

The Pace of Community Forestry and Joint Forest Management

Since 1987, villagers, the Forest Department, and project staff have undergone a long learning process in which the methodology for building representative user groups capable of implementing forest management has been identified. However, it would be a mistake to assume that, because most of the procedure for user group formation is clear, community forestry is about to take off throughout the whole of Nepal. Only 1,900 forest user groups have been formed to date, out of which 525 user groups have evolved operational plans and have been handed over forest areas (Joshi 1993). Approximately 90,000ha of government forests have been handed over as community forests (Kanel 1993). Although these figures seem to be relatively low for the whole of Nepal, they do not encompass the indigenous and informal user groups which have been involved in forest protection in the past. More recently, there has been a rapid rate of increase in group formation through the forest department. This has both positive and negative aspects: it indicates a greater willingness by the Forest Department staff to support community forestry as well as a greater confidence in the users in the efficacy of the policy. However, there is concern that the Forest Department does not have sufficient capacity to support a large number of user groups. It remains to be seen how it will meet the target of establishing 5,000 user groups and handing over 252,000ha of forests, as targetted by the Eighth Five Year Plan of HMG/Nepal (HMG/N 1992a).