Emerging Issues in Communtiy Forestry in Nepal

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Putting Ideas to Work

The Mithila art depicted on these pages appears in Eastern and Central Nepal on handicrafts, papers, terra cotta, and on the walls of traditional houses.

Women artists create these paintings using natural and locally available dyes and colors. The art expresses their culture, way of life, daily activities, and festivals.

In this male-dominated society, the women also use their art as an outlet to express their difficulties and hardships.

Janakpur is the capital of Mithila, which was the Kingdom of King Janak (father of Sita who was wife of Ram). Ram was the hero of famous Hindu epic Ramayan.

Preface

Nepal is recognized as a world leader in community forestry. The Nepal experience illustrates the success and challenge of participatory community-based forest management. The enabling policy, legislation, and implementation of community forestry emerged out of the country's unique history and geography. Nepal has led the process of implementing community forestry, experimenting with what began as a new form of forestry management to improve forest resources, while meeting the needs of rural communities.

The intention of this publication is to generate discussion and raise issues from implementation of community forestry in Nepal in the past 25 years. By publishing these findings, we hope that policy makers, foresters, national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and donors will make necessary adjustments to community forestry to ensure its success in the future.

Prepared with support from the Ford Foundation, this paper resulted from an assessment of second-generation issues in community forestry. The content is based on a workshop "Equity Issues in Community Forestry for Sustainable Development" held in Kathmandu on October 4, 2002. The workshop summarized findings of studies conducted in the past three years. The studies examined the impact of community forestry in the Terai, Mid-Hills, and High Mountains as well as leasehold forestry, watershed management, buffer zone management, and service providers in the forestry sector. Researchers used semistructured interviews, extensive interviews with various stakeholders, participatory rural appraisal, secondary sources, and published materials. Contributors included:

- Government officials (including the district forest officer and his staff, mainly assistant forest officers and rangers)
- Facilitating project/NGO staff
- Local community-based organizations and NGOs, if supporting or involved with community forestry
- Local leaders (such as local politicians, teachers, and others)
- Officials of the Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal (FECOFUN)
- Private sector groups or individuals who purchase forest products (including local sawmill owners, owners of brick kilns, some restaurant owners, and others)
- Local people both involved in and excluded from the community forestry program.

Community forestry has evolved as one of the major components of Nepal's forest development strategy during the past 25 years. The policy is progressive, mandating the need to address poverty alleviation along with environmental conservation. Nepali policy makers have had the courage to recognize and address the crucial role forests play in rural Nepalis' lives. Moreover, it is generally recognized that, given the incentive of long-term rights, people will sustainably manage their natural resources. Community forestry shows that, not only it is possible to achieve two seemingly opposing goals—improving peoples' livelihoods as well as conserving natural landscapes—the only way to achieve either goal is by addressing both.

As of August 2002, community forestry programs have been operating in all but one of seventy-five districts. A little more than 1.2 million households throughout Nepal (29.63 percent of Nepal's total households) organized into 11,408 community forestry user-groups are involved in managing 897,741 ha of community forests. Of a total of 6.3 million ha of forest area about 3.5 million ha were identified as potential community forest area, almost 25.6 percent of which is presently being managed by communities throughout Nepal.

The policy is popular among people all across the country; planners, policy makers, researchers, and villagers recognize its effectiveness and efficiency in balancing conservation and rural development. It has influenced other forest management regimes within the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation. For example, both leasehold forestry and buffer zone management involve local people's participation. Policy makers realize the need to develop conservation programs with stated objectives of conserving environments, while improving the economic situation of local people. Together, these and other programs offer opportunities for local communities to benefit and improve their livelihoods by participating in the management and development of natural resources.

Community forestry has had social and environmental successes. In its most successful cases, it has contributed to increasing community-based groups in self-governance skills and democratic processes. Many people are better off with community forestry. At the same time, many forest conditions have improved and previously degraded forests near villages and settlements have been restored.

Although community forestry has had numerous successes, experience from the past 25 years has produced ample lessons that, if analyzed, can provide policy makers information needed to fine-tune, adjust, and improve policy to meet the intended goals better. The following sections explore some of the chief issues by examining community forestry's impact on landscapes and livelihoods in Nepal. The document first describes the emergence and evolution of community forestry in the three major physiographic regions of Nepal—the Terai, Mid-Hills, and High Mountains. It then identifies and analyzes community forestry–related issues affecting landscapes and livelihoods and concludes by making concrete recommendations for supporting and strengthening community forestry in Nepal.

Emergence and Evolution of Community Forestry

In the late 1970s, social or community forestry evolved as a solution to improving forestlands by addressing the issue of people's livelihoods. It expressed an explicit concern for meeting the subsistence needs of local farmers for firewood, fodder, leaf litter, and small timber for agricultural implements and for developing farmers' rights and responsibilities for the forests. Both Nepal's consecutive five-year national development plans and forestry policies reinforced the government's commitment to including people's participation in forestry in Nepal. The changes in policy furthermore show how the lessons learned were incorporated in new forestry and national plans.

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The National Forestry Plan in 1976—an outcome of the national conference of forestry professionals in 1975—recognized for the first time the need for community involvement in protecting forests, specifically in the Mid-Hills by ensuring local forest-based needs were met. Panchayat Forest and Panchayat Protected Forest Rules of 1978 were Nepal's first people-oriented forest policy and gave forest management responsibility and control to local panchayats—the lowermost politico-administrative unit of the government led by elected representatives. The Sixth Five-Year Plan (1981–85) helped operationalize community forestry by stating the need for people's participation in forestry in the forest sector of the plan, reinforcing the Panchayat forest policy. The Decentralization Act (1982) and Decentralization Regulations (1984) empowered panchayats to form consumer committees for the protection and utilization of local forests and set terms for handing control of the forests over to panchayats.

Several challenges emerged with the panchayat forests. The panchayats did not necessarily represent the community nor the users of a particular forest, and local leaders tended to have control over the resources. The panchayat forests and panchayat protected forests that were handed over tended to be, respectively, monocrop plantations and degraded forest. Neither forest type provided benefits for the communities and local people continued to use national forest land for fuel wood and fodder. Although well intentioned, panchayat forest policies, as a result, contradicted policy objectives intended to return ownership of local forests to the community.

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The Decentralization Act of 1987 tried to address some of these issues by introducing the concept of the "forest user group" and amending the Panchayat Forest and Panchayat Protected Forest Rules of 1978 in 1988. The seventh Five-Year Plan (1985–90) emphasized (a) fulfillment of people's basic needs for forest

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products as the prime objective of the forestry sector and (b) people's participation in afforestation and forest management to ensure that their subsistence needs were met. This all led to development of the key community forestry policy: in the Master Plan for the Forestry Sector (1988).

This master plan further defined the concept of the community forestry user group and acknowledged the need to amend all existing forest regulations by introducing the concept of a user group. Main development imperatives of the Master Plan for the Forestry Sector were to (a) meet basic needs, (b) include local users in decision making and benefit sharing, (c) improve socioeconomic growth, and (d) encourage sustainable utilization of forest resources. The policy envisaged empowerment of those whose survival depends on the well-being of forests to take over their management. It gave priority to safeguarding livelihoods through community forestry to poorer communities and poorer people within communities. In this way, the forestry sector would play a significant role in poverty alleviation and strengthening of local economies. From a policy perspective, community forestry would facilitate a "common property institution" as a comparatively rational solution to curbing the problems of managing forests due to poverty and people's dependency on forests.

The plan opened up the door for Hill people, who traditionally depend on forests, to take over forest ownership and management responsibilities to the extent they are able and willing. It also recognized the role of government foresters as advisors and extensionists. As community forestry evolved, particularly after reinstatement of democracy in 1990, the definition of "community" changed from political unit (i.e., panchayat) to user group, that is, all users of a particular resource. Community forestry's "user group approach" extended the boundaries of existing administrative units to cater to the needs and aspirations of a group of people with a collective concern for forest and forest products.

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The Forest Act (1993) and Forest Regulation (1995) further strengthened community forestry by repealing all previously existing forest legislations, providing a legal basis for implementation of community forestry, simplifying the hand-over process, and recognizing community forestry user groups as self-governing, autonomous corporate bodies for managing and using community forests according to a community forestry operational plan.

The government's principal strategy for the national development program is expressed in its Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997–2002). This plan follows the Master Plan for the Forestry Sector in making a commit-

ment to continue with the principle of people's participation in forestry. The current plan lists poverty alleviation as a primary objective in its forestry sector statement. To support this principal objective of the forestry sector, the plan cites creating employment opportunities, income generation, and sustainable management of forests to fulfill timber, firewood, and fodder requirements of local people. The most recent amendment, the Revised Forestry Sector Policy 2000, raises the issue of collaborative forestry and revenue sharing with local governments.

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From its inception in the late 1970s, community forestry has involved a dynamic learning process. The Master Plan for the Forestry Sector emphasized the priority of involving poor in managing community forests in 1998 and envisioned community forestry as contributing to overall poverty alleviation by integrating social justice, gender balance, equity, and good governance. Issues and challenges have emerged as community forestry has evolved and participation of rural communities has grown, supported continually by donor communities, NGOs, and other civil society organizations. A joint technical review of community forestry undertaken in 2000 was intended to clarify the government's community forestry policy objectives, analyze issues, and develop strategy for the future. It remains to be seen how much the recommendations from this review will influence future development of community forestry in improving livelihoods of communities, especially those of the poor and marginalized. This document contributes to the discussion.

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Community Forestry in Nepal

Community forestry in Nepal is one of three types of public forestry management under district forests offices throughout the kingdom. These offices are also responsible for managing national forest land, leasehold forests, and wildlife within national forests. National parks and watershed management fall under the jurisdiction of different line agencies.

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To initiate community forestry, forest office staff or villagers can initiate the process to identify forest area to be designated as community forest. In addition, the land must be surveyed and inventoried and traditional users of the forest must be identified.

The users, once identified, constitutes a general assembly, referred to as a community forestry user group; they elect an executive committee to represent them. The executive community will generally identify a chairperson, secretary, and treasurer.

The executive committee, with input from the general assembly and assistance from the district forest office develops an operation plan for the forest resource. The operation plan describes rights and responsibilities of the users and the harvesting and management plan. It specifically describes what can be collected and harvested and when, how the users contribute (labor or cash), how benefits are distributed (to whom and how, and free or payment), and specific management prescriptions such as protection, thinning, weeding, and planting.

Most community forests have very conservative operational plans.

The current rules of community forestry allow access to any aboveground resource (but not mining rights). Only the community forestry user group can sell products from the forest, not individuals.

The district forest office must approve the operational plan to ensure sound forest management practices. Once approved, the rights and responsibilities of the forest are handed over to the community, and this concludes the initial stage of community forestry implementation.

Most community forests have very conservative operational plans, mostly involving protection with only limited harvesting. Consequently, most of the community forests have regenerated.

Characteristics of Three Regions in Nepal

Three main physiographic regions exist in Nepal—the Terai, Mid-Hills, and High Mountains, whose geography, culture, and economies vary greatly from each other. Community forestry has been applied in all three with different results. The approach was first developed in the Mid-Hills, primarily in response to the forest-based agricultural subsistence lifestyle. Community forestry has only been implemented in the Terai since the early 1990s, and in the High Mountains, people have been adopting the community forestry model even in areas where no formal process exists (this is true only in some areas and not throughout the region). Implementation of community forestry has differed significantly among the three regions, influenced by environmental and socioeconomic factors. The impact of the approach has not surprisingly also varied, in particular when comparing the Mid-Hills and the Terai. The following sections highlight the unique features of these landscapes to provide context for policy recommendations.

Implementation of community forestry has differed significantly among the three regions, influenced by environmental and socioeconomic factors. The impact of the approach has not surprisingly also varied,

The Terai

The Terai, a flat extension of the Indo-Gangetic plain in the south of Nepal, is home to nearly half the population of Nepal and has major urban centers. The Terai's fertile soil and high population density (330 persons per square km) set it apart from other parts of the country.

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The Terai plains comprise about 487,300 ha of forestlands, whose main species is the high-value sal (Shorea robusta) (43 percent of total stem volume); a single mature sal tree may fetch US$1,000 or more. The Terai also provides habitat for globally important endangered species, such as the Asian rhinoceros and the Royal Bengal tiger, and a variety of lesser known, but equally important, species. Their presence generates significant revenues for local people through ecotourism. The region has the best road network in the country, so its forests are highly accessible. The region also borders India, which has a huge timber market; this presents tremendous potential and opportunity for future development and management, while posing an enormous threat to forest protection.

The indigenous population, primarily Tharu, once constituted the majority of inhabitants. The region's population has grown, however, since eradication of malaria in the 1950s. A steady influx of migrants from the hills has settled mostly in cities or created new settlements in forestlands, altering the demographics of the region. Most of the people now living in the northern part of the Terai are new migrants who either

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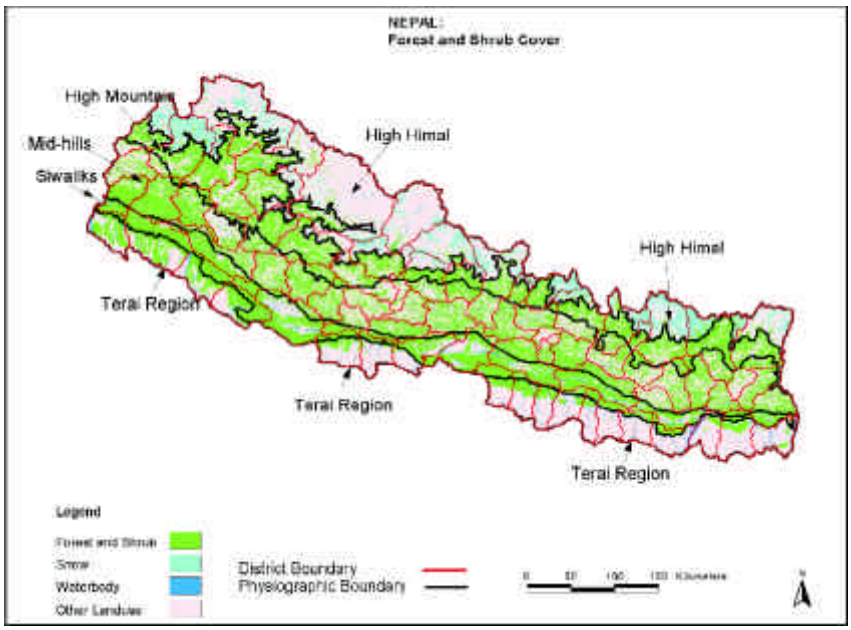
cleared the forest or bought land cleared by others. (The government has now legalized these migrants' occupancy in most parts of the country.) In the process, forestland has been lost. The new occupants have come between traditional forest users who reside in southern areas and the forests, which lie in the north. The indigenous groups are physically far from the forest on which they depend.

Mid-Hills

The Mid-Hills are located at an altitude of between 200 m and 3,000 m between the Terai and the High Mountains. The region's population is almost 10 million or 44 percent of Nepal's population. The Mid-Hills generally has few roads and poor access to urban centers and their markets. Goods are transported largely by animals, people or by air (plane or helicopter). Agriculture remains the primary source of livelihood for more than 90 percent of Mid-Hills people, mostly on a subsistence basis; livestock rearing is an integral part of the hill farming system.



Communities in the Mid-Hills generally tend to be well established with little in-migration, but noticeable out-migration, mostly for job opportunities. Although the region continues to grow at about 1.7 percent a year its percentage of Nepal's population has continually declined (from 65 percent in 1971 to 59 percent in 1981, 55 percent in 1991, and 44 percent in 2001).

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The region has eight tropical, subtropical, and lower temperate forest types: sal (Shorea robusta), subtropical deciduous, pine (Pinus roxburghii), katus-chilaune (Schima castonopsis), uttis (Alnus nepalensis), kharsu-gurans (oak-rhododendron), upper slope coniferous forests, and upper slope mixed hardwood.

Most Mid-Hills forests tend to be "managed" for fuel wood and fodder. According to Nepal's Master Plan for the Forestry Sector, about 65 percent of these forests have predominantly small-sized timber and only about 30 percent have large-sized timber. This is because the subsistence farming economy prevalent in rural areas of Nepal depends, directly or indirectly, on forests. They are the major source of fuel wood, fodder, animal bedding, fertilizer, timber, fiber, fruits, nuts, mushrooms, honey, vegetables, a wide variety of medicinal and aromatic plants, and many more products. Fuel wood from forests remains the major source of household energy (66 percent) followed by kerosene (13.5 percent), cow dung cakes (10 percent), and liquid propane gas (7.6 percent). Kerosene and liquid propane gas tend to be luxury items for rural hill people, primarily due to the added cost of transporting them. Wood fuel remains the only option for household energy supply, as dung is the major source of manure and not traditionally used as a fuel. Along traditional and established trading routes, migrant herders from the High Mountains use forestlands to graze their animals and collect fuel wood and fodder.

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Forests in the Mid-Hills are generally in fair condition, except near lucrative timber markets. Markets for fuel wood, food, and nontimber forest products (NTFPs) exist in district headquarters and along roadsides. Unlike the Terai, however, most Mid-Hills forests are not near roads.

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High Mountains

The High Mountains encompass the northernmost part of Nepal on the border with Tibet and falls north of the Mid-Hills. They normally start from an altitude of 2,300 m. The region's average population density is 33 persons per square km, compared with the national average of 157 persons per square km.

Despite the low population, resources are scarce and the climate is harsh. The region is characterised by high altitude, steep terrain sensitive to erosion, lack of irrigation, and isolation; with virtually no roads, walking to a road head or airport can take days. Most of the area is covered with forest, shrub, and pasture. Agricultural land is scarce. Highland people depend for their livelihoods on a combination of animal husbandry and agriculture, that is, seasonal pastoralism (or upland livestock herding) and upland dryfield farming. They also derive subsistence from many other natural resources.

Pastoralists, mostly indigenous ethnic groups, including Lamas, Tamang, Sherpa, Thami, and Jirel, are herders who move seasonally with their animals—sheep, goats, and chauri *(a crossbreed between yak and cow). These animals are key to pastoralists' livelihoods and central to their culture.*

Forests in the High Mountains can be broadly grouped into four types: montane/Himalayan moist temperate forest, Himalayan dry temperate forest, subalpine forest, and alpine scrub. These forests hold competing values: for herders and traders with livestock, the forests are essential grazing areas; for subsistence farmers, they provide key products such as fodder, fuel wood, heating wood, timber, bedding, medicines, and grass. Temperate forests also provide commercially traded, high-value NTFPs, including medicinal and aromatic plants, such as jatamasi, kutki, aatis, and shilajit, providing a major source of cash income for residents in some districts. In some areas, the forests and, more important, the mountains themselves are a worldwide attraction for ecotourism and other activities. Forests at lower elevations traditionally accessed by traders and pastoralists are just as important as sources of fodder, timber for shelter, and places for grazing livestock.

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Community Forestry Impacts on Landscapes and Livelihoods

Community forestry emerged in Nepal in part because people's livelihoods depend on forest resources. In this context, "livelihoods" refer to people's ability to meet their needs for food, shelter, and education and to improve their quality of life. Previous protective forest policy in Nepal failed because it did not provide incentives for sustainable forest management. The limited rights of access and use by rural communities encouraged short-term extractive activities, rather than more sustainable long-term management; as a result forests were degraded.

Community forestry succeeds because it recognizes that poverty and environmental issues must be addressed simultaneously to achieve progress on either. Forests in Nepal are not only key sources of subsistence and economic products, but also essential watersheds, wildlife habitat, centers of biodiversity, and CO_2 sinks; they are also important in erosion control. Nepal's urban and rural centers depend on a soundly managed landscape.

Community forestry succeeds because it recognizes that poverty and environmental issues must be addressed simultaneously to achieve progress on either.

Nepal's example stands alone—no other country has implemented community forestry for so long. Over the past 25 years, community forestry has changed the social and natural landscape of Nepal. This is an appropriate time to reflect on the current status of community forestry in Nepal, examine its outcomes, and determine what policies and practices should be changed to meet the goals of forestry management and poverty alleviation.

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Given community forestry's dual goals of improving the environment and alleviating poverty, how has this approach changed forest resources (landscapes) and people's lives (livelihoods)?

- **Landscapes.** The condition of community forests has generally improved greatly, while the national forests, have noticeably degraded.
- **Livelihoods.** Community forestry can be successful in improving livelihoods when people are included in the process and involved in decision making.

Community Forestry's Impact on Landscapes

In all areas of Nepal, conditions and the natural environment have generally improved in community and private forests. For example, the number and age distribution of plants in Koshi Hills forests have been improving, even though active forest management has not yet been widely adopted. In the rural landscapes of the Mid-Hills, more trees occur in private holdings now than 30 years ago. Most community forestry operational plans prescribe protection of forests with no or limited grazing and harvesting of fuel wood, fodder, and green materials. This has allowed these resources to regenerate.

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Not all community forest, however, have improved. In the High Mountains, residents excluded with the onset of community forestry from their traditional forests in neighboring villages and districts at lower elevations, began cutting trees in their own nearbyforests to extend pastureland and cleared subalpine fir forests to increase grasslands and temperate forests for grazing land. In high-altitude forest (between 2,000 and 4,000 m) of Sindhupalchok, forest area has decreased by 20 percent in the past 14 years; at the same time, shrublands and grasslands have increased significantly—13 and 6.5 percent, respectively.

Exclusion of users from distant areas has resulted in seasonal grazers bringing their herds to higher altitudes on more ecologically sensitive pasturelands, in the process, overgrazing and significantly reducing their productivity. Alpine and subalpine pasture are still in good condition, but are fully used. The good condition of high alpine pasture is directly related to indigenous pasture management systems in the district.

In the Terai, poorly functioning forest user groups—inactive committee members and a lack of awareness of roles and responsibilities of general members—have resulted in further degradation of some community forests. Disagreements on how the forest should be managed has sometimes resulted in conflicts and disputes, delaying decisions and resulting in ineffective forest management and overuse.

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In all three regions of Nepal, as community forests have been protected, nearby national forests have become more degraded. Most operational plans are conservative, requiring both user group members and those excluded from the user group to harvest their basic needs from the national forests. Land owners have been able to plant trees on their land (thus, increasing on-farm forests), but the landless are forced to meet their needsfor forest products and and land eslewhere. National forests continue to degrade, and people encroach more and more on them. If users cannot meet daily needs for products from their forests for 3–4

years, they obtain them from nearby government forests. District forest office (DFO) staff are not able to control, protect, or manage national forests. Despite restoration of forests through community forestry, the rate of forest loss outside community forests in the Mid-Hills and High Mountains, at 2.3 percent a year, is alarmingly high; however, without community forests, all the region's forests would likely be similarly degraded.

Despite improvement in community forests, availability of forest products has not necessarily increased at the household level nor has forest productivity. In a few instances, community-managed forests have enhanced production and productivity or even generated a surplus.

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Community Forestry's Impact on Livelihoods

In rural Nepal, people depend on forest resources for their livelihoods. Some depend on fodder, fuel wood, leaf litter, and small-diameter timber to support subsistence agriculture or collection of medicinal plants to provide income to buy enough food for the year, whereas others need access to forestlands to graze their animals. People's access to the forest and involvement in decision making directly affect the distribution of goods and benefits and, therefore, their livelihoods. Few places exist where access to forests is so important for people's daily survival.

Community forestry was specifically formulated to address livelihoods and natural resource management. Although the approach has undergone improvement in some cases, it still has shortcomings, for example, in inclusion and full participation of traditional users and distribution of benefits to them. Key components of community forestry that affect people's livelihoods is in forming the user group, making decisions, and distribution of benefits.

Community forestry was specifically formulated to address livelihoods and natural resource management. Although the approach has undergone improvement in some cases, it still has shortcomings.

Forming Forestry User Groups

Although Nepal's Master Plan for the Forestry Sector in 1988 and the Revised Forestry Sector Policy 2000 tried to define accessibility to forests and their products based on collectively recognized traditional use rights, many with traditional access have been excluded—especially distant and seasonal users, the poor, women, and low castes. In many cases, selection of forest user group members has been based on residency within a political boundary (village or district) and proximity to the forests in question. Yet, throughout Nepal, traditional users have not necessarily resided near forests. In the Terai, Mid-Hills, and High Mountains, this practice of using proximity and residency as a criteria to select users can deny access to forests on which the poor are dependent.

One of the challenges has been the approach for identifying users in the process of handing over community forests. The identification process has often been rushed, due to pressures district forest officers faced in trying to meet their goal of handing over a specific number of forests within the year. They often have streamlined the process by engaging local leaders to identify users—reminiscent of panchayat forestry. As a result, the political leaders often become leaders in the forest user group and include only their constituents as users. In addition, many foresters lack the skills needed to ask the right questions in identifying users. Many of the excluded traditional users are unaware of the process used to develop the forest user group in the first place. Exclusion of key users of the forests, however, fails to fulfill the intent of the forest sector policy and constitutes one of the biggest problems facing marginalized people in Nepal.

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Exclusion of Users in the Terai

Ethnic and tribal groups traditionally dependent on the forests originally inhabited the Terai, but they are now noticeably absent from forest user groups. Tharu and other indigenous groups live in the lowlands, which were once richly forested. Major harvesting in the late 1800s and early 1900s to supply wood for India's railroads cleared many of the lowland forests, leaving forests primarily in the northern part of the Terai. Additional deforestation has pushed the forest farther from Tharu settlements, whereas hill migrants who settled in the forest or former forest now reside closest to remaining forests. In the Terai, most members of forest user groups tend to be well-off villagers (predominantly hill migrants), are more active and better informed about community forests, and are the first to gain control over and monopolize use of community forests. One of the main criteria used to select forest user groups—proximity to forests—has excluded or marginalized traditional users, primarily ethnic minorities, who live in the southern part of the region, while including recent settlers. This has resulted in conflict when traditional users try to obtain products from their forests. Many have turned to national forests and, in some cases, have decreased their consumption of forest products (in terms of type and quantity).

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Community forestry in the Terai in its present form is problematic, given the loss of traditional user rights, because most of the community forests have been handed over to nearby residents—newly migrated residents who have settled near rich patches of forest—to the exclusion of traditional users.

Exclusion of Users in the High Mountains

Raising and herding livestock is a key component of the High Mountains economy and depends on migration. Livestock, such as goats, sheep, and chauri, provide food (milk and meat), leather, wool, fertilizer, and transportation. Residents of the High Mountains have traditionally had rights to forests beyond their village and often beyond their district. With the onset of community forestry, however, user groups have generally ignored seasonal users.

Establishment of community forestry user groups in the Mid-Hills resulted in exclusion of traditional seasonal users from the High Mountains. As a result, entire populations dependent on sheep have changed to subsistence farming in the High Mountains, a fragile, nonproductive ecosystem. Community forestry arguably contributed to some degree to the 1998 famine in which 400 people died.

Establishment of community forestry user groups in the Mid-Hills resulted in exclusion of traditional seasonal users from the High Mountains.

Community Forestry and Migrating Traders in Humla

In Humla, a remote district in the west of Nepal bordering Tibet. It can take 7–10 days to walk from the closest road to the district's headquarters. The economy has traditionally been based on a barter system of trading salt, grain, and wool trade between Tibet to lower elevations in Nepal, carried mainly on the backs of sheep and Tibetan goats. The system has not only supported the economy and food supply of Humla, but also supplied food for the Taklakot district of Tibet. Although the onset of road building in Taklakot began changing this system, sheep have continued to play a key role in the Humla economy for food, wool, and manure.

These Humla traders have long spent more than half their time outside the district, traveling along the trade route to graze their sheep at lower altitudes in the winter. They had traditional rights to forest and grazing land in districts along their route, including the more southern districts of Bajura, Achham, Kalikot, Bajhang, Dadeldhura, and Kailali; Achham was one of the major traditional wintering grounds for livestock for three months of the year.

A village dependent on this trade was Bargaun, which 10 years ago had 26,000 sheep—on average300 per household. The sheep and goats transported salt and grains, could travel the various altitudes on narrow trails, and provided wool, meat, and good manure for agriculture. Bargaun stored the grains and supplied all the food grain needed for Simikot (the district headquarters), creating about 800 jobs for young men herding the sheep.

Winter grazing land for the sheep at lower elevations has traditionally been in the forests of Achham; however, user groups in these hill districts did not include herders and traders from Humla. Forest user groups along the route have also harassed herders by imposing excessive fees for passing through community forests, not allowing their sheep to graze, capturing the sheep, and physically beating the herders.

The Humlis' lack of access to traditional grazing lands at lower elevations due to community forestry caused many sheep to die, whereas other Humlis, disheartened by such deaths, have sold or slaughtered most of their sheep. Bargaun's 26,000 sheep of a decade ago have been reduced to only 2,900 today. This has greatly affected their agriculture, food and wool supply, as well as job opportunities for young men.

In 1998, 400 people died in Humla due to famine and a diarrhea epidemic. Although a variety of events contributed to this tragedy, excluding Humlis from traditionally used land with the onset of community forestry certainly contributed to their food insecurity. The spirit and intention of the policy to provide equity and access to the users has failed.

At higher elevations of central Nepal, a similar scenario has played out. User groups were formed based on residency. Traditional users from other villages and from other districts were excluded. Herders, primarily of chauri and yak, are not allowed to use distant pastures and forests and, in many cases, even trails through community forests (see box on seasonal grazing).

People cope by either grazing within their limited area or leaving to find alternative employment (e.g., in Kathmandu and even India or Saudi Arabia). In other community forests, traditional herders have had to concentrate their livestock within their own village boundaries, resulting in forest degradation, overgrazing, and loss of NTFPs and biodiversity. Moreover, in some cases, a community forest is situated on the route to an alpine pasture, but traditional herders are not even allowed to enter the community forest. It is not possible to cross the territory of the community forest in one day. Livestock farmers have no other options than excessive lopping of kharsu, clearing fir forest to increase grassland area, and overgrazing of nearby available pasturelands.

Community forests within the same area have also excluded traditional users, further marginalizing them. In Humla, people walk 1–2 days to a forest to collect jaributi (high-value NTFPs, usually medicinal and aromatic plants). For those with little land, sales from jaributi form a significant part of annual income. Many people who had collected medicinal plants and other NTFPs for many years are now prohibited from going inside the community forest or must pay an extra charge to the local people; as a result, they sometimes risk entering the forest illegally, hoping to avoid the notice of local people.

Seasonal Grazing

This cultural system is characterised by seasonal movements between *kharkas* (pastures). In spring, grazers move their herds of yak or *chauri* and sheep to alpine areas higher than 4,000 m to summer pastures and in the autumn to low-lying areas below 2,000 m in river valleys or village sites for the winter. This grazing system characterises the patterns of seasonal grazers of the High Mountains. Within their traditional pastures, grazers have their own indigenous system of managing pastures. Herds are usually moved up to alpine pastures before the last week of June and stay there no more than two months before descending around early September. Pasturelands located along the trails of seasonal grazers are also used briefly, usually for no more than two or three days, during the upward spring or downward autumn migrations of the herds.

Existing customary systems clearly define rights to specific patches of forest for specific periods. Grazers often make shelters within the forest or pasture as temporary homes, while their animals graze. Each *kharka* has well-defined boundaries; encroachment on someone else's territory is considered a punishable offence.

This migrating system is based on the environment, weather, and livestock. High-altitude pastures can be covered in snow in the winter and have a limited season. *Chauri* are bred to combine the hardiness of the yak with the ability to travel to lower elevations. The seasonal grazers are required to travel beyond their own village, district, and sometimes region.

A member of a forest user group in Doti, was heard to say, *"Previously this forest was overused and remained unprotected, because government-appointed forest guards did not bother to protect it. Seven years ago, they declared it a community forest; we elected a committee to look after it, but the committee people behave even worse with us when it comes to collecting forest products. Our wealthy neighbors graze their cattle in community forest and bring fuel wood and other materials any time they need, yet nobody stops them."*

Decision Making within Community Forestry User Groups

Decision making within community forestry contributes to equity and ensures people's livelihoods are met. Poor community forestry user groups decision making processes can result in the group ignoring the needs of women, the poor, occupational castes (such as blacksmiths), and the marginalized. Many of these groups are not involved in decision making and have been denied their rights, leading to distrust and disinterest in the process.

The intention behind community forestry is to have a user group with an executive committee representing the users and making decisions based on member input. Community forestry general assemblies and executive committee meetings provide opportunities for people to participate and make decisions on future activities, forest management, harvesting, and distribution of benefits. The committee's job is to get the past year's program and expenditures audited and endorsed and to finalize the annual plan with input from the general assembly and incorporating issues raised by the members. The committee should also summarize the discussions of the general assembly to form guidelines for the community forest's operation plan.

Community forestry user groups often ignore the needs of women, the poor, occupational castes (such as blacksmiths), and the marginalized.

In most cases, the committee makes decisions regardless of users' needs. Several issues contribute to this process:

- Membership in forest user group committees generally does not adequately represent the poor, women, and disadvantaged. Even if they do, men, often from an upper caste or class, dominate user group executive committees and their meetings. The majority of women, landless, poor, and disadvantaged remain silent spectators of community forestry processes.
- The decision makers in community forestry make decisions based on their own interests and are unaware of or ignore the priorities and concerns of the poor. Most disadvantaged groups do not know about community forestry and their user rights and responsibilities.
- In the Terai, the timing and length of meetings prevent some users from attending. Most community forestry user groups in the Terai have large memberships (more than 100 households), which restricts effective interaction and discussion during the meetings; people have no other process through which to share their concerns.
- In some cases, decision making lacks transparency. For example, in Jhapa, a user group for one community forest noted that their meetings primarily entailed formal speeches by local dignitaries, which left no time to discuss community forestry issues.

- To prevent decision making by only a few people, most user groups require the presence of a minimum number of people—a quorum—at a general assembly to make decisions. A provision in some user group constitutions states that, without the required quorum at the general assembly, the assembly will be held later when a significantly lower quorum can be reached. If this second meeting fails to achieve the lower quorum, the meeting is again held later when an even lower quorum is reached. This system is practiced mostly in Terai community forests and in larger community forestry user groups.
- Many user group members are hardly aware of their own community forest constitution and operational plan and lack understanding of their rights and responsibilities toward effective functioning of their forest user group.
- Although the forest sector policy has tried to define accessibility to forests and their products, linked with collectively recognized traditional use rights, the policy has failed to define clear criteria and indicators.

Many user group members are hardly aware of their own community forest constitution.

In principle, the general assembly directs or guides the executive committee on how to run the forests and should evaluate and monitor the committee's work. In practice, the executive committee tends to control the user group and mandates the use of the forests without considering the true needs of the users. Executive committees, intentionally or not, tend to overlook the users, make decisions, and implement community forestry on their own, controlling access to information and deterring users from opportunities, awareness, and capacity development. They also regulate forest product distribution by imposing membership fees, fees for collection, and prices for many products, Such regulations are often not rational and especially not conducive to the welfare of landless, poor, and deprived user members.

Effective participation would involve not only representation in user groups and labor contributions, but also membership on executive committees, attendance at meetings, and consideration of member views in decision making.

User Group Operational Plans

Operational plans are written documents describing how a forest will be managed and laying out various people's roles and responsibilities. The user group (often through the executive committee) prepares and submits such a plan to the DFO; this signifies the beginning of community management. Plans consist of set management prescriptions for different blocks and subblocks of a community forest to guide the user group in managing the forest. In the early stages of community forestry, the operational plan was considered a simple and flexible management contract between the Department of Forests and the user group. With additional experience, however, such plans have begun to encompass prescriptions relating to forest protection, management, development, harvesting, and distribution. Based on a management goal, the plans can prescribe climber cutting, cleaning, weeding, pruning, coppicing or pollarding, thinning, managing regenerations and planting, and so on. Some plans include intercropping for short-term income generation and NTFP production and collection.

Distribution of Benefits

The benefits from community forests vary, depending on the area and needs, but include all products and/or income from products. Those who make decisions on benefits determine what will be harvested, how often, and how it will be distributed. Although the forest user group should decide these questions based on member needs and priorities, committee members are often the ones who actually make the decisions.

The most common forest management practice has been to protect the resource; most forest plans also focus on restoring and protecting the resource and allow only limited collection of forest products. This practice hurts those who depend on forest resources for their livelihoods.

Those who make decisions on benefits determine what will be harvested, how often, and how it will be distributed.

Community forest management has so far not moved much beyond conventional protection, because (a) operational plans have often failed to capture the interest of all users and have tended to be protection oriented, (b) alternative management practices (for timber, NTFPs, or fuel wood) have not been promoted, and (c) DFO field staff have limited knowledge on managing for subsistence needs. In most cases, surplus forest products are sold and used for community development activities.[1]

The most common forest management practice has been to protect the resource . . . This practice hurts those who depend on forest resources for their livelihoods.

Terai. Larger forest user group executive committees in the Terai have hired laborers to protect and manage forests (weeding, climber cutting, liberating, thinning, pruning, coppicing, regeneration management, and so on) and collect and market products. The committees have also established depots for selling and distributing products. Some community forestry user groups give or sell products to households. Where products are sold (generally the larger community forests), they establish or fix a price for all user group members, and surpluses are sold to outsiders (nonmembers), usually at a higher rate. These larger community forests operate like big forest management enterprises and can be quite successful in generating revenue. Poor and marginalized members, however, do not benefit. They often lack the resources to pay for forest products, but need them the most.

Money generated from selling forest products is partly spent on activities related to community development, such as graveling roads, construction of culverts, and support for schools and clubs. Many of the poorer families cannot readily benefit from these improvements when they cannot afford to send their children to school or use vehicles. Remaining resources earned from forest products are reinvested in the forest.

Mid-Hills. Typical operational plans in the Mid-Hills allow rotational grazing among blocks of land.

1. The Forest Act 1993 (first amendment) had a provision that 25 percent of income from community forests should be spent for community forest development. Such expenditures usually include paying salaries of hired staff and allowances for committee members, fireline construction, barbed wire fencing for the community forest, construction of office buildings, timber yards, shades, and establishing plantations.

Money generated from selling forest products is partly spent on activities related to community development.

Fuel wood and small-sized timber and poles are harvested during forest cleaning operations, which are undertaken one to four times a year based on the condition of the forest. Every household member must participate in such harvesting days or forego obtaining forest products.

In addition to contributing manual labor for cleaning and harvesting, every household may pay for its share of forest products. Households are generally provided an equal share of fuel wood from the total harvest and collection. The executive committee regulates the collection of fodder, compost material, and leaf litter based on availability and demand; households pay a fixed amount of money per head load unless it is abundant. In some forest user groups, annually available timber is marked and auctioned within the group. In others, the executive committee shortlists the most needy households and allocates standing trees to them on a fixed price per cubic foot. In many cases, timber and fuel wood is made available to the poor and victims of natural disasters (landslides, floods, fires, and so on) at subsidized prices.

In areas near markets paying high prices, user groups often decide to sell forest products for cash, rather than allocating products to their members for subsistence.

In areas near markets paying high prices, user groups often decide to sell forest products for cash, rather than allocating products to their members for subsistence. Growing road networks in the Mid-Hills have made urban areas accessible, and the tendency is for user groups to export fuel wood and timber to nearby urban centers and sometimes to Kathmandu for their higher prices, even though user group members need basic forest products.

High Mountains. The sale of timber and other forest products—NTFPs, especially medicinal plants and lokta (a plant used for Nepali papermaking)—can bring a considerable amount of money in the High Mountains, in one case, more than Rs 300,000 in one year for one community forest. In this case, the forest user group spent the money on various ceremonial activitiessuch as general assembly parties, welcome parties for government officers, and so on, and no activities were launched to uplift the livelihood of poor members of the user group.

Middle- and high-income households accrue the most benefits from community forests.

Based on such distribution systems, middle- and higher-income households accrue the most benefits from community forests. Poor users actually contribute relatively more to community forests compared with what they receive. Although everyone must contribute through fees or labor, financial benefits supporting the communities rarely benefit marginalized groups. For example, when forests are protected, the poorer forest-dependent households (generally women) must walk farther to distant forests to collect for their basic needs. Landowners of the same user group often plant trees on their property for their forest product needs. This is one reason on-farm forestry has increased in the past 20 years.

The poor are inadvertently discriminated against in some community forests, where the users have

earned income to contribute to local development activities. These development priorities may not consider the needs and aspirations of the poor and disadvantaged. The poor often cannot afford to send their children to school. Water taps and roads do not necessarily address the most pressing problems of marginalized groups. There is little evidence that policy objectives on benefiting "poorer communities or poorer people within communities" have been achieved under community forest. To the contrary, poor and disadvantaged groups—particularly women, the poor, and marginalized—have generally been negatively impacted; some have lost real, effective access to "common property" forests, once they became community forests.

In summary, community forests may not result in more benefits to the poor . Management of forests and distribution of their products may ignore the traditional dependence of the poor, women, and occupational castes on forests for their livelihoods. Where products are sold to members, the poor do not have the ability to pay. Some people from the occupational castes (e.g., potters, blacksmiths, alcohol distillers, and so on), who have traditionally depended most on fuel wood for their livelihoods, have often been discriminated against under community forests.

Development priorities may not consider the needs and aspirations of the poor and disadvantaged.

General Recommendations

Based on studies and results of the workshop, "Equity Issues in Community Forestry for Sustainable Development" held in Kathmandu on October 4, 2002, the following policy and implementation recommendations emerged to address the identified problems. They are organized under the categories of "landscapes" and "livelihoods." Each category contains general recommendations with specific recommendations focusing on community forestry in each of the three regions.

Social Equity

Social equity refers to unequal power relations between the rich and poor, high and low castes, women and men, and so on, characterised by both cooperation and conflict. Community forestry should ideally address such power relations with respect to forest management and use, as forest user groups gradually gain maturity and experience on achieving sustainability. This has yet to take place.

Equity problems are rooted in:

- Traditional attitudes discriminating on the basis of caste, class, gender, and ethnicity
- Significantly low levels of awareness on community forest policy
- Inadequate representation and virtually no involvement of all marginalized groups in setting institutional rules and priorities
- Lack of innovative forest management interventions that support livelihoods
- Dominance of executive committees and elites within user groups may not have the ability to pay. The occupational castes (e.g., potters, blacksmiths, alcohol distillers and so on, who have traditionally depended most on fuel wood for their livelihoods, may lose access when forests become community forests. Development priorities of the user groups as a whole, may not reflectthe needs of its poorest members, especially women.

Coping Strategies

Communities dependent on forests in the Mid-Hills have been coping with the changes brought about by community forestry in a number of waysby growing more fuel and fodder trees on private holdings and reducing the number of cows they rear, gradually switching to buffalo rearing and even stall feeding. Relatively poorer farmers dependent on goat rearing for income are sustaining fewer goats, and many landless and occupational castes dependent on fuel wood from forests either look to adjoining national forests, adopt alternative means of livelihood (e.g., as porter or wage laborer), or leave their homes for better work elsewhere. In the High Mountains, people have reduced their herds and flocks of livestock, switching to agriculture, or migrated elsewhere to other occupations.

Demand for chemical fertilizers is gradually growing in Hill districts, indicating a coping strategy of well-off farmers against the shortage of green materials from forests and less manure. Additionally, land use is gradually changing, especially in the eastern, central, and western Mid-Hills districts to reduce dependency on forests and respond to market changes. For example, many in Hill communities have started intensive farming of green vegetables and cardamom and commercial cultivation of alder and fruit trees The benefits, however, of such improved land use practices rarely accrue to the poor and landless, except by extending the wage market for them.

Landscapes

Implement a landscape approach to forest management that includes community forestry alongside national forests, leasehold forestry, watershed management, and park management

Community forests fall within a landscape, whose unique qualities or attributes should also be prioritized or managed. At a national or regional level, policy makers and planners need to look at needs (watershed, subsistence products, biodiversity, and so on) and priorities in the working landscape. Landsat imagery and geographic information systems can be used to identify watersheds, biodiversity corridors, timber-producing areas and their relationship to communities, and other key forest management regimes.

Community forests fall within a landscape, whose unique qualities or attributes should also be prioritized or managed.

This landscape approach should include as a priority the contribution of forest resources to alleviating poverty . A landscape approach would (a) help community forestry user groups and DFOs to identify their priorities for managing specific forest areas, (b) boost people's participation in helping meet the goals of park, watershed, and national forest policy, and (c) help determine what forests would be best for community forests based on local people's needs.

In some cases, management of sensitive watersheds and biodiversity habitats as environmental services should be considered an objective of local community forests. In essence, an environmental service is a benefit provided to neighbors and the world at large through conscientious natural resource stewardship. Placing an economic (or qualitative) value on provision of these services enables those managing the natural resource potentially to receive transfer payments from those who benefit from these services, for example, users or beneficiaries of watersheds, such as residents of cities or hydropower utilities. Mechanisms could similarly be developed to compensate user groups for protecting and managing forests for wildlife.

Managers of national forests, parks, and watersheds can conversely benefit from lessons learned from people's participation in community forestry. Managers can develop new models in which people participate in managing watersheds, national forests, and national parks, for example, where local people benefit without being handed over full responsibility for resource management (see collaborative forestry below). Community forestry has demonstrated the need for local people's involvement for successful management of a number of Nepal's forests. These lessons can be transferred and adapted to manage other forests of Nepal.

Solving poverty and equity issues in other forestry regimes, such as leasehold forests and collaborative forest management (see below) may help address the economic problems of excluded or marginalized groups. Leasehold forests are designed for those below the poverty level to ensure they have access to forest resources to meet their basic needs. Leasehold and other proposed models (collaborative forestry and corporate forestry) could complement community forestry with its focus on poverty alleviation.

Leasehold and other proposed models could complement community forestry with its focus on poverty alleviation.

Community forestry policy should be flexible and reflect regional variation and enable new models for forest management

Community forestry evolved under specific conditions found in the Terai, Mid-Hills, and High Mountains, each of which has significantly different economic, environmental, social, demographic, and political conditions that, in many instances, affect the impact of community forestry.

Community forestry evolved under specific conditions ... that, in many instances, affect the impact of community forestry.

A policy developed for the Mid-Hills may not be useful for residents or forests of the High Mountains. Exclusion of high-altitude seasonal users in the Mid-Hills, for example, has resulted in greater degradation and overgrazing of forest resources, as well as increased poverty, in the more ecologically sensitive High Mountains. Forests and pasturelands are not as resilient at higher altitudes as at lower elevations. True users of any forest may reside in several different villages or districts, so user group meetings with such dispersed populations may be impractical. Other forest management regimes may be better at ensuring resources are not destroyed and people are not marginalized.

New models. In the Terai and possibly other areas where users do not live in the immediate vicinity, user groups could be formed like **corporations** in which users are shareholders. Users could buy shares either with cash, labor, or goods. The poor could work in the forest for benefits, which would be split (either as products or cash from products) among the shareholders. Poorer and disadvantaged groups could collect basic goods such as grass, fallen firewood, and fodder.

Forests would be managed for economic return. Such a model would best be applied in Terai forests that have high economic value. Cash benefits would go directly to individuals and households (shareholders) and not to the group.

The revised Forestry Sector Policy 2000 laid out the concept of **collaborative forestry management** based on Joint Forest Management of India managing other forest areas (such as national forests in the Terai). Details on how it would work are still not clear. The goal of this concept is to seek the participation and collaboration of the central government, local government, local people, and/or private interests. Roles, responsibilities, and benefit sharing among these collaborators needs clear differentiation. The approach, if carefully designed and implemented, may resolve several equity-related issues. Local people who collaborate may benefit directly from the program. It also may provide a mechanism to manage valuable forests on a long rotation. A collaborative approach could also be used to manage medicinal plants and NTFPs, their intensive in situ conservation, ex situ cultivation and processing, flora and fauna farming (e.g., orchids, floriculture, butterflies, pheasants, and so on), and ecotourism. Some donor-assisted projects are trying to pilot this program in central region in the Terai, but the government and other policymakers should also look at developing this model.

The revised Forestry Sector Policy 2000 laid out the concept of collaborative forestry management *based on Joint Forest Management of India managing other forest areas.*

Manage forests for benefits and services

The most common practice is to develop operational plans that focus on protecting the forest or harvesting modest amounts of forest products; few forests are managed for specific goods, benefits, or services. As mentioned above, specific parcels of land should be managed for specific environmental benefits (watershed or wildlife). For example, the Chuira Hills in the Terai are a key watershed for downstream users. Forests of the lower Terai are potentially key corridors for linking valuable wildlife habitat and national parks.

User needs—for timber, grazing, NTFPs, and subsistence products—must also be considered. In Koshi Hills, production of farming inputs could be enhanced three to five times through intensive forest management.

User needs—for timber, grazing, NTFPs, and subsistence products—must also be considered.

The Terai could benefit from intensive forest management using sound silvicultural practices to maximize production and the value specifically of sal forests; however, this should ensure the livelihoods of poor people dependent on the forest, possibly in the form of employment. Intensive management of forest has tremendous potential for employment.

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More than 100 species of medicinal plants and NTFPs or jaributi are traditionally consumed and traded in Nepal; the majority come from forests of the Mid-Hills. Jaributi has great potential for contributing to the

User groups and district forest staff in general need sound and simple scientific information to manage forests for the desired products and services.

national poverty alleviation program, while maintaining the diversity of forest ecosystems under community forest management. Management of NTFPs could increase incomes (in relatively short rotations) and support the landless and poor. Some forest user groups have already started managing and cultivating chiraita (Swertia chirayita and its varieties) in some parts of eastern Mid-Hill districts.

DFO field staff, compared with rural people, know little about most jaributi. Detailed inventory and assessment of the stock, distribution, and status of different NTFPs is neither available nor monitored. Furthermore, policy on NTFPs fails to support their conservation at the community level. NTFP promotion should get preference in community forestry, especially in the Mid-Hills and High Mountains to integrate biodiversity conservation with poverty alleviation. User groups and district forest staff in general need sound and simple scientific information to manage forests for the desired products and services.

Clarify contradicting policies as related to ownership of natural resources.

The forest policy and the national decentralization policy contradict each other and need rewriting so they complement each other at the local level.

The rights, roles, and responsibilities of community forestry user groups, village development committees (VDCs), and district development committees (DDCs) need clarification. The VDC is the village level administrative unit (replacing the village panchayat), and the DDC is the district level administrative unit. The forest policy and the national decentralization policy contradict each other and need rewriting so they complement each other at the local level.

Section 25(1) of the Forest Act (1993) states that community forestry user groups are entitled to sell, distribute, or use forest products (including timber, NTFPs, rock, sand, soil, stones, and wildlife that are not restricted by other laws) from their community forest. They can also fix the price of such products.

The Local Self-Governance Act of 1999, however, recognizes local bodies—DDCs and VDCs—as the focal agencies for local development and empowers them to plan, prioritize, implement, coordinate, and evaluate all development activities at their respective levels.[1] It states that natural heritage (which includes forests, lakes, ponds, and rivers) is the property of a VDC and that a DDC can sell the sand, stone, soil, driftwood, bone, horn, and hide of wildlife not protected by other laws (section 218). Under this act, local bodies also have ownership and control of natural resources.

1 The act conflicts with at least twenty-two other acts, under which sectoral agencies operate and does not address the relationship with or role of local community organizations, such as the community forestry user groups.

The goal should be to establish a mechanism for sharing defined roles and responsibilities among user groups, VDCs, and DDCs and to increase the commitment and support of local bodies in sustaining the community forestry user groups and forests. The Local Self-Governance Act will have to be reviewed and amended with clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of local bodies and user groups at both the VDC and DDC levels, recognizing that user groups should be organized beyond the political boundary of a VDC. This will provide a legal basis for defining the control of natural resources between VDCs and user groups. Some steps can and should be taken immediately to facilitate this process. At the VDC level, necessary steps may include the following:

- Organize a monthly interaction and consultation meeting of a community forestry user group and VDC at the various range-posts throughout the district
- Form a VDC-level natural resource management coordination committee
- Have VDC representation on the user group executive committee and user group representation on the VDC and/or its council.

At the DDC level, steps may include establishing a coordination committee or reorganizing and activating the existing industry, forest and environment committee in each DDC to focus on the forestry sector.

The industry, forest, and environment committee headed by a member of the DDC is too general and said to be inactive. Either this committee should be reorganized and activated or a new committee established to coordinate forestry sector programs and address issues that cut across several VDCs (e.g., boundary conflicts).

The DFO currently has judicial authority, which cannot be practiced if the natural resources management falls under the DDC. Furthermore, forest user groups may potentially lose their independent status, should they fall under the DDC. As pointed out in this study, users are also not always from the local village, and user groups should include users who live a considerable distance from the forest, village, or DDC jurisdiction.

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Livelihoods and Equity

Ensuring equity in community forest programs is critical for achieving social justice and the success of community forestry programs.

Target disadvantaged groups

Ensuring equity in community forest programs is critical for achieving social justice and the success of community forestry programs. The most forest-dependent members of the community—the poor, women, and disadvantaged —find themselves at the periphery of the community forest development process and unable to express their concerns in community forest management discussions. Forest user groups need to institutionalize equitable and democratic processes to ensure that these groups—which together constitute a majority in rural Nepal—are included in decision making and receive ample and direct benefits at the household level.

Management and use rules spelled out in operational plans of the majority of forest user groups do not reflect people's dependency on forests for livelihood or its nature and type. The executive committee needs adequate representation of the poor, women, and disadvantaged and needs to secure their effective participation.

From identifying forests and their users to preparing operational plans, community forestry should be process oriented, not target oriented. All potential traditional users—regardless of caste, class, gender,ethnicity, and settlement basis—must be included in and informed about community forestry.

Raise awareness

The process of selecting and organizing forest user groups involves educating and involving people in the process of community forestry, a key step in raising awareness of community forestry and its benefits to participants. This process should include all potential users of the forest, including seasonal users. Adequate social mobilization can also help empower marginalized people within the community by making them aware of their status and rights and enabling their participation. This would also improve their nominal presence on most executive committees, in terms of numbers and expression of concerns.

Identify true users of forests

User groups are currently formed by classifying people within a specific area as users. One of the major lessons learned to date is that this process excludes key local and distant users who are dependent on the forest resources. Several steps can be taken to ensure all users are included. From identifying forests and their users to preparing operational plans, community forestry should be process oriented, not target oriented. All potential traditional users—regardless of caste, class, gender,ethnicity, and settlement basis—must be included in and informed about community forestry; such approaches have been employed in

many donor-supported project areas and the lessons learned need replication to ensure continued dialogue and negotiation, especially between "solely forest dependent" and "relatively less forest dependent" users.

The rights of **distant users** should be recognized and safeguarded. The approaches to this differ in the Terai compared with the Mid-Hills. In the Terai, one might include distant users in the community forest, categorizing them into different classes based on their forest-based needs and the contributions they can make. In the Mid-Hills, one might establish a mechanism or process by which migrant or seasonal users have tenure within community forests. DFOs and community forestry user groups should be obliged to include traditional users and traditional uses, regardless of their village (VDC) or district of residence. Greater attention can be paid in forming the groups and allowing flexibility in adding users in the future. Both user groups and distant users also need to identify ways for distant users to contribute to the group—either through seasonal labor, cash, or goods. A mechanism for transfer of payments can be established for distant users to contribute to community forests. As an intermediate step, a workshop or meeting with DFOs of key districts and representatives of community forests could begin discussion of key issues and identification of solutions.

Once organized, community forestry user groups must keep the doors open to those with traditional access and use rights who may have initially been excluded.

Once organized, community forestry user groups must keep the doors open to those with traditional access and use rights who may have initially been excluded. This can happen during an added consolidation phase of the community forestry process as well as afterward. Its purpose would be to strengthen the capacity of the executive committee, create awareness, and empower user group members, especially the poor, women, and disadvantaged, through wider consultations on provisions of the constitution and operational plan. This may include side meetings at which marginalized groups can voice their concerns, opinions, and needs and learn of their rights, responsibilities, and relationships with other user members. The meetings can also prepare and psychologically empower people, so they become agents, not victims, of change. The goal is to facilitate user groups in identifying and prioritizing their local development opportunities.

The outcomes of this added phase would be to (a) enhance awareness and empowerment of all users, especially the potentially excluded, (b) refine the constitution to promote transparent and democratic functioning of community forestry user groups, (c) evaluate executive committees functioning within the framework of the constitution, and (d) develop an operational plan that addresses the needs of all members. This phase would require regular and intensive support from DFO field staff, facilitating agencies and other service providing agencies within and outside the district.

Problems in the community management of forests that concern human well-being cannot be dealt with just technically; they are equally affected by political, social, and economic inequalities prevalent in societies regarding resource use and ownership.

Community forestry currently does not allow individuals to profit from forest resources.

Balance equity between user groups

Within districts and throughout the country, great disparity exists among community forestry user groups. Some have ample forests that are rich in natural resources; others are small and degraded by many users. Although community forestry cannot ensure that all forests and user groups are the same size, some effort can be made to ensure neighboring groups and forests are somewhat equally distributed.

Improve support to forest user groups

As community forestry matures, user groups need assistance that the DFO cannot necessarily provide; the best role of the government is to plan, allocate, monitor, evaluate, and regulate, and many user groups have the resources to hire expert outside consultants. Other tasks, such as preparing operational plans, conducting surveys, and advising on sustainable harvesting regimes, are probably best outsourced to specialized service providers, including private consultants or companies, NGOs, community forestry user group networks such as FECOFUN, or other user groups. In anticipation of this need, the Institute of Forestry should continue to develop curricula or short-term training to prepare a cadre of professional foresters with practical skills for hire to forest user groups. The institute could also develop training courses and workshops for the user groups. One immediate need is to assist user groups in inventorying the forests and preparing operational plans.

Problems in the community management of forests that concern human well-being cannot be dealt with just technically; they are equally affected by political, social, and economic inequalities prevalent in societies regarding resource use and ownership. Traditionally trained foresters lack the skills to bring heterogeneous groups together, advise on accounting, or facilitate a meeting. Social scientists such as sociologists could assist in identifying users, educating community members about community forestry and facilitating community forestry user groups in effectively working together.

Enable individuals or households to earn income

Community forestry currently does not allow individuals to profit from forest resources. Permitting poor and disadvantaged individuals to engage in environmentally sound, forest-based income-generating activities could help increase equity within user groups. Activities could include community and/or collaborative in situ conservation, farming, and microenterprise development for commercially viable species.

Participatory forestry programs must develop mechanisms to distribute benefits down to individuals, households, and/or targeted groups within communities to play a meaningful role in poverty alleviation. Forests, in addition to providing basic subsistence-based products have also provided income-generating activities supporting or supplementing the livelihood of many. In the Mid-Hills, forest-based products include bamboo for baskets, grasses for roofs, agricultural implements, mushrooms, cardamom, bark for paper, and more. Other NTFPs include fruits, seeds, yeast, vegetables, mushrooms, fresh bamboo shoots, medicinal plants, dyes, tanning materials, and so on.

Ensure that revenue benefit marginalized groups

The Revised Forestry Sector Policy 2000 mandates 40 percent of revenue to the government on the sale of forest products by the user group outside the group. Twenty-five percent goes to the local government (VDC and DDC), and the other 15 percent goes to the national treasury. The **majority of these funds** should go directly to benefit marginalized and distant users. This could be in the form of a revolving fund that some could access at little or no interest and/or be used for an emergency fund for funerals, weddings, and disasters. This fund could be used to provide post-formation services to economically weak community user groups that cannot pay for such services.

Participatory forestry programs must develop mechanisms to distribute benefits down to individuals, households, and/or targeted groups within communities to play a meaningful role in poverty alleviation.

2. The act conflicts with at least twenty-two other acts, under which sectoral agencies operate and does not address the relationship with or role of local community organizations, such as the community forestry user groups.

Next Steps

Adjusting the policies and practices in community forestry requires a team effort. The government cannot take all this on alone; it requires multiple organizations and institutions to work together on the effort. Based on strengths and expertise, the following are suggested roles:

His Majesty's Government, National Planning Commission

- Clarify the contradictions of the Local Self-Governance Act of 1999 and the Forest Act of 1993.

Department of Forests

- Implement a landscape approach to forest management and look at community forestry within the context of other forests and needs
- Adjust the community forestry process to include a consolidation phase
- Allow for variations in community forestry and support new models in forest management
- Mandate inclusion of traditional distant users; ensure the local village or district does not define user groups
- Balance inequities among user groups
- Enable individuals or households to earn income from community forestry
- Improve support to user groups.

Adjusting the policies and practices in community forestry requires a team effort.... (with) multiple organizations and institutions working together.

Local NGOs and/or private sector

- Develop service providers to user groups
- Improve support to user groups
- Raise awareness of community forestry with potential users.

Institute of Forestry

- Develop short-term practical training courses for service providers (forest assistants or private consultants)
- Develop short-term practical training courses for user groups
- Provide short-term, mid-career training in specific, sound management practices for specific goods or services.

International NGOs/ Donor Community

- Support local NGOs, government, and institutions in ways requested
- Develop pilot projects for corporate and collaborative management models
- Develop mechanism for ecosystem services
- Assist the Institute of Forestry in developing practical coursework and community forestry user group training materials; facilitate Tribhuvan and other universities to work with the institute or independently to develop training materials on other areas, such as accounting, organizational management, facilitation, and so on.
- Develop a pilot for a revolving fund
- Document the lessons learned.

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