

Natural Resources and Livelihoods: Expanding Knowledge,  
Transforming Policies and Changing Practices

# Strategic Plan 2009-2014



ForestAction Nepal  
Kathmandu, Nepal

## ***Table of Contents***

About ForestAction .....	3
The Changing Context of Our Work.....	4
Major NRM Issues.....	5
Opportunities .....	6
Our Capacities and Resources .....	6
Strategic Plan for 2009-2014 .....	7
Thematic Areas of Actions.....	8
Theme 1: Natural Resource Management and Sustainable Livelihoods.....	8
Theme 2: Local Governance, Tenure Reform and Community Autonomy.....	8
Theme 3: Climate Change and Environmental Services.....	10
Theme 4: Inclusive Governance and Deliberative Policy Processes .....	10
Theme 5: Social Learning and Innovation Systems.....	10
Implementing the Strategic Plan .....	12

## **ABOUT FORESTACTION**

ForestAction Nepal is a Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) in the field of Natural Resource Management (NRM), environmental governance and livelihoods. Established in 2000, it is based in Kathmandu and operates across the country at various levels from field action at grassroots to national and international level policy processes. It has occupied a unique space of policy advocacy through action research, policy analysis, and lobby and networking.

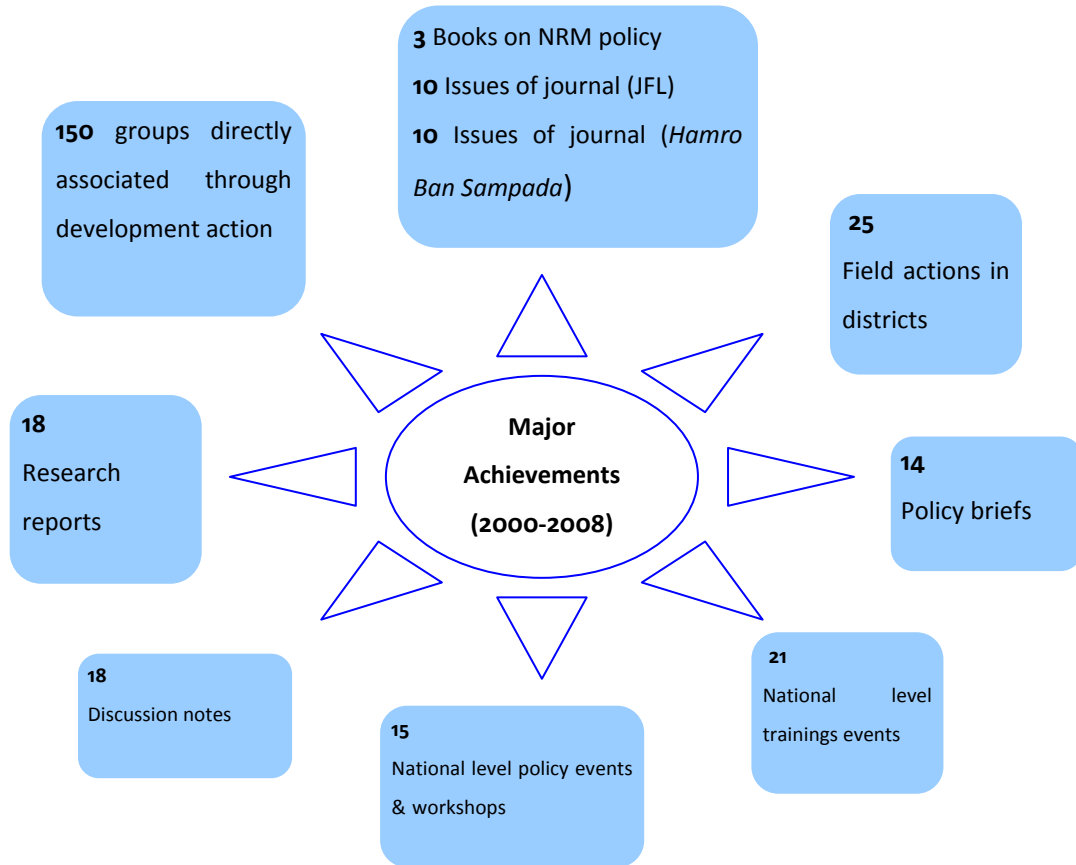
**Vision:** Environmentally sustainable society free from poverty and injustice.

**Mission:** Policy, institutional and technical innovations to promote equitable, sustainable and effective management of natural resources.

**Approaches:** Unlike many other NGOs, ForestAction works at multiple scales of governance, from local communities to district and national levels to international policy spheres. It has a pro-poor focus on its research, development actions and policy influence. Rather than spreading the efforts over a larger geographical area, ForestAction focuses on a few pilot sites to generate critical policy and conceptual insights to inform the wider natural resource sector. It documents lessons and interprets them through cutting edge theoretical advances in the field of governance and NRM. Since its establishment it has tested and developed a number of innovations which are now widely adopted by stakeholders and communities in their everyday practice.

**Key Achievements:** ForestAction has developed three sets of highly relevant innovations: a) policy process - e.g. multi-stakeholder policy processes; b) institutional processes - e.g. Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM) and Participatory Action and Learning (PAL) processes; and c) production technologies - e.g. active forest management, improved forest harvesting methodologies. These innovations have been increasingly adopted by the Department of Forest (e.g. in community forestry guideline), by other stakeholders (such as Livelihood and Forestry Programme promoting ACM based planning), and by the local communities (several Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) are using ACM and PAL process in their planning and monitoring). With such innovations and policy advice, ForestAction has been recognised as a major think tank in NRM policy and practice. ForestAction's major achievements during its nine year working period are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Major Achievements during 2000-2008**



## **THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF OUR WORK**

**Resource Conflict and Poverty:** The widespread poverty among various sections of Nepalese society is largely an outcome of limited access to productive lands, forests and water. Nepal has experienced historical conflicts in different forms and extent over the distribution of these natural resources. Conflict exists at different levels; between central government and local government, between government and local communities, between different social groups within local communities, between groups and individuals, and between individuals. At the same time management of natural resources has been equally influenced by environmental imperatives such as conservation of biodiversity, particularly with regards to wildlife. Debates in NRM must be located within this broad context of conflicts over resources and widespread poverty. Our development actions, research and policy advocacy aim to enhance poor and marginalised people’s access to productive natural resources and enable them to derive equitable benefits.

**Political Transition and State Restructuring:** Nepal is currently undergoing a significant political transition. There is an explicit political commitment for state restructuring which will be institutionalised through a new constitution. The state restructuring process seeks to address the legitimate demands of diverse ethnic and cultural groups whose identities have historically been subjugated by the unitary centralised system of governance. It is also expected to provide opportunities for addressing regional imbalances in development by devolving power to lower units, including provincial and local governments. This will significantly alter governance of natural resources, including land, forest and water. The allocation of specific rights and responsibilities to federal state and local governments and local communities will shape the fate of the resources and that of resource dependent people. In this context, ForestAction seeks to contribute to the state restructuring process through its policy and institutional innovations with the aim

of bringing NRM rights down to the community and local government level and building their capacities for these tasks.

**Climate Change:** The emerging discourse on climate change is dominating the global development and environmental agenda. Nepal's national development policies and programmes are increasingly informed by the climate change discourse in two ways. Firstly, Nepal's Himalayas and fragile mountains are highly susceptible to climate change which will have diverse detrimental effects, particularly for poor forest dependent people. Secondly, as a poor, aid dependent country, Nepal's national agenda's are highly influenced by global agendas. Therefore, climate change as a biophysical process and as a global policy priority provides an overarching context under which ForestAction will be functioning. Whilst sustainable and equitable management of natural resources and enhancing livelihoods have been ForestAction's priority action areas, they will increasingly focus on developing climate resilient NRM policies, institutions and practices.

## **MAJOR NRM ISSUES**

**Unclear Tenure and Resource Degradation:** Continued deforestation, resource degradation, shrinking availability of critical forest resources and loss of biodiversity has become visible particularly in the Terai, Churia hills and high mountain areas. Policy confusion in NRM in these regions has created a situation in which the forests and other natural resources are *de facto* open access. The current interventions in halting deforestation and degradation have neither properly addressed tenure issue nor have fulfilled the institutional vacuum in managing natural resources in those areas. As a result, the economic potentials of valuable forests and biodiversity in the Terai and high altitude areas have not been realised.

**State Restructuring and Community Rights:** Federalism has dominated debates over state restructuring in Nepal. This discourse has often narrowly focused on the issue of power sharing between federal governments and the state government and tends to undermine the legitimate claims of local communities for their greater role in managing natural resources. One of the key issues here is how to enshrine community rights in the constitution, legal framework and institutional arrangements within the constitution building process.

**Climate Change, Resilient Management and Environmental Services:** As the climate change debate has increasingly influenced NRM policies, securing community rights over natural resources has become a challenge. It appears that NRM policies may impose further restrictions on resource extraction or de-legitimise the existing management practices in return for various carbon related funds. One of the major challenges here is to ensure that community rights are not compromised in any of the international negotiations and national policy decisions. Moreover, since Nepal's community forestry and other community based forest management programmes produce multiple products and services and provide probably the most climate resilient model of resource management, they must be promoted and scaled up.

**Equity, Gender and Social Inclusion in NRM:** Although equity, gender and social inclusion are pervasive challenges for transforming Nepalese society, our special interest is to understand and address these within NRM sector. Moreover, stakeholders involved in this field recognise and appreciate these challenges and have initiated diverse innovative practices to address them. These issues are important both from practical and policy perspectives.

**Resource Productivity and Poverty Reduction:** The productivity of our current resource management regimes is very low. We could enhance the productivity of land, forest and water several fold and thereby increase their contributions to poverty reduction. However, we need to transform the current regulatory framework, institutional arrangement and the state of technology to realise such high productivity. Capacity building of the local communities and the stakeholders towards gaining these levels of productivity is a key issue.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

We have identified four sets of emerging opportunities that provide us spaces in which to advance our agenda.

**State Restructuring:** The demand for community rights may benefit from a move towards a federal state. Tenure reform in the form of handing over forest to the local communities is likely to gain speed in the proposed federal democratic republic of Nepal. This would allow us to influence NRM policies in favour of greater community rights.

**Climate Resilient Modalities:** Nepal has promoted diverse forms of community based NRM modalities which are regarded as climate resilient. Lessons from the policy, institutions and practices of these NRM modalities are valuable assets in advancing climate resilient NRM and development practice. Climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives in Nepal and elsewhere can benefit from the lessons of our rich experience in community-based NRM. ForestAction can document and synthesise these lessons and communicate them with a wider audience.

**Markets for Ecosystem Services:** Emerging market opportunities for environmental services provided by forests and watersheds demands new institutional arrangements and capacities to ensure livelihood benefits. ForestAction can increase research and action in promoting Payment for Environmental Services (PES) to reward communities for their conservation efforts.

**Government Promotion of Multi-stakeholder Processes:** In recent years the government has recognised and promoted multi-stakeholder policy processes in the NRM sector, especially in forest management. There is an increased realisation of the need to strengthen national capacity to effectively negotiate multilateral environmental agreements to reward Nepal's conservation efforts. This provides ForestAction spaces in the policy process in which to engage and influence.

## **OUR CAPACITIES AND RESOURCES**

**Organisational Capacity:** ForestAction team is comprised of a unique combination of technical and social science professionals and rights activists. Our main areas of expertise are in carrying out action research, undertaking policy analysis, facilitating institutional change, and undertaking science-based advocacy. Many of us received early degrees in forestry or agriculture but later trained in social science. Majority of us became familiar with social issues through student activism, later engaged in NGO advocacy and gradually turned to intellectual activism through higher degree training.

**Knowledge Based Advocacy:** Our approach to research and policy advocacy is distinct from many other NGOs. We use credible evidence, wider experience, and rigorous analysis to influence policy and civil society advocacy. We adopt action research methods with inbuilt elements of reflections into action. We have wide and extensive working links with actors of change at different levels. We capitalise on ongoing

development practices by using them as opportunities to learn through action, monitoring and reflections. Through this, we minimise the gaps that often exist between development actions and research activities.

**Horizontal Organisational Structure:** We work in a horizontal organisational structure with a slim secretariat to facilitate the professional team. Our researchers enjoy a great amount of autonomy in advancing their own research projects within the broad strategic framework of the organisation. Provided with this ample flexibility they are able to flourish and expand in their respective areas of expertise and interests. As a result we have been able to retain a rich multidisciplinary professional team of researchers, activists and development professionals.

**Winners of International Funding Competitions:** We receive a major part of our funding by bidding on international calls for proposals. In recent years we have however increased our dialogue with Kathmandu based aid agencies.

**Clear Focus on Local Communities and Stakeholders:** Our research and development actions primarily focus on forest dependent local communities, particularly women, *Dalits*, indigenous peoples and the poor. We also work with a range of stakeholders including policy makers, forestry professionals, the citizen's group, researchers and donors. We are increasingly targeting political party leaders and their cadres as audiences for our research.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2009-2014**

**Strategic Objective:** Promote inclusive and deliberative governance, sustainable management and productive utilisation of natural resources for enhancing climate resilient rural livelihoods.

**Major Strategies:** ForestAction takes a five-track strategy to achieve its objectives:

- a. *Innovative development actions and reflections:* Integration of observation and critical reflections in development practice often with multi-dimensional outcomes - resource conservation, livelihoods enhancement, governance improvement, methodological innovations, enriched understanding, capacity building of communities and stakeholders; development action and research are embedded so that the key purpose of our research is enhance the effectiveness of the development actions;
- b. *Documentation, analysis and synthesis:* Documentation of lessons, analysis of action research outputs, strategic analysis of key policy issues and processes, and theoretically informed synthesis;
- c. *Publication and communication:* Diverse forms of publications targeting different policy actors, training and workshops, conferences, seminars and teaching, informal meetings and intellectual inputs;
- d. *Lobbying, networking and policy dialogue:* Lobbying the policy community, networking and alliance formation, facilitating multi-stakeholder processes, and creating forums;
- e. *Capacity building:* capacity building of ForestAction team, our stakeholders and local communities through training, exposure visits, back stopping, coaching, and experiential learning.

## **THEMATIC AREAS OF ACTIONS**

ForestAction has prioritised five thematic areas of action for the next five years (2009-2014)

### ***Theme 1: Natural Resource Management and Sustainable Livelihoods***

*Strategic objective:* Support for productive and sustainable management of natural resources by participatory innovations, building the capacity of local communities and introducing socially responsible enterprises.

Activities:

- ❖ Action research on production technologies
- ❖ Piloting of forest based social enterprises
- ❖ Training and workshops for technical and institutional capacity building

### ***Theme 2: Local Governance, Tenure Reform and Community Autonomy***

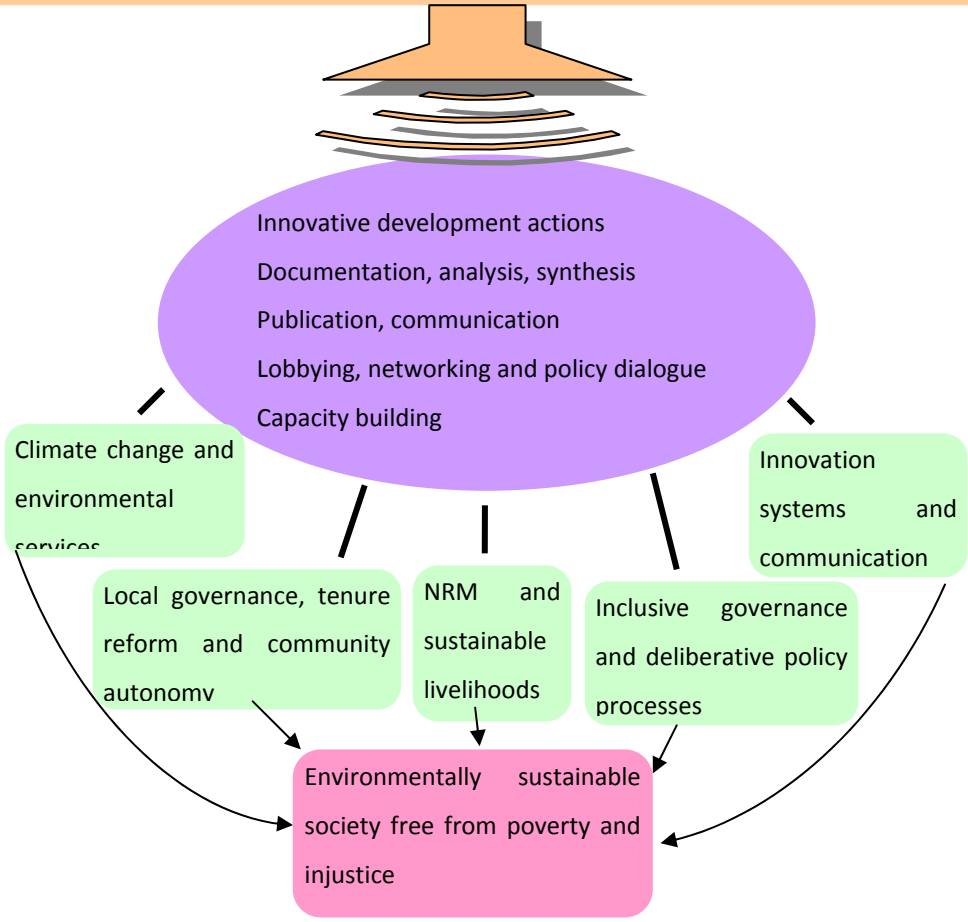
*Strategic Objective:* Promote decentralisation, local governance and community tenure security over natural resources.

Activities:

- ❖ Studies of NRM decentralisation and related regulatory frameworks
- ❖ Research and publication of best practices
- ❖ Comparative analysis of different tenurial regimes
- ❖ Facilitate policy dialogue on Terai forest management
- ❖ Advocate tenure reform and community rights
- ❖ Explore appropriate regulatory and institutional arrangement for resource management in high altitude

**Figure 2: Operational Framework: Context, Thematic Areas and Strategies**

*Resource conflict and poverty; Political transition and state restructuring; Climate*



Context      Strategies      Working areas      Outcomes

### **Theme 3: Climate Change and Environmental Services**

*Strategic Objective:* Strengthen local communities' resilience to impacts of climate change and increase their contribution to resource conservation.

Activities:

- ❖ Analyse, synthesise and communicate to stakeholders the international instruments and schemes related to climate change
- ❖ Provide support to increase national capacity for multilateral environmental negotiations
- ❖ Study general as well as specific effects of climate change, particularly the vulnerabilities and coping strategies of the poor and marginalised
- ❖ Study ecosystem services produced by community-based NRM
- ❖ Piloting for institutionalisation of PES
- ❖ Advocacy, networking and collaborative initiatives for climate mitigation/ adaptation policies

### **Theme 4: Inclusive Governance and Deliberative Policy Processes**

*Strategic Objective:* Promote and facilitate equity, gender and social inclusion at different levels of governance through institutional innovations and capacity building of marginalised groups. Promote deliberative policy processes by reflective sensitisation through critical analysis.

Activities:

- ❖ Create platforms for multi-stakeholder dialogues
- ❖ Focused studies on major issues of resource governance
- ❖ Reflective analysis of key policy processes and communication to stakeholders
- ❖ Provide critical intellectual inputs to NRM federations, networks and alliances
- ❖ Targeted programmes for capacitating and empowering poor and marginalised

### **Theme 5: Social Learning and Innovation Systems**

*Strategic objective:* Promote innovation systems in natural resource management.

Activities:

- ❖ Introduce learning-based approaches (ACM, PAL) in NRM
- ❖ Scaling up and scaling out of previous innovations
- ❖ Pilot adaptive NRM practices to cope with climate change
- ❖ Regular publication of Journal of Forest and Livelihood and Hamro Ban Sampada
- ❖ Publication of research reports, policy briefs, books and working papers
- ❖ Strategic alliance with national and international civil society organisations for exchange of ideas and innovations

**Figure 4: Working Areas of ForestAction**

## **IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

ForestAction seeks to mobilise the expertise of its core staff, consultants and associates to lead the thematic areas outlined above. We also seek to improve our capacity to proactively participate and influence international forums on environmental governance including climate change. A separate human resource development strategy will be developed to fulfil increased demand for human resources. Competent professionals and committed activists will be recruited for specific projects and attempts will be made to retain them in the longer term. Interns on diverse areas of NRM will be attracted in order to cultivate the required skill and expertise of the organisation.

ForestAction's ability to mobilize sufficient human and financial resources and to develop partnerships with relevant organisations determines the implementation of this plan. We seek to diversify our funding base by developing partnerships with all compatible donors and other organisations working on research and development actions related to natural resources. While we continue to respond to open calls for proposals, we will also increase dialogue with donors who have especial interests in addressing Nepal's poverty and NRM issues. Emphasis will be given to collaborative projects with multiple partners. Priority will be given to projects building on the lessons from existing and previous projects.

**Partnership Modalities:** ForestAction seeks to develop three types of partnerships:

- ❖ Institutional and strategic partnership: partnerships with those who support to the core funds and those who are involved in institutional development, the design and development of specific plans, documenting and synthesising lessons and institutionalising learning.
- ❖ Project partners: partnerships within the scope of particular projects; includes funding agencies and implementing partners.
- ❖ Network/collaborating partners: partnerships with those who have similar missions and commitments to work in collaborative modes, often with resource sharing between the collaborating partners.

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