers in promoting participatory natural resource management in South Asia.

The **'Talking Points'** series from ICIMOD contains short presentations of topical, controversial, or problematic themes, where general consensus has not yet been reached or where action may be appropriate. They are intended to stimulate thought, and discussion, their contents should not be seen as definitive statements.

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Contents

Foreword

Community participation in natural resource management and ecosystem conservation has been widely practised during the last two decades in countries of the Himalayan region, particularly in Nepal, India, and Bhutan, and significant progress has been made both in terms of millions of hectares covered and thousands of communities engaged. Widespread support for the programme has led to these accomplishments and has shown that community-based forest management can reverse forest degradation trends and provide significant benefits to local communities, especially the mountain poor, women, and other marginalised groups.

However, success and growth has brought with it new issues of governance, forest management, marketing, and equity. While contributing significantly to forest conservation and sustainability in production of goods and services, the approach has shown that continuing achievement depends on accelerating and internalising learning and good practices in the highly varied social and natural circumstances in which it has been applied. Better understanding is needed of the micro and macro issues concerning how households participate in forest management, the types of constraints and opportunities they face, the consequences of technology choices adopted, the types and distribution of benefits, and the effects of different policy and institutional arrangements.

Both ICIMOD and the German development agency, GTZ have been deeply engaged in promoting participatory natural resources management in Asia. ICIMOD's two decades of experience together with partners like GTZ, has shown that meaningful involvement and participation of local communities in forestry, watershed, and rangeland resources management projects and programmes can lead to real improvements in the livelihoods of mountain people. Sustained participation fosters their improved socioeconomic conditions. It also creates a sense of ownership for community-based resources, and strengthens the capacity of individuals and community organisations to mobilise local resources thus minimising dependence on government resources.

Recently, GTZ, in collaboration with national partners, completed participatory natural resources management projects in Bhutan, India, and Nepal: the Bhutan-German Sustainable Renewable Natural Resources Development Project in Bhutan, the Indo-German Changar Eco-Development Project in India, and the Churia Forest Development Project in Nepal. This publication presents the results of a joint undertaking carried out to study these projects, identify lessons learned, and thus contribute to continuing learning on community-based forest management not only for ICIMOD and GTZ but also for others involved in forest resource management.

A joint team of staff from GTZ and ICIMOD focused on three country case studies to examine how the GTZ supported community-based forest management (CBFM) projects have linked people, institutions, sectors, disciplines, activities, and programmes together in a dynamic system of community forest resource management. The learning

approach recognised that management and use of any one component of a natural resource inevitably affects other resources. It also underscored the dynamic nature of participation, consultation before action, cooperation, communication, coordination, and shared decision-making.

The papers included in this volume represent the state-of-the-art in the field of CBFM. The multidisciplinary team comprising foresters, sociologists, economists, and rural development specialists that carried out these studies found results that affirm the capacity of community-based management to succeed in a variety of circumstances. The studies also identified a number of issues that need to be addressed to improve both positive and negative factors that could influence participatory natural resource management. Factors that have led to successful innovations include: (a) an effective institutional framework developed to embrace a multi-sectoral approach to decision-making, (b) enabling policies, legislation, and implementation arrangements at both national and local levels, (c) a high degree of awareness among the people and communities involved, and d) provision of economic and institutional incentives for meaningful people's participation. On the other hand, factors that have had slowed progress include: a) existence of vested interests (b) lack of facilitating and enabling institutional mechanisms, (c) lack of a regular policy review and reform mechanisms to address emerging issues like marketing and enterprise development, and (d) neglect of issues related to gender and social equity in planning and implementation.

The projects represented three different methodologies being used for natural resource management and tested varied institutional arrangements and approaches. The Churia Project in Nepal tested the feasibility of a community forestry framework involving distant users in the Himalayan foothills. Although community forestry was successful in the middle hills of Nepal, there were doubts whether the model would work in the completely different conditions of the Churia (or Siwaliks) Hills. The Changar Eco-Development Project in the Dhauladhar range of Himachal Pradesh, India, introduced and tested micro-planning in joint forest management with the active involvement of the panchyati raj institutions - the grassroots level local government institution in India. The Bhutan-German project dealt with the question of whether participatory forest management could be successful in conditions where forest resources are relatively abundant.

The authors also identified key challenges and opportunities. As the paradigms for sustainable mountain development are continuously evolving and new innovations keep emerging, CBNRM strategies and approaches will need to be revisited on a continuing basis, updated, readjusted, and refined. The papers describe methodologies and approaches that have been reassessed, and strategies that have been reformulated in the context of the dynamic nature of the mountain imperatives of forest and watershed management, biodiversity conservation, livelihoods improvement, and use of non-timber forest products for income generation. Forest resources are valuable and have competing uses. Wise and creative compromises and trade-offs may have to be made by policy makers and resource managers through careful planning and implementation of projects that balance between the ideology of conservation and the imperatives of development, always focusing on local peoples' needs and popular participation – as local people are the principal stakeholders of the natural resources.

As resources become scarcer and as populations increase, it will require foresight and vision as well as creative imagination on the part of political and organisational leaders, researchers, and forest resource managers, to deliver sustainable development programmes and activities to people effectively. ICIMOD, working together with its regional member country partners and donors like the German Government (BMZ) and GTZ, is committed to continuously learning from experience and adding value to the initiatives of the communities who depend on forest, rangeland, and watershed resources for their livelihoods. The lessons learned from these projects will guide our joint community-based work in future.

I congratulate the learning and writing team for their keen interest, dedication, and enthusiasm and laud GTZ for the initiative to put their projects to scrutiny and use them as a basis for continuing learning. This is an initiative worthy of wider emulation. I hope this collaborative exercise will help to enhance our understanding of and provide further insights in better addressing emerging challenges in participatory forest management in HKH region.

Madhav Karki
Deputy Director General - Programmes
ICIMOD

Message from GTZ

Community participated forest management has been advancing over the years in South Asia, particularly in Nepal, India, and Bhutan, and significant progress has been made. GTZ is pleased to have been associated with this important initiative from the very beginning as one of the important partners. Our major support to the promotion of participatory forest management in Bhutan, India, and Nepal has been through three major projects: the Bhutan-German Sustainable Renewable Natural Resources Development Project, the Indo-German Changar Eco-Development Project, and the Churia Forest Development Project.

All three projects are very interesting, each represents a different approach to forest resource management with different institutional arrangements and policy orientation. In order to draw key lessons from these pioneering projects, and with a view to sharing the findings and lessons learned at a regional level as a contribution to taking forward the community forestry movement, ICIMOD and GTZ jointly undertook an initiative to document the experiences gained. The joint learning mission that was formed adopted a novel approach by forming a multi-disciplinary team comprising the project implementing officials and local officers to gather relevant facts and figures. The team jointly gathered the lessons learned through field visits, participant observation, and key informant interviews. The information was shared and discussed with relevant stakeholders and changes made based on the feedback. These experiences are now being shared with a wider public in this publication.

The experiences gained through these projects indicate that using appropriate technical and financial support it is possible to achieve the twin goals of conservation of forests and reduction of poverty. Moreover, communities, given opportunities and incentives, can improve degraded forests, as shown, for example, by the Nepal Churia project. The learning team worked together for almost two years to complete the project in a systematic manner. I am very glad to see this document published, which succinctly documents the key lessons learned for use by the partners in their future work.

I congratulate the team for their success in translating the ground perspectives into key policy messages. The publication has also documented a list of good practices in community-based natural resource management which will be a useful reference not only for GTZ and ICIMOD but also for other stakeholders involved in community forest management. I hope that this collaborative exercise will stimulate interest and dialogue in further developing community forest management and contributing to the well-being of poor people in the HKH region.

Armin Hofmann
Programme Manager
German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), Nepal

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

The development of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) is more advanced in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, where natural resources are heavily linked to people's livelihoods, social ethos, economic underpinning, and environmental security, than in most other parts of the world. Nepal has over two decades of very successful experience in community forestry (CF); India has a similar amount of experience in joint forest management (JFM); while Bhutan initiated social forestry (SF) (which embraces community and private forestry principles and practices) in the mid-nineties.

German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) have been actively supporting the adoption of participatory practices in natural resource management. GTZ has been supporting projects that promote participatory natural resource management (PNRM) in all three countries: the Bhutan-German Sustainable Renewable Natural Resources Development Project (BG-SRDP) in Lobeysa, Bhutan; the Indo-German Changar Eco-Development Project (IGCEDP) in Himachal Pradesh, India; and the Nepal-German Churia Forest Development Project (ChFDP) in Lahan, Nepal. Some of these projects have been operational for more than ten years, spanning several project phases. ICIMOD through its natural resources management, advocacy capacity building, and policy support programmes is supporting community-based and participatory resource management in its eight member countries, which adds a complementarity and synergy to the GTZ supported work.

A joint learning exercise (Joint Learning Mission) was carried out by the GTZ supported project teams in Bhutan, India, and Nepal, together with ICIMOD. The objectives of the Mission were to (i) document the experiences gained through the implementation of the GTZ projects; (ii) assess the overall social, economic, and environmental impacts of the projects; (iii) identify the factors responsible for the success or failure of the projects and draw lessons; and (iv) disseminate the joint learning experiences to relevant stakeholders. The Joint Learning Mission took the unique approach of not simply evaluating the projects critically from an outside perspective, but also adopting an appreciative and empathetic attitude towards the projects in order to document good practices and the most valuable lessons learned. It is highly desirable for such learning to take place at least 20 months before the project completion date so that recommendations can be accommodated to improve the project. Dynamic leadership in the team and an active facilitator was duly recognised as necessary to enable better synthesis of knowledge and information and ensure wider dissemination and impact.

The three projects devoted much of their efforts to devising and introducing a variety of technological innovations. These pioneering initiatives have contributed to enhancing rural livelihoods and rural economies at the local level, as well as identifying policy and institutional factors that will pave the way for a shift from mere subsistence to a more commercial use of forest products at the policy level.

In Bhutan, a forest resource potential assessment was made using GIS and other participatory tools, along with documentation and capacity building, to enable the effective planning and management of forest resources. In Nepal, the project supported

the development of a participatory forest inventory, including non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and biodiversity, and launched demonstration programmes with pro-poor and livelihood-focused programmes within the community forestry framework. These programmes encompassed the use of NTFPs, fodder, and fruit trees to support poverty reduction efforts by the forest users. This model also employed the distant user group approach in community forestry, integrated natural resource management, and capacity building aspects. In India, the project institutionalised the development of village forest development societies, participatory forest planning and implementation processes, and the participatory integrated watershed management approach.

In relation to the livelihood enhancement of communities, the projects supported processing, value addition, and the marketing of forest products for micro-enterprise development – promoting employment and income at the community level, while conserving natural resources. For example, the establishment of a bael juice plant in Nepal helped to transform the livelihoods of people in the Churia hills and has opened up an array of possibilities for further expansion and diversification. Similarly, Vasundhara, a micro-enterprise body set up to capture local value addition in a range of NTFPs in Himachal Pradesh, India, has opened up a new dimension for income and employment generation for livelihood enhancement, while conserving forest resources. In Bhutan, the project promoted livestock farming and dairy processing in the rangelands for income and employment generation. These initiatives were successful, but such activities do need extensive research support, development inputs, credit and marketing networks, private sector participation, and training and capacity building, along with enabling policy and legal support.

Appropriate 'institutions' are a pre-requisite for the successful implementation of participatory natural resource management, the scaling up of best practices, and to maximise impacts. In all three projects, local institutions comprised of local forest users were developed into participatory or joint structures and their skills, knowledge, and capacity were developed through training and formal and informal interactions. This enabled local forest users to interact properly with other stakeholders and manage forest resources in a sustainable way. In Nepal, 346 community forest user groups (CFUGs) have been formed and nearly 60,000 households are involved in the use and management of about 60,000 hectares of forest land. Similarly, in India, IGCEDP is working in 593 villages covering an area of 439 square kilometres. This in itself is an innovation, as IGCEDP was implemented by HPEDS, and facilitating the society to maintain its existence after project completion is a new idea. In Bhutan, more than 20 community forests (as of December 2005) are managed by the local people following a cautious community forestry approach which hands over responsibility and ownership to local users. However, the challenge is the sustainability of these institutions. It is important that these social institutions are legalised, empowered, and capacitated so that they can make wise decisions on natural resource management. Public institutions and civil society needs to bridge the gaps and facilitate their initiatives with technical and funding support, and with reduced administrative costs.

Although participatory forest management has contributed significantly to improving forest conditions in Bhutan, India, and Nepal, its contribution towards alleviating persistent poverty, reducing inequalities, and bringing about gender equality has remained limited in most cases. The projects have ventured into addressing these issues

through the inclusion of poor and disadvantaged groups and women in forest planning processes and decision-making and benefit-sharing mechanisms. Special avenues and programmes were developed for these marginalised groups, like fodder planting, managing NTFPs, and fruit collection for livelihood support, and they were trained and empowered to participate in forest management, decision making, and advocacy. However, enabling policies are required to promote these initiatives through positive discrimination, equitable benefit sharing, proper representation, capacity building, and empowerment of these marginalised groups in natural resources management, while also enhancing their livelihood opportunities.

It is increasingly being realised that the core problems of unsustainable resource use are often linked to poor governance, including unclear rights and responsibilities, centralised planning and management, and inadequate participation of local resource users in decision making. It is largely recognised that the state, as the major stakeholder and custodian of natural resources, has not delivered effectively in relation to sustainable NRM. The continued degradation of natural ecosystems and the continuation of issues related to poverty and inequity are real indicators of ineffective governance. The major factors are the legal sanctity of the long-term role of communities in the management of natural resources (to plan, manage, and use), benefit sharing therefrom, and the continued control of forest and related resources by government agencies. The three projects have addressed some of these issues through sensitisation and capacity building, and by formulating new rules and approaches (village forest development society, participatory forest management guidelines, the inclusion of Dalits and marginalised groups in natural resources management and micro-planning) with some success. However, frequent changes in rules and priorities, lack of back-up support after project termination, inadequate linking of micro-plans to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (which were not included in the original fixed logframes developed in the mid 1990s) and national plans, delays in the amendment of old policies and regulations, and the exertion of indirect control by line agencies have hindered the anticipated gains and potential scale ups.

Policy changes must be backed up by the provision of enabling and effective governance structures and instruments by the state. Government policies should set priorities and milestones, work with a clear impact orientation, and have transparent indicators. Feedback mechanisms must be in place to facilitate policy updates. The issue of 'good governance' should be included in all working manuals, (government) guidelines, and training packages. Mass campaigns need to be organised to create awareness about good governance.

The key to the success of all strategies will be the socioeconomic empowerment of poor, vulnerable, and socially excluded groups through a rights-based approach to enable them to implement good resource governance that taps the full potential of the forests. To this end, GOs, CBOs, NGOs, and service providers need to be sensitised, informed, and capacitated on good governance and devolution issues. While the good practices need to be formalised and scaled up by strengthening enabling policies and programmes, community participation and decentralisation in other sectors of natural resource management (water, land, biodiversity, environment) and other development initiatives can contribute equally to addressing gender and social exclusion, poverty, and livelihood issues in the region.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

BCN	Bird Conservation of Nepal
BG-SRDP	Bhutan-German Sustainable Renewable Natural Resources Development Project
CBNRM	community-based natural resource management
CBO	community-based organisation
CFMDP	Community Forestry Management Demonstration Programme
CFUG	community forest user group
ChFDP	Churia Forest Development Project
DFO	district forest office
DSCO	district soil conservation office
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users, Nepal
FMU	forest management unit
FRPA	forest resources potential assessment
GIS	geographic information system
GPS	global positioning system
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
HP	Himachal Pradesh
HPEDS	Himachal Pradesh Eco-Development Society
IC	Indian currency
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
IGCEDP	Indo-German Changar Eco-Development Project
INRM	integrated natural resources management
JFM	joint forest management
NGO	non-government organisation
NRM	natural resource management
NRs	Nepali rupees
NTFP	non-timber forest product
Nu	ngultrum (currency of Bhutan)
PNRM	participatory natural resource management
PRI	panchayati raj institution
RNR	renewable natural resource
SF	social forestry
VFDS	village forest development society