



DISTRIBUTIONAL IMPACT OF COMMUNITY FORESTRY WHO IS BENEFITING FROM NEPAL'S COMMUNITY FORESTS?

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Abstract

A study was conducted to examine the distributional impact of community forest management on three economic groups of two selected forest user groups in the Koshi Hills of Nepal. The main objective of the study was to assess the costs and benefits of community forest management process to the rich, medium and poor groups of forest users. Wealth ranking exercise was done with the local people to identify the three groups according to the locally perceived criteria. Costs of forest management were classified as forestry operations costs (such as involvement in plantation etc.) and transaction costs (such as decision-making etc.). Benefits included in the analysis are all material values of forest actually consumed, excluding intangible benefits such as greenery. A simple benefit-cost analysis (B-C Ratio) was done (using non-discounted techniques), and BC ratios for the three income groups were calculated. The analysis showed that the B-C ratios of poor, medium and rich households (0.94, 1.17 and 1.10) are markedly different. This indicates that the poor users are getting negative benefits from the community forests. The middle-income groups get the highest net benefits followed by the rich households. The paper also analyzes the reasons behind this observation, and draws implications for policy, implementation support and research.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Community Forestry (CF) has become the most important program within the Nepal's forestry sector, following the approval of Master Plan for the Forestry Sector (MPFS) in 1989 and the enactment of Forest Act 1993 and Forest Rules 1995 (HMG/N, 1995). As per these policy provisions, local communities are organized as Forest User Groups (FUGs) and entrusted with the responsibilities of management, development and utilization of forest areas that are accessible to the communities. To date more than 9000 FUGs are managing about 660,000 hectares of community forest in the country (CPFD database, 2000).

With the expansion of community forestry, a question of equity in sharing the benefits from, and costs of, community forest management has been more pressing than ever before. In the hierarchical social structure of Nepal's rural communities, the power elites of the community largely dominates FUG decision-making forum. The poorer families are rarely in a position to voice their arguments for forest management activities that maximize their net benefits from the forest and fulfill livelihood needs. Experiences have shown that in many cases the level of extraction of forest products, particularly fuel wood, and small wood has been reduced following the establishment of community forest. As a result, the situation of the poor and the disadvantaged users is more likely to get worse.

At times, high costs of forest protection and management imposed by elite-dominated FUG committee has forced some of the poorest members to leave the group (Maharjan, 1998).

The preceding discussion indicates that the optimum flow of net benefits from forest to users in an equitable manner has been a serious issue in community forest management in Nepal. Although there are discrete observations and experiences regarding this question, there is no systematic inquiry into the issue reported. As a result, stakeholder response to the issue is not adequate, and the issue continues to go unattended.

Objectives of the Study

In this context, a study was carried out to assess the costs and benefits of Community Forest Management of three economic groups within FUGs (rich, medium and poor), and then to analyze the Benefit-Cost ratio (B-C ratio) of each of these income groups.

Specifically, the study had three objectives:

- Identify the items of costs and benefits of community forest management processes to the rich, medium and poor groups of users
- Quantify such costs and benefits for these sub-groups based on the prevailing economic conditions
- Assess the comparative flow of benefits and costs by analyzing Benefit-Cost Ratio for each income group

The aim of the study was to contribute to the understanding of the distributional impact of community forestry and make suggestions for more equitable community forest management practices in Nepal.

Methodology of the Study

Two FUGs were selected for the study one each from Dhankuta and Terhthum districts in the Koshi Hills, where Nepal UK- Community Forestry Project (NUKCFP) has been supporting community forestry process for the past several years.

These groups were selected for two reasons: first, a variety of forestry operations were carried out in the community forests; and, the three distinct classes of forest users were easily discernible. This was known from reviewing NUKCFP FUG database.

Participatory wealth ranking was done to identify the three economic groups. Representatives of all the three groups were involved in assessing costs and benefits using techniques they could understand. Data were collected from interviews, selected participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) tools, and observations.

Two types of cost borne on by users were identified for analysis. *Forestry operations costs* include a) time spent in collecting forest products, including the journey, b) the opportunity cost of labor at local level; and c) fees or charges to FUG funds. *Transaction cost* covers time spent in meetings, assemblies for planning and management of community forest. To get the total cost for each economic group, these two costs are added in each case. Other types of cost like spending time with visitors coming to the group from outside, visiting district and range post forestry staff and the like were not included in calculation. To get the cost of each economic group, personal interviews were conducted with four households of the concerned category. The cost incurred by these

four individual households were quantified and averaged to represent the cost of the individual household for each economic group.¹

The benefit in this study is defined as all those perceived by the users. In both the cases, all harvested materials or products from the forest are used as benefits. Users did not consider scenic beauty and other less tangible services of the forest as the benefits, although they are important from national and global perspectives. In this study, the valuation of the products was done by listing the products and then determining the monetary value from consensus among the participating groups for each item. Then to get the gross total value, all the items are added. Using costs and benefits thus obtained, benefit- cost ratio is calculated for each of the above-mentioned economic groups, using non-discounted techniques.

COSTS AND BENEFITS OF FOREST MANAGEMENT

About the Two FUGs

The two community forests are smaller than the national average of 73 ha (CPFD database, 2000). However, they represent typical community and forest characteristics in the middle hills of Nepal. Both groups represent a typical a heterogeneous community structure of Nepalese hill societies. The two groups cover two common forest types in the hills: Mixed forests of *Schima-Castanopsis* along with *Alnus*, and forests dominated by *Pinus roxburghii*.

Box 1: Bhadaure FUG: A Glimpse of Forest Management Process and Institutional Contexts

Bhadaure FUG is located in Basantapur VDC in Terhathum District. The main ethnic group is Bhramin- Chhetri, and 44 households (with a population of about 300) constitute the FUG. Some (28) of them are also the members of another adjoining community forest. Agriculture and animal husbandry, both of which are supported by forestry systems, forms the backbone of local economy. Small share of livelihood income comes from selling goats, milk, vegetables, wage labor, weaving and other outside jobs. The land holding ranges from 0.3 ha of Bari (up land) to more than over 2.0 ha, including Khet (irrigated land). The FUG committee (FUGC) comprises of 11 members including two women. Generally, 12 FUGC meetings and an assembly are held in a year.

Prior to hand over, the forest was heavily degraded. Rampant clearance of forest vegetation was common under the de facto open access regime of resource use, and this was exacerbated by chronic conflicts of the land and forest tenure between the power elites (who wanted to register the forest as private land) and the ordinary people (who wanted the forest to be retained as a common property). The users reached even the Supreme Court that eventually established communal/public right of users to the forest, and the villagers informally formed a committee to protect the forest. In 1994, the forest area was officially handed over to the Group. Grazing and other extractive works were then controlled and regulated by the committee. Now, 25 years after protection, the forest condition has significantly improved.

The forest covers 7.54 hectares of land comprising 6 management blocks (Bhadaure OP, 1992). Forest vegetation primarily consists of natural Alder (*Alnus nepalensis*), associated with Chilaune (*Schima wallichii*), Mahuwa (*Madhuca latifolia*), and Patle (*Castanopsis histrix*). The trees in the forest are more or less even-aged (about 20 years). The ground floor is open because of frequent leaf litter sweeping. Some scattered clusters of *Eupatorium* are found as ground flora. Some four or five years back, users planted cardamom (*Amomum aromaticum*) in about 1.85 ha of the forest (in block no 4 and 6). These plantations are separately leased to two households who pledged to pay highest charges to FUG for management. Parts of forest land near the people's agricultural

¹In calculating the cost, one man-day is considered equivalent to six working hours. The labour cost (including the opportunity cost at local level) is calculated by considering seasonal labour rate on the basis of agricultural workload in the particular season.

fields have no vegetation as they are meant for 'panighatta' (community-sanctioned private use for grazing cattle) for the respective households.

The objectives of forest management as stated in the operational plan (OP) include: a) fulfill users' forest product needs like firewood, timber, bedding materials, litter, grasses, bamboos etc; b) manage properly the 'Panighatta' and 'charicharan' (grazing areas) for livestock; iii) conserve spring water; iv) carry out development works to improve forest condition. At the beginning, because of poor forest condition, timber extraction had been prohibited. But since 1999 they had a plan to distribute timber 25 cubic feet (cft) per household to the needy users at the rate of Rs 1.5 per cft.

Firewood is extracted from dead, dying, diseased, crooked trees, which are collected in one place and distributed equally to every household every year in March-April. Rupee one per Bhari (approximately 45 Kg) is collected for raising FUG fund. Dry twigs are collected free of cost all round the year.

Two types of bedding materials are used: leaf litter and the lopped materials, which can be collected free of cost round the year as per need. The prescribed species for this purpose are banmara (*Eupatorium* sp), bhogate (*Maesa micriphylla*), angeri (*Lyonia ovalifolia*), chulesi (*Melostoma* sp), pati (*Artemissia vulgaris*), kamle (*Pilea wightii*), fern and similar others which are not used for timber.

Small poles (locally known as Ghocha-ghara) are distributed as per need. There are very few tree species for this purpose. Weeds (*Eupatorium*, *Artemissia*) can be collected round the year, and there is no charge on products obtained from them. These products are useful, especially for goats as a cheap fodder. Grazing can be done all round the year except in cardamom plantation area.

More details of forest management and institutional processes are presented in box 1 and 2. Benefits and costs of resin tapping in P-FUG, and that of cardamom cultivation in B-FUG have not been incorporated into the present analysis due to lack of adequate quantitative details of information.

Box 2. Patle Pangsing FUG: A Glimpse of Forest Management Process and Institutional Contexts

This group is located in Dhankuta Municipality. The main ethnic group comprising the FUG is Bramin- Chhetri. 180 households constitute the group (encompassing a population of about 900). The FUGC consists of 11 members including two women. While agriculture forms the main part of the economy, the users earn supplementary income through government services, jobs in other organizations and other off-farm activities. Milk has got a good local market and several households earn additional money from milk. The users of this forest are also the members of several other adjoining community forests.

This forest was initially under the control of 'Thari' and 'Jimmawal' (who are a group of local elites recognized by state to control and regulate the land ownership traditionally), and the forest condition was very much deteriorated. These elite groups tried to register the forest as their own private land but were unsuccessful. Later it was handed over (under the Forest Act 1961) as Panchayat Protected Forest in 1978. Even then the forest products continued to be enjoyed by a handful of powerful persons in the community. Later in 1989, the group was reformulated on the basis of user group concept, and this encouraged people to participate in management and utilization of the community forest.

The operational plan (OP) was prepared as prescribed by the Panchayat Forest Regulations 1978, with too few details of forest management planning (Patle-pangsing OP, 1989). The plan has not yet been revised in the light of the mandate and requirements of the new forestry regulations (HMG/N 1995). The OP, which is actually a mixture of the elements of constitution and forest management strategies, has inadequate provisions regarding the organizational processes of the

FUG such as meetings and assemblies. In practice, the committee meetings are held once a month and assembly at least once a year.

The forest has been divided into four blocks informally to run the management work smoothly. Chir pine (*Pinus roxberghii*) forests cover almost all 40 hectares of the land. Other associates are hardwood species like Patle katus (*Castanopsis hystrix*), Utis (*Alnus nepalensis*) and Chilaune (*Schima wallichii*). Large pine trees are scattered in the forest approximately at the rate of 20 trees per hectare. Utis is more dominant in block no 4 of the forest. Understory of the forest is mostly covered by the planted pine (carried out in 1991). Broom grass was planted (in 1992) underneath the Utis trees.

There are three main objectives set by the FUG for the betterment of users and the sustainable use of the forest: They are: i) to fulfill the forest based needs like grass, firewood and timber ; ii) To protect the soil from erosions ; iii) To increase water resource by maintaining green vegetative cover. The committee is planning to implement programmes that will benefit the poor but decisions have yet to be made regarding the kinds of activities and the type of beneficiaries.

The users extract several forest products. Ground grass is allowed free of cost, only in September and October in a year. During this time, committee distributes permits to every household, authorizing user households for collection of grasses. Thatch and broom grass are distributed through auction. Every year during June-August titepati (*Artemissia vulgaris*), banmara (*Eupatorium* sp), simali (*Vitex negundo*) and kali-angeri can be collected free of cost as green bedding and/or composting materials.

During March and April, leaf litter can be collected free of cost. Only in the months of February and March, the committee can declare, in consultation with DFO field staff, the time for firewood collection. Dead, dying, diseased, bushy, crooked, fallen trees are the source of fuelwood. In addition, inferior species of shrubs such as Bhogate (*Maesa microphylla*), Dhursul (*Colebrokia oppositifolia*) are also prescribed for firewood. Every household has to pay Rs 2 for a bundle of firewood (two feet long piece and tied with seven-foot long rope). Dead and dying trees are open for auction sale within the user group.

Timber is available to any needy households in consultation with forest rangers. The rate is equal to the Government royalty. Those who need have to apply one month in advance of construction for which timber is needed. Grazing is totally closed until the seedlings planted in the middle of the forest are established and cannot be damaged by the livestock.

Resin is collected from about 400 trees, and this activity was started in 1995. The average production of resin per year is 240 kilograms. A user from the group is assigned for the resin collection works. At present he receives Rs 5.5 and FUG receives 3 rupees per kilogram as a royalty from a Government owned Resin Tapping Company.

Costs of Forest Management

Forestry operation and transaction costs (costs per households per year, based on average of four households in category) are presented in Table 1. The table indicates several interesting observations. Rich groups bear largest fraction of forestry operation costs in both the FUGs, while poor groups in one FUG and the medium in the other share the smallest of this cost. This means that rich households are more active in forest management and utilization activities.

Transaction cost of poor is significantly lower than that of rich and medium groups. This indicates poor share less of decision-making costs than rich and medium do. Transaction costs of rich and medium is equal in the two FUGs, meaning they take equal part in decision-making. The poor have the lowest forestry operation as well as transaction cost. This indicates that poor have less involvement in overall forest management process – decision-making and implementation. This is partly due to the higher opportunity costs of

labor for the poor groups (since they have to spend their time on generating cash and/or daily subsistence needs).

Average forestry operation cost is 13 times higher than the average transaction cost for all income groups and the two FUGs. This means that about 7% of the total forest management costs is attributed to transaction costs. This is a cost imposed by community forestry on all income groups as this was not a necessity when the forest was *de facto* an open access prior to hand over.

While the transactions costs of the two groups are more or less the same, the forestry operation costs of the B-FUG are three times higher than those of P-FUG. This indicates the differences in scale of forest management. Interestingly, this difference means that the higher intensity of forest management may not always need higher transaction costs in meetings and decision-making.

Table 1. Quantification of Forestry Operation and Transaction Costs of Forest Management for Three Different Income Classes in USD (1 USD = NRS 69)

Income Class	Bhadaure FUG			Patle FUG			Average Cost		Total Average Cost
	Cost (Rs per Household per year)			Cost (Rs per Household per year)			Forestry operation	Transaction	
	Forestry operation	Transaction	Total	Forestry operation	Transaction	Total			
Rich	53.18	3.06	56.24	23.10	3.27	26.36	38.14	3.16	41.30
Middle class	51.87	3.06	54.93	10.09	3.27	13.35	30.98	3.16	34.14
Poor	42.39	1.81	44.20	13.82	0.24	14.06	28.11	1.02	29.13
Average Costs	49.15	2.64	51.79	15.67	2.26	17.92	32.41	2.45	34.86

Benefits of Forest Management

Details of benefit calculation (per households per year, based on average of four households in category) are presented in Table 2. The table highlights the product type, quantity and monetary values of the benefits for each income class.

The table indicates some differences in product use pattern among the rich, medium and poor. While medium income groups use maximum number of products (7), the rich and the poor use almost equal number of products (5). But the difference is that the poor do not use timber, which the rich use. Two most common products used by all groups are fodder from other shrubs (which includes *Eupatorium* as well) and fuelwood. Altogether, 11 items have been used by all.

'Fuelwood' and 'fodder from other shrubs' account for 80% or more of the gross value of benefits rich and medium households get, and 88% of that of the poor. This means that all the three groups compete for the same sets of products from the community forests. However, in P-FUG, the two products that contribute highest proportion of total values are slightly different for the three groups: timber and fuelwood for rich, timber and other grasses for medium, and fuelwood and other grasses for the poor.

From the table, the average benefits of rich, medium and poor groups are USD 45.38, 39.95 and 28.09 for rich, medium and poor respectively. This means that gross value of benefits obtained is positively with the degree of wealth a household has.

While the difference of benefits between rich and medium is insignificant in B-FUG, the difference is high in the case of P-FUG. In both the groups, the poor get far less than what rich and medium groups get. This means that although the difference in benefits obtained by rich and medium is not always so different, the poor invariably differs from the other two groups in this respect.

Table 2. Quantification of Benefits from Forest Utilization in USD (1 USD = NRS 69)

Items	Bhadaure FUG			Patle FUG			Total
	Rich	Medium	Poor	Rich	Medium	Poor	
Timber	-	-	-	11.00	10.00	-	21.00
Small Poles	1.40	0.70	-	-	-	-	2.10
Fuelwood	15.10	16.80	9.90	8.70	1.70	2.90	55.10
Tree Fodder	-	0.60	-	-	-	-	0.60
Broom grass	-	-	0.58	3.26	-	-	3.84
Thatch grass	4.30	4.30	0.90	-	-	1.40	10.90
Fodder from other shrubs	29.00	29.60	29.00	-	-	-	87.60
Dry twigs	6.50	1.30	-	-	-	-	7.80
Other grasses	-	-	-	4.30	6.50	6.10	16.90
Leaf litter	-	4.10	3.80	7.20	4.30	1.60	21.00
Total	56.30	57.40	44.18	34.46	22.50	12.00	226.84

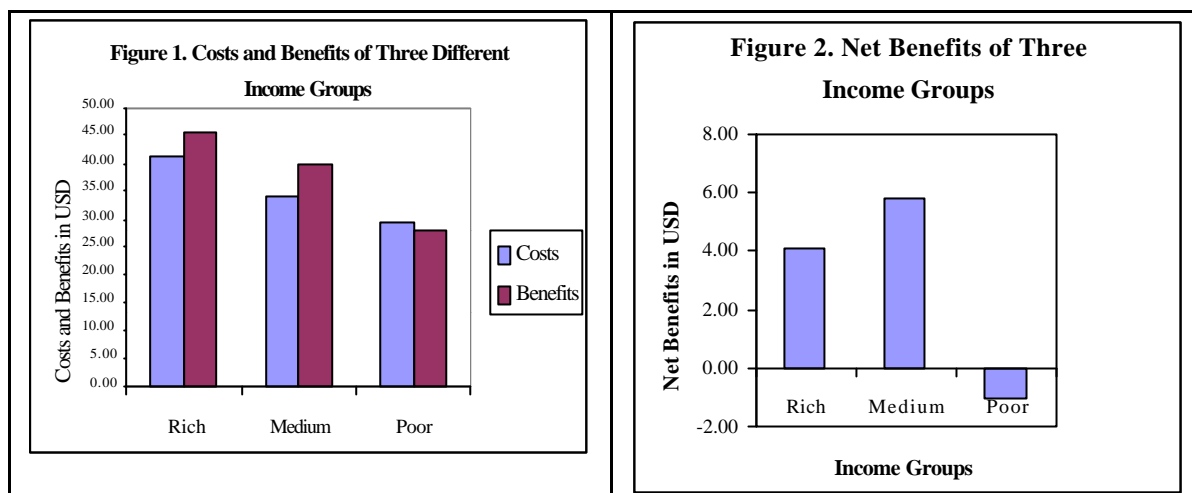
Benefit-Cost Analysis

Based on the calculations made in the preceding Tables 1 and 2, average net benefits for each economic group of both the FUGs combined are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of Net benefits among Income Groups

User Class	Benefits	Costs	Net Benefits	B/C Ratio
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d) = b-c	(e) = b/c
Rich	41.30	45.38	4.08	1.10
Medium	34.14	39.95	5.81	1.17
Poor	29.13	28.09	-1.04	0.96

The same data set is presented graphically below in Figures 1, and 2. Key observations from the analysis are presented in Box 3.



Box 3. Observations from the benefit cost analysis

1. Negative net benefit of the poor

As depicted in the above table, the total cost incurred by the poor households exceed the benefit received, hence the poor economic groups are in loss (Figure 5 and 6). Poor users give emphasis to use low value products such as grasses, leaf litters and others, which require high labor cost. This makes the poor's net benefit negative. The benefit cost ratios of poor group 0.96, and a B-C ratio of less than 1 indicates net negative returns.

2. Highest net benefit of the middle income group

Users in the middle income groups obtain highest net benefits. Possible reasons for this are that they use highest number of products that include low value such as bedding materials as well as high value products such as timber.

3. Lowest Absolute cost and benefits of the Poor

The absolute cost incurred by the poor group is lowest, indicating they invest less in decision-making and forestry operations. This is because of the high opportunity cost of labor. Likewise, the gross value of benefits of the poor as they use mostly low value products and they do not often need timber as the other income groups do.

4. Highest absolute cost and benefits of the rich

The reason why the rich groups spend the most are they have high purchasing power, particularly for bidding the products set out for auction sale. Likewise, the absolute benefits of the rich is also the highest.

Benefit-Cost analysis suggests that the wealthier class of user benefit more from community forests. This may be attributed to several practices adopted by FUGs, and the socio-economic factors pertinent to the FUG.

Distribution system of some of the products encourages the rich and medium class households who have high purchasing power. For example, the two FUGs have adopted the bidding system to sell/distribute the forest products (broom grass in P-FUG and thatch grass in B-FUG). The bidding system tends to marginalize the poor who cannot offer the highest bid in the auction but the need is the serious.

Rich and medium class households have higher land and animal holdings, and consequently they consume more forest products. However, sometimes rich households collect less amount of products like leaf litter and grasses from the CF area. They collect such products mostly from their own private land.

In some cases people from these economic classes do not collect their firewood share at the time of harvesting. They transfer their share to other households from more or less

similar economic class. Due to the compulsion of physical presence of the member during harvesting time, some rich and medium households do not want to be present and collect the firewood from the CF. This was clearly seen in Bhadaure FUG during harvesting time. In P- FUG, firewood can be obtained from pruning operation and the quality is low, they have to spend a whole week for tending operation (specially the pruning). Rich and medium class households are not attracted to spend the time for firewood from CF since they have their own trees in private land and can be harvested at any convenient time.

Another reason why rich people use more forest products is that they have money and resources for constructing new houses and/or repairing the old ones. The poor unlike the rich accords low priority in constructing and improving buildings, and hence have less demand for timber. Although the FUGC charge for timber is less or equal to government royalty, it is still higher for the poor and cheaper for the rich when rated against the real purchasing power. This situation is clearly reflected in P-FUG.

Due to small land holdings, poor households do not have trees in their land. They have to utilize the land for grain production. Hence they have to depend on community forest for products like grasses/ fodder, leaf litter, firewood and others. The poor have no alternatives except the communal land for meeting the forestry based basic needs. In the past, these people used to collect firewood from the forest and sell to the market for their livelihood without much restrictions. Although there are no any alternatives, people are forced to obey the rules of OP after handing over the forest to the villagers. This is because the voices of the poor are too weak to be adequately incorporated in the FUG rules.

All economic groups in Bhadaure FUG use *Eupatorium* as a cheap source of fodder extensively. Due to the scarcity of other fodder species in the CF and limited access to the private resource, fodder supply is entirely from CF for the poor economic group. Almost two- third of the total benefit is drawn from *Eupatorium* grass alone.

This analysis indicates that the poor are concerned over daily needs like fodder/ grass, leaf litter and firewood, whereas the rich and medium households' concern is towards timber and other high value products. Also, the poor have borne less overall costs, meaning they have less involvement in the entire process of forest management. This may be due to high opportunity cost of time and labor, which is allocated to higher priority areas of securing immediate livelihood needs.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT AND RESEARCH

This study has concluded that from the current practices of forest management, poor users are not actually benefiting when all opportunity costs are accounted for in the assessment of costs and benefits. Rather, community forestry may be imposing extra costs due to increased transaction costs of participating in meetings and assemblies and the costs of collecting products. FUGs lack provisions for addressing equitable system of benefit distribution and cost sharing, and the forest ecosystem has been manipulated in ways that maximizes production of outputs (such as timber) useful to relatively well-off class of community members. A similar observation is reported by Ojha (1999) in Paire FUG of Dhading, where too much of timber thinking is rapidly converting young *Shorea* forest into closed-canopy big forest, eliminating grasses and other useful shrubs from the forest, with a negative impact on the poor and the women.

The two FUG fairly represent the community forestry scenario in the middle hills of Nepal on aspects of socio-economic as well as ecological systems. However, this study focuses on 'after community forestry situation' only. In order to arrive at more universal

conclusions, it is necessary to analyze a wide array of FUGs, with varying socio-economic and ecological contexts, and the distributional impact may be assessed in 'before community forestry' as well as 'after community forestry scenario'.

Despite this limitations of the study, the conclusion gives rise to a fundamental question to the widespread practice of community forestry in Nepal: is the present system of community forest management creating favorable impact on the livelihood of the poor and the disadvantaged or increase the cost of living? The findings of the study are apparently suggest 'no'. The main reasons behind this are that despite policy emphasis on generating consensus among users in Community Forest management, there is no real consensus that actually incorporates the aspirations and views of the weaker sections of the community. Forest management and distributions systems are mostly controlled by the elites in the community, and community forestry extension input alone may not be expected to reorient the entire socio-political structure. However, the existing opportunities to change the attitude of community leaders and building their capacity to understand the dynamic links among 'FUG decisions', 'human actions', 'ecological processes of the forests' and the 'equity in forest products sharing'. Also, the Department of Forest (DOF's) perception of good FUG is dominated by criteria such as good forest and good bank balance, and hence monitoring of the livelihood impact of community forest management is not an area of its explicit interest.

Implications of these findings on policy, research and implementation process are drawn for more equitable community forestry practices in the hills of Nepal. These are listed in Box 4.

Box 4. Implications for More Equitable Community Forestry

Improvement of CF Support System

- Empower poor and disadvantaged users for increased access to decision-making on forest management and utilization issues
- Encourage equitable forest products distribution systems, for example, by making groups aware on innovative practices carried out by other FUGs in other areas (see Dhanmane FUG of Ilam reported by Subedi et al, 2000)
- Sensitize, train and reorient the community leaders/FUGs members on the linkages between silvicultural practices and equity
- Develop capacity of DOF field staff and NGOs in understanding and facilitating links between community forest management and rural livelihoods, with particular emphasis on equity

Community Forestry Research Issues

- Carry out study into organizational development processes of FUGs and implications for support to make FUGs more democratic institutions
- Carry out participatory action research to develop suitable silvicultural technologies/methodologies for various ecological and socio-economic situations
- Explore market and forest product development potential at commercial (beyond subsistence) levels

Policy

- Explore policy mechanisms for ensuring increased flow of benefits to the poor. Possible options include introducing leasehold and private use provisions within community forest.
- Give policy mandate to DoF to undertake periodic monitoring of livelihood impact of CF management
- Empower FUGs to sell community forest products extracted on a sustainable basis

At the implementation level, efforts to empower poor and disadvantaged users for increased access to group decision-making system. NGOs and FUGs/FECOFUN may be encouraged to take the role of awareness raising, empowerment and building of

democratic user group institutions. As part of FUG capacity building process, sensitize, train and reorient the community leaders/FUGs members on the participatory processes and techniques.

There is a need to better understand the social dynamics of forest management with particular reference to power relations and participation in user group processes. Studies may be undertaken to assess the organizational development processes of FUGs and implications for support in forest management. Also participatory action research to develop suitable silvicultural technologies/methodologies for various ecological and socio-economic situations may be carried out so that silvicultural options that may generate products mostly needed by the poor may be advocated.

Policy options of leasehold forests (on parts of community forests) for the poor groups within FUG may be explored. Also the DOF should review its role to include periodic monitoring of livelihood impact of CF management practices so that the policy formulation processes are based on broader premises of rural livelihoods rather than the issue of forest conservation alone.

The conclusions arrived at this study are expected to initiate a process of reflection among stakeholders to look for ways so that community forestry may be modified to positively impact the livelihood of the poorer sections of the community.

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About ForestAction

Forest Resource Studies and Action Team, Nepal (ForestAction) is a core team of forestry professionals and activists associated with Bikalpa, a registered network/membership based organization advocating for livelihood rights. ForestAction believes that primacy of livelihood rights, democratic and participatory policy process, local governance on resource base, and generative action and learning are prerequisites for sustainable, equitable and efficient management of Nepal's forest resources.

The team is committed to promote and facilitate informed dialogues and effective interactions among forest dependent communities, intermediaries and Government authorities to decide the future of forests as a source of livelihoods and economic well-being. ForestAction's current action nodes include participatory/action research and training for development and dissemination of generative as well as adaptive forest management methods and tools, interactive workshops on policy/practice issues, dissemination of generated information on socio-political and technical aspects of forest management, and promotion of local users' agendas in forest management. ForestAction is still evolving, and it would highly acknowledge comments and suggestions from all interested.

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