

Forest land management in Nepal: Community forestry and rural livelihood

Global Alliance of Community Forestry (GACF)

Background

The community forestry policy of Nepal is regarded as a progressive method for establishing the rights of local people over forest resources. However, the promotion of forest-based enterprises has been limited. Recently, more Community Forestry Users Groups (CFUGs) are initiating poverty alleviation activities, helping to establish community forestry as a recognized pro-poor program.

Community forestry user groups constitute about 35% of the country's total population. The achievements of the community forestry program can be seen in terms of better forest condition, better social mobilization, income generation for rural development and institutional building at the grassroots level. It has been recognized that community forestry has the potential to improve people's livelihood and alleviate poverty (CFD, 2006 as cited by Kandel, 2006).

There has been extensive discussion of the links between forests and livelihood in recent years. It is clear that rural people in Nepal make extensive use of forest resources for their livelihood. This includes: direct consumption of forest products (food, timber for construction, fuel wood, fodder for livestock, water, and land for farming); collection of forest products for sale (hunting, NTFP collection); and the use of forest products for food security in times of seasonal shortages, drought and economic stress.

Nepal's Land Use Pattern

Nepal's land stretches across 147,181 square kms. and is divided into three distinct ecological zones, namely: Terai¹ in the south, hills and mountains in the middle and the Himalayas in the north. It is home to nearly 23 million people (2001 census), comprising 100 ethnic groups each with its own distinct language, culture and lifestyle. Land use in Nepal necessarily adapts to the diverse topography. Based on the agriculture census of 2001-02, 94.1% of total landholdings are agricultural land, which is 24.98 million ha.

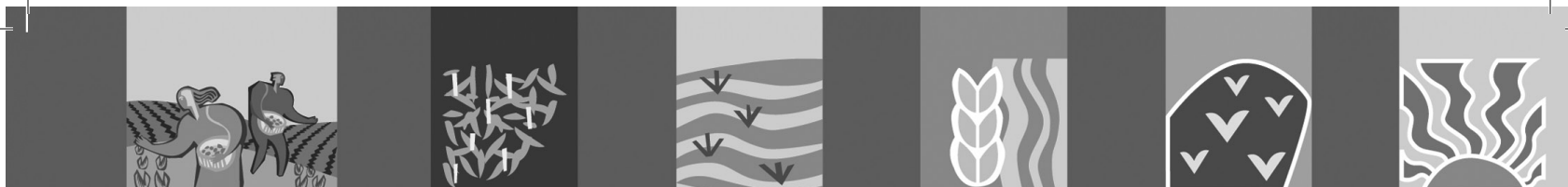
Study site

Makwanpur district is rich in biodiversity due to its varied altitude and climate. Forest and shrub cover 59.14% of the district's total area. The average volume of growing stock is 152 square meters per ha (DFRS, 1992). Major forest types found in Makwanpur are sal forest, terai hardwood forest, chirpine forest, upper mountain hardwood, quercus forest and riverian forest. Sal forest is the most dominant forest, comprising 50 % of the total volume of reachable forest in the district.

Community Forestry in Nepal

Community forestry broadly refers to the transfer of national forests to local communities organized in CFUG for protection, management and utilization

¹ The plain land of the southern part of the country



Nepal's Land Use Pattern								
Land Use Types (Ha)	Year 1991/1992				Year 2001/2002			
	Himal	Hills	Terai	Total	Himal	Hills	Terai	Total
Cultivated land (Total)	207,761	1,721,450	1,038,806	2,968,017	210,635	1,798,158	1,081,987	3,090,780
Non-cultivated land	494,998	436,300	55,600	986,898	517,309	448,491	64,590	1,030,390
Forest (Total)	233,346	4,435,809	1,158,845	5,828,000	228,100	2,890,606	1,149,494	4,268,200
Shrub	137,800	511,608	39,000	688,408	167,800	1,254,178	138,132	1,560,110
Grass land	132,644	1,589,278	35,423	1,757,345	137,644	1,592,093	36,423	1,766,160
Other	796,618	1,667,919	24,894	2,489,432	946,212	2,024,775	31,474	3,002,460
Grand Total	2,003,168	1,036,2364	2,352,568	14,718,100	2,207,700	10,008,300	2,502,100	14,718,100

Source: Adapted from CBS, 2008, Environment Statistics of Nepal

of forest resources. A community forestry program has been implemented in Makwanpur district since its creation in 1978. Since then, community forestry has been a source of income for the district's rural communities. A total of 362 community forestry units has been formed, covering 62,304.46 ha. CFUG practices technical forest management activities guided by the country's forest department. Controlled burning, thinning, pruning and cleaning are done with technical inputs provided by forest officials from the district forest office. CFUG in the district has been successfully implementing various income-generating activities for livelihood and conservation. This study focused on the Sundar Community Forestry Users Group which is near the city.

Sundar CFUG

Sundar CFUG, established in 2053 B.S, lies in Hetauda municipality ward 1 and 2. The Sundar Community Forest is prominently recognized as the greenery of the city. It covers 109.5 ha. and is inhabited by 300 households, of which 103 are

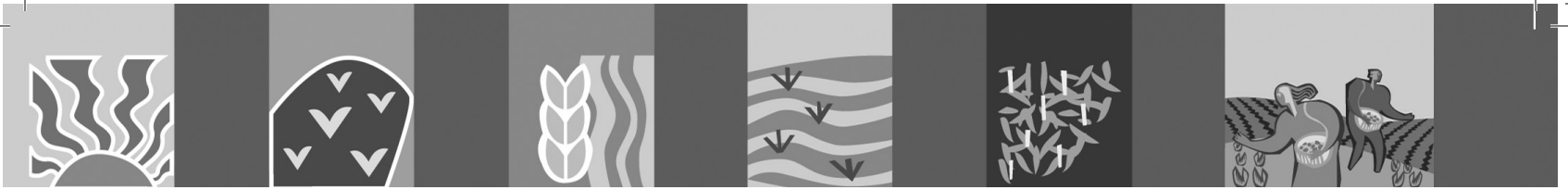
comprised of indigenous peoples. Most of the CFUG's members are engaged in farming and livestock (77.73%). Sundar CFUG has a working committee of 11 members, seven female and four male.

Income generating activities

From the beginning, Sundar CFUG has been focusing on farming and livestock. Among other income-generating activities of the CFUG members are: Amriso plantation, handicraft, furniture (wooden chair), NTFP farming, vegetable farming, goat herding, sewing and fire fighting.

Key Lesson & Emerging issues in CFUG

The livelihood study of this CFUG shows that the community forestry program has been supporting rural livelihood in a sustainable manner. Improved participation in decision-making and varied income generation activities are enhancing the community's interest to develop new schemes for further improvement of their livelihood and forest



conservation. This CFUG shows that rural farmers are dependent on forest resources for their income.

However, while there are numerous benefits, the CFUG members face different issues from time to time. It may be amendment to forest policies, land rights or taxes. Although there are available income-generating activities, a nagging problem is the market for the community's produce. In the case of Sundar, the CFUG established a number of small-scale businesses engaged in production of nontimber products such as brooms, *Muda* (wooden chair) and vegetables, but find it difficult to market these products. Training on marketing is still much needed.

Another issue is that majority of CFUGs are not utilizing the forest to its full potential (in terms of income generation). While trends in resource degradation have been arrested, and in many cases forest cover has improved, the livelihood of the poor and disadvantaged has not improved as expected.

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FECOFUN is a formal network of Forest User Groups from all over Nepal. It emerged from the idea that forest users from all parts of the country should be linked (to each other and engaged) in order to strengthen the role of users in policy-making processes.