

FOREST POLICY SEMINAR SERIES

Presentation (5/2010)



By Dr. Manohara Khadka

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Training Hall, Forest Complex, Babarmahal, Kathmandu

ALL INTERESTED ARE INVITED TO ATTEND

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Why Does Exclusion Continue in Nepal's Community Forestry? An analysis of Aid, Knowledge and Power in Forest Policy Process

Background:

This study asks a crucial question “why does exclusion of the poor, women, *dalits* and other social disadvantaged groups continue in community forestry in Nepal, despite the increasing emphasis on poverty and participation in the community forestry discourses and institutions?”

Contrary to the usual analysis of socio-cultural and other local dynamics, this study extends its horizon well beyond the local and national context and focuses on the role of aid in sustaining and worsening exclusion in CF.

Although some development literature shows that institutions and institutional processes at national and international level can also contribute to exclusion, the effect of national and international institutions and policy processes on exclusion has not been widely studied in the case of CF in Nepal. In the Nepalese forest sector, aid has been the major supportive factor for the implementation of CF since the early 1980s. As such, aid has a role to play in social exclusion or inclusion including poverty outcomes. Yet the question is - how far aid, policy and influential actors at the policy level have been prepared to be inclusive themselves, and hence to contribute to the inclusion at local level, is much less researched issue in the natural resource sector. Given this, this study addressed the following two questions:

- (a) How has aid influenced the emergence and development of CF discourse? how and why does (or not) the exclusion agenda gain priority in the policy agenda?
- (b) How have actors' relationships and structures affected the inclusion of exclusion issues in the policy agenda?

The study has largely employed a qualitative and interpretative methods in general and in-depth interviews, observation and content analysis in particular.

This study identified that CF policy process, which is heavily supported by aid, is not sufficiently supportive of tackling exclusion issues. I summarise my findings as:

1. The CF policy instruments and practices have taken a techno-scientific and instrumental view that results in undermining participatory philosophy.
2. Aid helps to introduce global policy ideas and shape policymaking process at the national level. The structures, institutions, knowledge and networks developed with the support of aid serve to institutionalise techno-scientific values in CF development.
3. CF key actors work for a common goal (i.e. poverty reduction through sustainable forest management), but they locate the cause of and solution to exclusion problems with the community or the poor themselves. Influential actors are aware of exclusion problems, but do not feel that solving these problems are part of their responsibility.
4. The process of organizing aid funded policy spaces at the government level is exclusionary, as it is difficult to include the actors with different perspectives, limited power and low social status.

Finally, this study raises the following theoretical and policy implication issues.

- Is arguing that local socio-economic and institutional factors, and weak implementation of policy, cause exclusion in CF sufficient when a national policy creates and maintains exclusion, even when it has a social, not just an environmental focus?
- How much does emphasising the understanding of the relationships between state-community only help overcome the barriers of the poor and excluded, when actors' mentality, expertise and power relationships between them affected the development and institutionalisation of policy which maintains exclusion?
- How has aid indirectly involved in the process of maintaining exclusion by supporting existing policy processes that institutionalise non-participatory policymaking process and does not challenge power relations?
- Making a policy process inclusive depends on the extent to which power players in government, donors and non-state actors are sensitive to power relationship between people and to their role in including or excluding social perspectives in policy discussions.

WELCOME!

Dr. Khadka is currently working for a Swiss-funded agriculture project (Sustainable Soil Management Programme). Following an MSc in natural resources, she completed her PhD in 2009 from the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague. She has worked in various capacities with government, NGO and bi-lateral donor funded community forestry projects in Nepal for more than 15 years. She has advised MA students in development studies, BSc forestry and agriculture graduates and interns in research design. She is interested in social equity, rural livelihoods, participation and institutional issues in natural resource management. Her publications include books (2), research briefs (2) conference papers (4) book chapters (2) journal and newspaper articles (4).

The Forest Policy Seminar Series is the joint initiative of ForestAction Nepal (www.forestaction.org), Nepal Foresters Association (www.nfa.org.np), Institute of Forestry (www.iof.edu.np), College of Development Studies (www.cds.edu.np), Kathmandu Forestry College (www.kafcol.edu.np) and National Policy Learning Group. The purpose is to facilitate scholarly debate and reflections on forest policy and governance in Nepal. If you have any interesting research findings that are relevant to contemporary forest policy debate, please send a 250-300 words abstract to Dr. Hemant R. Ojha, the Seminar Coordinator, at ojhahemant1@gmail.com. Currently we plan to organise monthly presentations, but if there is more demand, we can go up to two presentations every month.