



Discussion Paper

Tackling Terai Forest Governance Deadlock: Can District-level Multi-stakeholder Processes Help?¹

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Summary

This paper discusses the role of multi-stakeholder forums for improving forestry sector governance. It draws on evidences from past studies and cases from a district each in the Central and Western Development Regions of Nepal. The findings of this study show that the District Forest Coordination Committee (DFCC) processes have not only augmented citizen participation in district-level forest-related decisions but also enhanced the political legitimacy and applicability of decisions in practice. Evidence clearly demonstrates that the DFCC processes have significantly improved good governance in terms of several indicators such as transparency, accountability and effectiveness. Even in the contested and politically turbulent environment of the recent past, the DFCC provided a deliberative forum for various modalities of forest management in districts. Experiences show that, while multi-stakeholder forums are an evolving and dynamic entity, they are undoubtedly a decentralized institutional mechanism or instrument for deepening the process of democratization at local level and at the same time building learning for sector-wide reform in forest governance. The study was conducted in two Terai districts by using an appreciative inquiry approach.

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction	3
2. Deliberative governance: a conceptual framework.....	4
3. Emergence of DFCC as multi-stakeholder forum	5
4. Methodology	7
4.1 Case studies	8
4.2 Review of previous studies/reports.....	8
4.3 Experiential knowledge.....	8
5. Case studies: DFCCs in Terai	8
5.1 DFCC in Kapilvastu district.....	8
5.2 DFCC in Chitwan district	10
5.3 Analysis of DFCC performance in case districts	11
6. DFCCs and Good Governance.....	12
6.1 DFCC self-assessment in BISEP-ST districts.....	12
6.2 DFCC review in LFP Terai districts	13
6.3 Reflection by a DFCC risk assessment study.....	14
7. Discussion	14
8. Conclusion	15
9. References.....	16

1. INTRODUCTION

In spite of the successful implementation of community forestry (CF) as a participatory forest management model in Nepal's mid-hills, its development in the country's Terai region has been relatively slow. A study carried out by German Development Institute in 1997, however, concludes that CF could become a feasible and desirable strategy in the Terai region (Chakraborty et al cited in Bampton et al. 2004). The low acceptance and success of CF in the Terai is largely attributed to the frequently changing directives of the Department of Forest (DoF) on whether or not to hand over the economically lucrative and biodiversity-rich Terai forests to local communities.

The conflict in the Terai CF is also aggravated by some geo-political conflicts between the native Terai populations, the so-called distant users, and other ethnic groups who had migrated from the hills, who live near forests. Several national policy and strategic documents underline the scope for different participatory modalities to manage the state forests. These documents stress the prioritization of programmes complementary to CF (e.g. leasehold forestry) for managing the state forests. It was increasingly realized in the 1990s that deforestation and degradation of Terai forests were on the rise as the principles of scientific management applied there did not deliver and encroachments continues. The need for addressing the second generation issues concerning the CF became more evident in the Terai (e.g. participation of excluded groups, equitable cost-benefit sharing and effective management plans).

In the revised Forestry Policy 2000, collaborative forest management (CFM) is introduced as a management modality for blocks of national forests in the Terai and Inner Terai. This management regime visualizes partnership with a range of stakeholders, including private sector, civil society/users, and local and central governments (MFSC 2003). However, the CFM approach is still at pilot stage and, along with its framework policy, is under intense debate. There was a low extent of citizen-government deliberations during the formulation of the revised Forestry Policy 2000 (Ojha et al. 2007, Timsina et al. 2004). It is often observed that, more the citizen-government negotiations, the more will be the effectiveness of policy development. In this context, a multi-stakeholder coordination and decision-making platform, called District Forest Coordination Committee (DFCC), was envisioned by the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MFSC) to strengthen collaborations among a wide range of stakeholders at district level (MFSC 2005). Such platforms are being supported by some donor-funded forestry programmes with an aim to contribute to the development of a deliberative governance system within the sector (Bampton 2003, Khanal and Pokharel 2007).

The paper discusses the multi-stakeholder forums and its processes, which are considered instrumental for improving forest sector governance. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to demonstrate the functions of the DFCCs, which could be an innovative institutional mechanism to foster good forest

governance. It has been assumed that the multi-stakeholder approach of the DFCC could serve as a basis for deliberative and consultative processes in participatory decision-making and stimulating good forest governance. The deliberative processes adopted to implement reform agenda for decentralization so far ensures that a) citizen's participation is augmented and b) forest governance improves.

2. DELIBERATIVE GOVERNANCE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is based on the perspective of deliberative governance, which emphasizes decision-making, construction of power relations and enactment of rules through informed participation of affected citizens (Habermas, cited in Ojha et al 2007 and Timsina et al 2004).

Deliberation can be understood as a 'careful consideration' or 'discussion of reasons for and against' (Pimbert, Wakeford 2001). Deliberation, thus, is an inherent component of decision-making processes in a democratic society. Democracy cannot be meaningful without deliberations and participation of the general people in state mechanisms. Lukensmeyer and Torres (2006) describes the five common rationales for public deliberation: (1) Citizen participation in policy formulation and decision-making can reduce conflicts, (2) Deliberative citizen participation can lead to better, long-lasting and wiser policy choices, (3) Citizen involvement in decision-making is something governments should facilitate (4) Deliberation builds citizen competence, (5) Citizen participation cultivates mutual understanding; builds bonds of trust among citizens, decision-makers and governing institutions, and can effect changes in political attitudes and behaviour.

The rationales of deliberation are based on the degree of participation in the decision-making process, which is directly related to governance. Deliberative governance can easily be related to the fact that policy-making in reality is a complex and non-linear process. Therefore, it is often hard to perceive if the process is moving towards a desired solution or to a better definition of the problem. As Shannon (2003) puts it, this is because policy processes occur within policy communities composed of all direct and indirect stakeholders in the outcome, all those with knowledge or expertise in the area, all those who are affected by the decision, and all those who are interested. Promoting deliberative governance is finally about engaging the policy community in policy processes in a meaningful way.

In this paper, the following key steps are used for analysis following the idea of deliberative governance outlined by Shannon (2003) (*Box 1*) and referring to the rationales by Lukensmeyer and Torres (2006).

Box 1: Key steps in deliberative governance

- Identification of the key forest governance problems
- Organizing and operationalizing of stakeholders' forum
- Decision-making with involvement of stakeholders
- Empowering the various stakeholders
- Developing ownership of the stakeholders
- Communicative actions to policy, programme, planning and implementation, M&E

Adapted from Shannon (2003).

In the light of deliberative governance for the forestry sector, the formation and functioning of the DFCCs can be studied based on the above process (*Box 1*). Whereas the forestry sector is undergoing reform in terms of devolution to local stakeholders, deliberative governance has not made much headway in the Terai due to various factors. Since the DFCCs have already been formed and are functioning according to the regulations made for the DFCC, the paper is mainly centred on the DFCCs' functions based on three parameters: 1) decision making, 2) empowerment and 3) ownership.

The process of **decision-making** can be studied to understand the degree of participation of stakeholders in the decision-making process. The degree of deliberation in the decision-making process is linked to the **empowerment** of stakeholders in the participation and decision-making processes. The level of empowerment can help ensure the perception and voices of the stakeholders being reflected in the decisions and thus create a sense of **ownership** over decisions made. Ownership thereby helps create not only legitimacy but also a conducive environment for effective implementation of the decisions made.

3. EMERGENCE OF DFCC AS MULTI-STAKEHOLDER FORUM

The concept of sectoral coordination platform within the forestry sector ranges from the project-level coordination mechanisms to a formal sector-wide DFCC. In 2002, the attention of some donors and INGOs were drawn towards the collaborative coordination and management approach, mainly for the Terai. The Biodiversity Sector Programme for Siwaliks and Terai (BISEP-ST²) and the Livelihoods &

² The Dutch government-supported forestry sector programme being implemented in eight districts, viz. Chitwan, Makwanpur, Bara, Parsa, Rautahat, Mahottari, Sarlahi and Dhanusha.

Forestry Programme (LFP³), implemented by the MFSC, started to support the establishment and operation of the DFCC in eleven Terai districts.

The 'District Forest Coordination Committee Establishment and Operational Directive BS2062 (2005)' of the MFSC outlines in detail the DFCC structure, functions, fund allocation and mobilization, and monitoring. It has also made provision for a DFCC unit with specified functions. The goal of the DFCC is to act as a facilitator and coordinator for the conservation, management and sustainable utilization of forest resources in the district. The objectives of the DFCC are based on the national forest policy and legislation, which include: 1) management of the district forest area in coordination with the stakeholders concerned and the formulation of a district plan for the conservation and management of forest resources through partnership and participation, 2) the coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the programme and the support of promotional activities for poverty reduction and gender equality through acquired benefits. In order to achieve the goal and objectives of the DFCC, the directive makes provision for multi-stakeholder participation in its structure. According to the directive, the District Development Committee (DDC, the local government at district level) can form a DFCC in each district with a maximum of twenty-seven representatives from different stakeholder groups (MFSC 2005).

Under BISEP-ST and the Terai component of the LFP, the MFSC is promoting the management of forests and conservation of biodiversity in the Terai and Siwaliks, where forest management modalities, e.g. CF and CFM, are selected based on the strategic forestry sector plan prepared by the respective DFCCs. The DFCCs are formed in these eleven districts according to the MFSC Guidelines 2005 under the leadership of DDC. The DFCCs are promoted with the twin objective of improving forestry sector governance as a whole at district level and setting up an environment conducive to implementing sustainable livelihoods programmes in those districts. While setting these criteria, the DFCC composition for stakeholder representation was followed.

³ DFID supported the forestry sector programme being implemented in fifteen districts, the three districts in the Terai being Nawalparasi, Rupandehi and Kapilvastu.

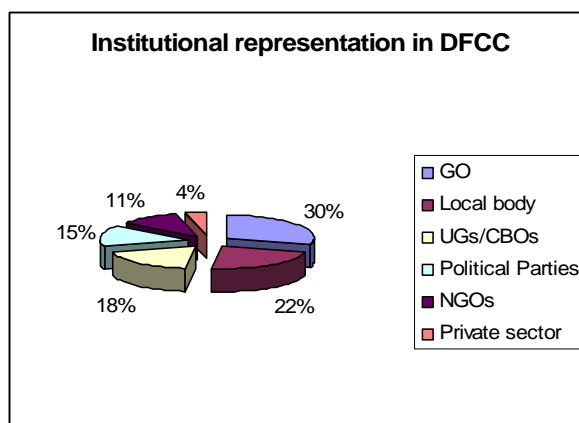


Figure 1: Source: Khanal and Pokharel 2007

The proportion of representation on the DFCC is 30% (*Figure 1*) from government line agencies such as Department of Forest (DoF), Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management (DSCWM) etc) at district level, 22% from local government (e.g. DDC, Municipality and VDC associations), 29% from civil society (e.g. NGOs, CBOs, user groups), 15% from political parties (nationally recognized political parties at district level), and 4% from the private sector (representation from business federations and forest-based industries).

The DFCC is being supported as a multi-stakeholder forum, consequently an instrument for good forest governance through deliberative and participative processes, engineering local decision-making, leading to empowerment, ownership and commitment to sustainable forest management. Such experiences on multi-stakeholder process in the Terai could be assessed in the light of learning for deliberative governance promotion in the sector.

4. METHODOLOGY

For this study, an appreciative inquiry approach was followed to collect evidences. An appreciative inquiry approach is a particular way of asking questions and envisioning the future that fosters positive relationships and builds on the basic goodness in a person, a situation, or an organization. This approach was followed with an aim of that more of the positive learning can be fed into the prevailing sectoral reform process. The citizen voices referred to in this text mostly include the voices of leaders of political parties, civil societies, NGOs and users' federations. The paper draws on four different, but related, sources of evidence:

4.1 CASE STUDIES

A case study each from Chitwan and Kapilvastu districts were selected to get a consolidated picture of the processes adopted, output delivered and outcomes achieved. These districts fall under BISEP-ST and the LFP support respectively, where the DFCCs have been supported at least for the past three years. The DFCC in Kapilvastu has longer and transitional experience since the DFCC there was formed even before its formal introduction under the directives of the MFSC. The DFCC in Chitwan was formed after the issue of the DFCC directive in 2005. Demographic differences between these two districts were also a key to sampling, as Chitwan is an Inner Terai district with even distribution of forest and settlements, whereas Kapilvastu is a typical Terai district with forest areas located in the north and a large proportion of forest-dependent population living in the south.

4.2 REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES/REPORTS

Various papers about forestry and governance were reviewed to conceptualize learning from the DFCC in relation to deliberative governance perspectives. Previous papers, studies and reports related to the multi-stakeholder processes in eleven Terai districts were reviewed and referred to as evidences, which included subjects like DFCC organizational reviews, district forestry sector planning and joint monitoring, etc.

4.3 EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

The authors, through their professional affiliations to BISEP-ST/LFP, are acquainted with years of direct working experience with the DFCCs. This experience has helped authors to discuss and verify the outcomes within the paper. The outcomes of the research and the contents of the paper were also discussed with some key professionals involved in promoting the DFCCs at both local and national level.

5. CASE STUDIES: DFCCS IN TERA I

5.1 DFCC IN KAPILVASTU DISTRICT

Amongst the need for coordinated efforts among the forestry sector stakeholders, the LFP has initiated discussions of the potentials of the DFCC with the DDC and District Forest Office (DFO) in Kapilvastu district in 2001/02. Such discussions led to the realization of the need for a DFCC and short-listed

potential DFCC members in a participatory manner. A district-level workshop was also organized with the participation of community forest user groups (CFUGs) to share the concept of the DFCC. The workshop, among other tasks, selected representative for the DFCC from CFUGs. It was then followed by several awareness-building activities, including workshops, leaflet distribution and meetings on the need to form a multi-stakeholder forum at district level.

A thirty-one-member DFCC was formed under the leadership of the DDC chairperson according to the provision made in the Local Self Governance Act 1999. It was then endorsed by the DDC Council in 2002. After the MFSC approved the DFCC directives in 2005, the structure of the DFCC was amended to include members from political parties, private sector, line agencies and the civil society/NGOs.

Since its formation, major strategic decisions have been made through the DFCC. A five-year forest management plan of the district was recently approved by the DFCC, and the strategic framework was discussed for a long-term sectoral plan. Joint monitoring is regularly done by the DFCC members, which helps to improve the plan for next year. The DFCC approved a number of strategic guidelines on how the programmes were operated during the conflict period and on how to benefit from social mobilization programmes in the local forestry context.

The decision-making processes were consultative, and the discussions in the DFCC were also seen as a knowledge-sharing and open forum, as a number of members are not from the forestry sector. Through active engagement in decision-making processes, the DFCC members have largely realized the importance of such a multi-stakeholder forum. The DFCC members are now constantly giving attention to making it a strategic forum for the making and shaping of forestry sector decisions in the district. Within the DFCC, the members of political parties are now better oriented about the forestry sector development.

The representatives of the existing forest users and DFCC representatives from the southern belt of the district have been quite empowered, and it is constantly ensured that their own right over resources is respected, thanks to the DFCC. The empowerment of their representatives on the DFCC has resulted in a more holistic and inclusive decision-making, though the decision-making process itself is sometimes felt to be lengthy.

More than 90% of the DFCC decisions were found implemented in Kapilvastu, and the DFCC members were actively engaged in coordinating the decisions in their respective areas or organizations. In the contested Terai forestry context prevailing in the district, this rate of implementation of decisions could be mainly due to ownership raised by the DFCC members who represent the stakes of the local people from various geographical and social contexts within Kapilvastu.

In an external consultation, some officials of Kapilvastu DDC and the LFP shared the view that the current DFCC could become sustainable in the long run if they got further support from the concerned authorities.

They were of the view that the current DFCC could be further institutionalized within the DDC and a local funding mechanism needs to be developed accordingly within the Local Development Fund.

5.2 DFCC IN CHITWAN DISTRICT

BISEP-ST programme had initiated awareness activities for a DFCC in Chitwan through the local media, conservation education, workshops, exposure visits, etc even before the introduction of the DFCC in 2005. After the MFSC promulgated the directives, a DFCC was formed in Chitwan in 2005 under the leadership of the DDC chairperson. The DFCC is composed of representatives of, among others, DOF, DSCO, DADO, DWDO, Chitwan National Park, political parties, private sector, etc.

The DFCC has made a number of significant decisions such as the approval of the district forest sector plan, review and extension of BISEP-ST annual programme and coverage. Through these decisions, the DFCC members, mainly political party representatives, are imparted the knowledge of the forestry sector and their coordinated stake in the related decisions. This has led to a common understanding of the forestry sector outcomes and good relations amongst the major stakeholders.

About 80% of the DFCC decisions were found implemented in Chitwan, and the DFCC members were found cooperating in the implementation of the decisions made in their respective areas. This shows a large degree of legitimacy of the decisions, which is linked by the DFCC representatives from the DFCC to the local communities. The practice of joint monitoring, led by the DDC chairperson, has also contributed to creating a common sense of the forestry sector's outcomes and transparency of the programmes.

BISEP-ST programme has also supported the DFCC by providing a secretariat, called the Office of District Forest Coordination Committee, at Bharatpur. This secretariat basically supports the DFCC, facilitates the implementation of the DFCC decisions, and keeps track of BISEP-ST programme plan and progress in the district.

In a consultation, officials from the DFCC office expressed the opinion that the current DFCC could become sustainable in Chitwan district with additional institutionalization support from the concerned authorities. For this, the commitment and modality for a sustainable institution should be designed from the DDC Council. A local funding mechanism also needs to be developed, while programmes such as BISEP-ST could provide a matching fund. Some duplication efforts, like the DFCC for leasehold forestry, also needs to be brought under the DFCC, and all the forestry sector plans and progress in the district should be routed through the DFCC to the DDC.

5.3 ANALYSIS OF DFCC PERFORMANCE IN CASE DISTRICTS

The performances of the two studied DFCCs are further analysed and summarized in Table 1. The analysis is based on three key steps of deliberative governance, i.e. decision-making process, empowerment and resulting ownership.

Table 1: Performance of case DFCCs

Parameters used for assessment	Findings in case districts	Interpretations
Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFCC engages participation of citizens' representatives such as political parties, local bodies, interest groups and other stakeholders such as NGOs and private sector in strategic decisions of forestry sector in the district • Key legitimate decisions made with consultative and deliberative process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFCC has provided an opportunity for wider range of stakeholders, including citizens' representatives, for their deliberative engagement in forestry sector decisions • Decision making with a deliberative process could be time-consuming but has significant positive outcomes with its legitimacy and acceptance at implementation level
Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives of political parties are most empowered to engage in forestry sectoral discussions • Representatives of sub-district clusters and thematic interests are empowered considerably in discussing the issue of rights and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowered stakeholders are better linking the grass roots issues of citizens to be addressed through stakeholders' coordination. • Holistic planning and wider coordination helps to build common understanding of forestry sector outcomes, a stepping stone for good governance.
Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the DFCC decisions (about 80%) implemented • Stakeholders with strong forest sector links and political parties keen to articulate ownership • Commitment to carry forward multi- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success rate of implementing of DFCC decisions, even in a geo-political complexity in the Terai, indicates that the decisions of this multi-stakeholder forum are better owned by the stakeholders • The ownership of the DFCCs within and outside has remained an enigma as

Parameters used for assessment	Findings in case districts	Interpretations
	stakeholder forum and processes, and thinking for its self-sustainability through self-funding and greater ownership by DDC	institutionalization based on the principles of decentralization and devolution has been lingering. Better institutional positioning within local government body and local funding mechanism could maximize its sustainability in the long run

Overall, in both the case studies, the multi-stakeholder process (MSP) has enhanced the participation of a wider range of stakeholders in forestry sector decisions in the respective districts. This has led to increased ownership of the decisions and programmes by citizens through their representatives. The forestry sector outcomes are better owned at district level. The DFCCs are foreseeing some better institutional arrangements to sustain the MSP.

6. DFCCs AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

This section describes the findings from the past reviews of the performances of the DFCCs in the BISEP-ST and the LFP Terai districts in relation to good governance.

6.1 DFCC SELF-ASSESSMENT IN BISEP-ST DISTRICTS

To assess the DFCC's performance according to their goal, objectives, roles and responsibilities, BISEP-ST has developed a DFCC self-assessment tool, and has facilitated eight DFCCs under the BISEP-ST support districts (viz. Chitwan, Makwanpur, Bara, Parsa, Rautahat, Mahottari and Dhanusha) to assess themselves in 2007 and to reassess in 2008. The tool covers five major areas of the DFCC functions consisting of good governance elements. The major criteria are: 1) DFCC meeting and working procedures, 2) Planning and implementation, 3) Linkages and coordination, 4) Participation and representation, and 5) Monitoring and evaluation. A comparison of self-assessed scores of eight DFCCs from 2005 to 2007 is shown in Figure 2.

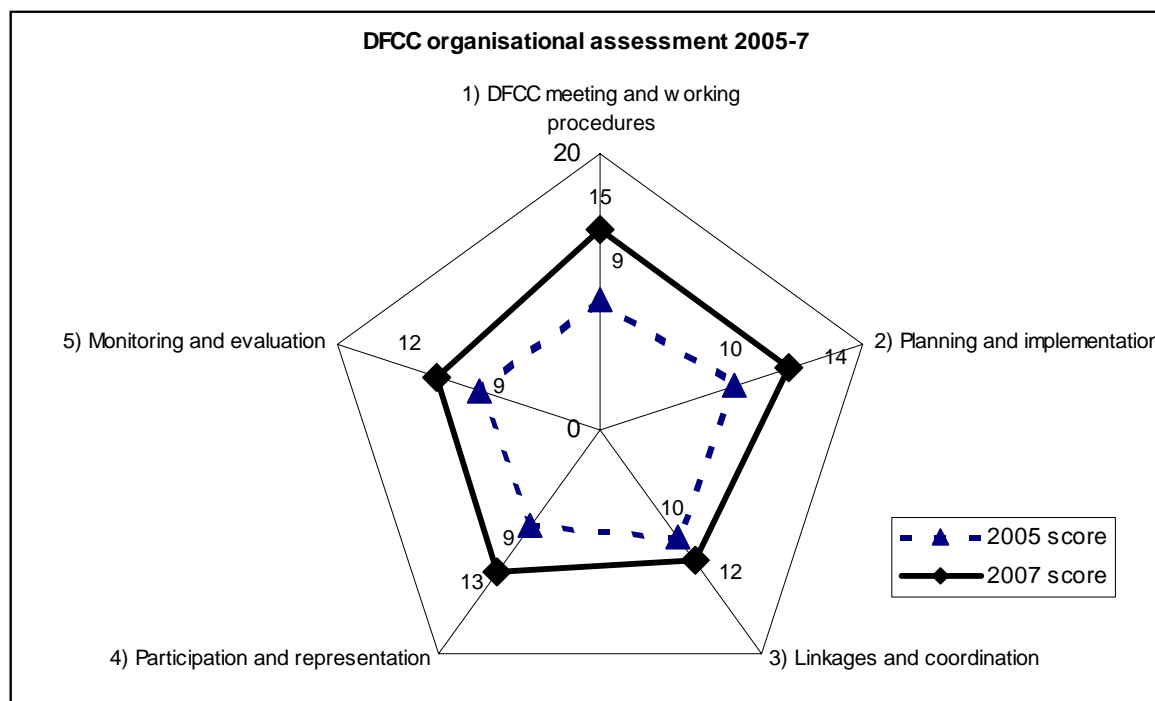


Figure 2: Results of organizational assessment in eight DFCCs (source: BISEP-ST 2007).

In Figure 2, the inner line shows the status of the DFCCs in 2005 on the given areas and the middle line indicates the status in 2007. The outer line of spider diagram shows an ideal situation given the score of 20. The assessment shows that, overall, the DFCC organizational capacity has increased from score 9 to 13, i.e. about 40% increase and 65% compared to an ideal stage of assessment criteria. It is evident that the DFCCs have improved considerably on various aspects of governance, including transparency, accountability, effectiveness and participation, which is reflected by capacity increase in various areas such as self-monitoring, representation, coordination and planning. Since the DFCC is a multi-stakeholder forum, improvement in good governance could also be understood as improvement in forestry sector governance in these districts.

6.2 DFCC REVIEW IN LFP TERAI DISTRICTS

The DFCC capacity building is supported by the LFP mainly in the Terai districts (viz. Nawalparasi, Rupandehi and Kapilvastu). Meeting records and workshop reports (LFP 2004) show that the DFCCs are augmenting their capacity for coordination, planning and monitoring. The district forestry sector plans are being developed under the DFCCs with the participation of stakeholders from grass roots to district level. The joint monitoring practice has helped to enhance transparency of forestry sector activities, improve coordination by initiation of a joint learning culture and ensure effectiveness of the programme being implemented (Maskey 2008).

6.3 REFLECTION BY A DFCC RISK ASSESSMENT STUDY

A recent study focusing on the DFCC in some Terai districts found that the introduction of the DFCC was appreciated by the DFCCs as its objective was to increase decentralization and improve people's participation in decision making (SNV 2007). According to the study, the stakeholders consulted appreciated the concept of sectoral approach underlying the DFCCs and the district forestry sector fund. This study has also made some concrete recommendations for improving the sustainability of the Decentralized Multi-stakeholder Forum. The major recommendations include widening of policies to frame the DFCC into the Local Self Governance Act 1999, increasing the representation of marginalized communities in the DFCC and making provision for a District Forestry Development Fund.

7. DISCUSSION

Our findings from the case studies and review of relevant literature show that the DFCC processes have significantly augmented the citizen voices.

The political legitimacy and practical applicability of decisions have also improved due to the DFCC process. This is judged by the high rate of successful implementation of the DFCC decisions, which has enhanced the effectiveness of the forestry sector programmes in the district as well as opened horizon for active management of forests for maximizing its benefits for the poor and excluded communities.

Even in the contested and politically turbulent environment of the recent past, the DFCC has provided a deliberative forum for various modalities of forest management in the districts. It has adopted a number of modalities, including annual planning and implementation of the DFSP and joint monitoring practices, towards this end.

The experiences show that multi-stakeholder forums are an evolving and dynamic entity and an instrument for decentralized institutional mechanisms to deepen the process of democratization at local level and at the same time build learning for sector-wide reforms in forest governance. A clear implication of this finding is that the actual process of democratizing forest governance starts when multiple stakeholders are invited to deliberate over the local modalities of governance that fit their negotiated interests, which is increasingly being required for broader issues such as payment for environmental services.

The DFCCs as carrier for collaborative mechanisms among represented citizens provide an anchoring space for the consultative processes and institutionalization of learning that matter for good forest governance. It may be noted here that the term multi-stakeholder processes (MSPs) is understood as the processes which aim to bring together the key stakeholders under an effective forum of communication and decision-making on forest governance issues. The underlying democratic principles are based on the

recognition of the importance of achieving participation, equity and accountability in communication between stakeholders, allowing equitable and inclusive representation of stakeholder groups and their views. The DFCC processes are progressing within the context of debate of forest management modalities of the Terai, not yet having the leadership of an elected local government and prevailing sectoral/state reform process. Being a multi-stakeholder policy, community learning from the DFCC can have leverage on promoting and distinctly contributing to the sectoral reform process at various levels.

The case studies can be used as the best cases. Furthermore, the MSPs and good forest governance have the ultimate aim of augmenting the support and acceptance of social change processes in order to more effectively contribute to poverty alleviation and social economic equity. Inherent to these processes is the involvement of different stakeholders—government, civil society and business sector—and more informed and communicative participation of citizens in the decision-making process. The MSPs are not a tool for solving all forestry sector problems but a basis for decision-finding and governance structures and processes in a scenario where conflicting demands on forest goods and services are multiple and complicated, like in a complex geo-societal setting in Nepal.

The DFCCs, with more formal recognition and anchorage in forest governance system, could revisit their objectives, participants, scope for contribution to decentralized and equitable forest governance. Its good outcomes so far as a decentralized and multi-stakeholder forum could be used for forest governance policy input, especially in the context of prevailing sectoral/state reform process.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that DFCCs are emerging in Nepal's Terai as a promising district level platform for multiple stakeholders to articulate their interests and voice in the governance of forests. Despite turbulent political situation and the lack of elected local governments, DFCCs have been able to forge collaboration, joint learning and political negotiation among diverse stakeholders who often have conflicting claims over forest resources. The DFCCs as carrier for collaborative mechanisms for citizens provide an anchoring space for the consultative processes and institutionalization of collective learning processes that matter for good forest governance. Evidences clearly demonstrate that the DFCC processes have led to significant improvements in several criteria of good governance such as transparency, accountability and effectiveness. The participation of the civil society, proximate and distant forest users, private sector and political actors in the process has enhanced the sense of ownership of the forestry sector activities at local level.

A clear implication of this finding is that the actual process of democratizing forest governance starts when multiple stakeholders are invited to deliberate over the local modalities of governance that fit their negotiated interests, which is increasingly being required for broader issues such as payment for environmental. The role of multi-stakeholder forums such as the DFCC should be promoted to implement different participatory forest management regimes like CF and CFM, especially in the context of the present-day political tension in the Terai. The DFCC could be sustained more effectively if it could be brought more under the umbrella of local government with required improvements (provision of a local sustainable fund mechanism, greater representation of disadvantaged communities). Like the DFCC, the idea of multi-stakeholder engagement should be ensured at all levels—from village to national—for structural reform of the forestry sector.

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