

FOREST POLICY SEMINAR SERIES

Presentation (2/2010)



By Dr. Thorsten Treue and Bishwa Nath Oli

9 April 2010 at 1500 – 1700 hrs

Training Hall, Forest Complex, Babarmahal, Kathmandu

ALL INTERESTED ARE INVITED TO ATTEND

Please confirm your participation to forestaction@wlink.com.np

Operational Plan as a democratic link between local communities and the government forest agencies: Issues, Challenges and Reconstructions

In Nepal's community forestry, there has always been a challenge as to how local communities can better plan, organise and implement management activities, and there is also a continuing debate about who can better provide services to local Community Forest User Groups (CFUG) and how, such that both scientific and participatory aspects are adequately incorporated into the processes of sustainable and equitable forest. A study was conducted recently in 10 CFUGs in Tanahu district to evaluate rules and institutions, focussing on the discrepancies between rules-in-form (written provisions in the operational plan) and rules-in-use (*de facto* management practices) in community forestry process. The research posits main research question as '*Have de facto management practices of CFUGs converged with provisions of original and revised operational plans? If not, what are the causes and the consequences of such discrepancies in terms of forest conservation and socio-economic outcomes of CF?*'

The findings indicate that though the operational plan has given formal authority to CFUGs to exercise rights of management and control over forest resources, CFUGs, in many cases, do not consider the operational plan as working guideline due to which provisions of the plan are difficult to translate into practice. It was found that operational plans were produced ignoring the local contextual settings and interests of majority users. Lack of ownership over the plan due to heavy involvement of outsiders in devising the plans, limited understanding of the users regarding the provisions of the plan, and limited number of human resources for monitoring the implementation status of the plan are some of the reasons for creating discrepancies between rules-in-form and rules-in-use. Despite this situation, the study further shows that all the categories of users are getting forest products in an equitable manner in all the studied CFUGs so far. Based on interpretation of aerial photos and satellite image, it was found that forest cover in all the 3 studied community forests has been improved with involvement of local communities. However, dense forests with big size trees are reducing (as there is no dense forest in Basudev Pahara CF now, where about 43% of such type was present in 1972). This might be because of users priority over harvesting of good quality and big-size trees, which may question sustainable supply of timber in the long run.

Looking at the limited human resources and large number of operational plan backlog (3513 OPs to be renewed as of July 2009), we argue that the state should explore alternative mechanism to render technical support to ever-increasing CFUGs. Sound and participatory methodology need to be developed and applied so that information of forest inventory carried out during formulation/revision process of operational plan can be used as baseline in the process of capturing benefits from REDD mechanism.

Thorsten Treue is currently an Associate Professor at Forest and Landscape, Faculty of Life Sciences, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. He is responsible for imparting education in Participatory Forest Management at M. Sc. Level course conducted by the Faculty of Life Sciences. He is involved in number of research projects related to participatory forest management in Africa and Asia, particularly in Tanzania, Ghana, Nepal, and Cambodia. He has also worked as Advisor in NARMSAP project in Nepal for more than three years. Currently, he is supervising 3 Ph D students at the Faculty.

Bishwa Nath Oli is a Ph D student at Forest and Landscape, Faculty of Life Sciences, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. He has started Ph D since April 2009 and currently is conducting field work as a part of his research. His Ph D research area is 'Evaluating community forestry processes and outcomes: evidences from selected community forests of Nepal'. He is focusing the research work in Tanahun district of western Nepal in 10 CFUGs. He is associated with Department of Forests, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation. Before, he had worked with Department of Forest Research and Survey. His previous degree is M. Sc. in Natural Resource Management from Norway.