Rehabilitating Common Property Resources: Experiences from PARDYP

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Rehabilitation of common property resources, as has been done in Begnas village, Kaski District, Nepal, requires an integrated and holistic approach

In the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, common property resources provide water, fodder, fuelwood, timber, medicinal plants, fruits, nuts, and so on – all of which are essential for sustaining rural livelihoods. Common property resources (CPRs) play a pivotal role in sustaining the productivity of mountain farming systems. Many of these vital resources have undergone degradation because of human-induced and other natural factors – some have reached a point of extreme degradation and substantial investment and motivation are needed to revive them.

Degradation of the commons is known to have many adverse effects: it undermines the hydrological functions of watersheds, thus affecting environmental benefits for upstream and downstream communities and eventually increasing economic, social, and environmental vulnerability among smallholder farmers and poor households. It is important, for vulnerable mountain communities especially, to ensure the sustainable management of mountain commons.

PARDYP studies

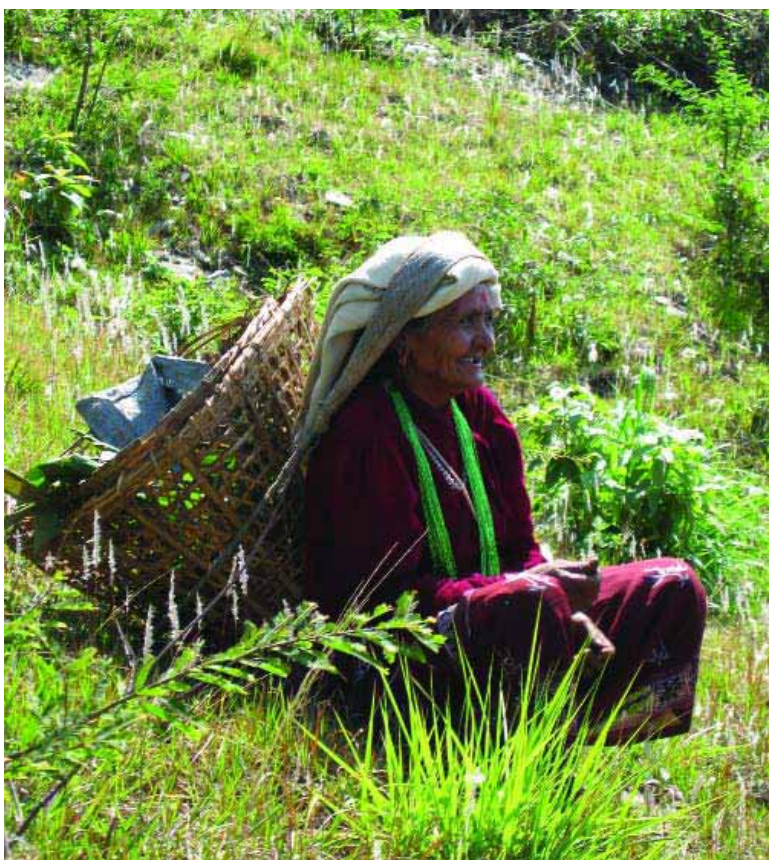
One of PARDYP's objectives was to understand the processes of natural resource degradation in the middle mountains of the Himalayas. Initial baseline surveys of watersheds helped to understand major socioeconomic and biophysical constraints to sustainable crop production and improved livelihoods, thus providing an opportunity to explore sustainable use of natural resources, including use of CPRs.

Causes of degradation

(Based on lessons from PARDYP)

- Increase in pressure on natural resources due to increasing population
- Scarcity of good policies
- Poor implementation of good policies
- Degeneration of traditional institutions
- Prevalence of self-interest over collective action
- Inequity in sharing resources leading to conflicts
- Lack of motivation and skills
- Missing technical know-how

PARDYP examples include rehabilitation of degraded community forests in Nepal and degraded village common lands that were developed into fodder banks in India. PARDYP also assisted local communities in developing water management options: water scarcity in the dry season being another problem in the middle mountains where demand is exceeding supply. In all cases, understanding the 'people dimension' was of far greater importance than the technical solutions. We realised that, if communities are made aware of the possibilities and given the confidence to develop their ideas, they can improve and manage resources effectively.



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Any common property related initiative must focus on reducing women's workload

Two examples from PARDYP are given below.

Mandalidevi Community Forest in Nepal

Mandalidevi community forest, Jhikhu Khola watershed, is situated on a relatively dry south-facing aspect and 110 households depend on it. Three years ago the forest was degraded and the villagers did not benefit much from it. Some families used it for grazing and quarrying. Lack of interest on the part of the forest user group had encouraged unsustainable harvesting of resources by some members, and its degradation over time. Most villagers, however, thought that the site should be rehabilitated and managed properly.

PARDYP helped the forest user group to rehabilitate the forest by motivating the local leadership and providing 'missing' technical know-how. The project involved a local NGO and facilitated the user group in preparing and implementing an action plan to rehabilitate the community forest. The members imposed a complete ban on grazing and any other free-riding activities inside the site and were able to stop mining activities above the forest site with the support of the local administration. Species planted in the Mandalidevi forest are growing well. The villagers, particularly the women, are protecting these species, most of which are multipurpose and aid soil and water conservation.

Land and water resources in Doba, India

Doba is a remote village in the PARDYP India watershed. It has few amenities, and the villagers depend heavily on common forest and water resources to meet their daily needs for energy and water. Due to individual self-interest overriding collective interest, and unsustainable use of resources, a common drinking water source and a patch of forest above it were reduced to open access resources and were highly degraded. Introduction of a government piped water supply rendered the spring obsolete. However, the government was unable to maintain the new piped water supply and it fell into disrepair. The spring too had been neglected and the traditional village mechanisms for maintaining the water supply had ceased.

The families depending on these resources were brought together by PARDYP to undertake rehabilitation work. Together with the Doba Gram Sabha (elected body) and PARDYP, they successfully rehabilitated the degraded resources. A village committee was formed to coordinate the maintenance of resources. The spring now provides an uninterrupted flow of clean drinking water to 20 households, and the

rehabilitated land is a source of quality fodder for many. Girls and women are pleased by this initiative as they have easier and greater access to water and fodder.

Success factors

PARDYP's experience shows that the following are among the factors that govern sustainable development of common resources.

Community empowerment. Sustainability of rehabilitation work depends on the extent to which the local people have been empowered, both socially and technically. Organising village campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of common property resources and explaining the complementarities between CPRs and private resources, applying people-led research and development approaches, motivating village leadership and institutions, reviving traditional institutions, and incorporating traditional knowledge and experience are ways in which communities can be better educated and empowered. In all aspects of a development programme, marginalised families and women must be actively involved.

CPR-PPR complementarities. Farmers in the PARDYP watersheds participated in conservation and protection of CPRs because of the contributions of CPRs to private resource-based, improved options. Providing poor farmers with alternatives that raise the productivity of private property resources is very important. PARDYP recommended options that made a difference to on-farm production, viz. treatment of crops and soils with appropriate strains of microorganisms (biofertilisers), use of improved seeds, cultivation of good quality forage species, cultivating irrigated rice using a system of rice intensification (SRI) method, water harvesting combined with fish farming, off-season vegetable cultivation, improved composting, drip irrigation, and land stabilisation and gully plugging. For all these, conservation and protection of the commons to maintain soil fertility and water availability, control sediment transport in streams and irrigation channels, and reduce workloads of women and men in fetching water and fuel were important achievements.

Monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation add value to the design and implementation of programmes. Therefore, communities must try to measure and assess the impact of interventions in an integrated manner by considering social, economic, biophysical, and environment aspects. To arrive at a fair assessment, all stakeholders – rich and poor families, men and women, land users, and experts – should participate in monitoring and evaluation activities.

PARDYP Nepal

Participation of local communities in common property resources management in Jhikhu Khola

Knowledge sharing and networking. In rehabilitation programmes, dissemination of the findings is a crucial component, and this requires careful planning based on target groups. In PARDYP, action research with farmers, farmer-farmer exchange visits, and farmer days were found to be good methods of sharing knowledge with local people. ICIMOD also demonstrated the use of alternative media, e.g., puppet shows, as an effective way of spreading success stories in remote villages. For others, a communication and outreach strategy may include options such as newsletters (including e-newsletters), CDs, films, websites, extranets, and papers.

Establishing credibility. Building links and trust with land users and decision-makers is the cornerstone of any action research and development initiative. Project staff and extension workers must spend time with the communities and should be able to understand and value the local context. Decision-makers also have a crucial role to play in upscaling a proven good practice, and they should be invited to participate in relevant networking and knowledge-sharing activities.