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Challenges in Community Forest Functioning under Political Conflicts

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Abstract

Community forestry in Nepal has been widely recognised as one of the most successful examples of Community-based Natural Resource Management initiative in any developing country. It has been initiated in the late 1970s in eighteen districts in the Middle Hills region; by 2001 the community forest had expanded to cover 73 out of 75 districts in the country. Large amounts of aid money and loans have been provided over the past two decades to various State agencies, NGOs and INGOs to facilitate the program. The international development community views Forest User Groups (FUGs), formed under the Community Forestry Programme (CFP), as institutions that not only facilitate local natural resource access and management, but also as vehicles of decentralised governance at the community level.

Meantime, the country has been facing serious political conflicts, which has extended terrorism and claimed thousands of human lives. The situation starts from the rural level where community forest targets and function well with the technical and extension support from government and non government organisation have been available. Several bilateral and multilateral development agencies have kept keen interest not only to continue necessary support but also they are learning themselves and their experiences have been proliferated worldwide. Now the community owned forest areas are being the inhabitants and so-called practice field of both revolutionarily group and government security. It is difficult for the people to go into the forest. Nowadays, there are several cases that even the local users became victim while entering the forest for their livelihoods.

This paper will discuss some potential strategies to better functioning of the resources management by the people themselves. The basis of the discussion in the paper was supplied by secondary sources from national and international journals and own interaction with forestry stakeholders in the country. Because of lack of external monitoring, internal conflicts have also be seen in some cases. Mobilisation of user groups by themselves either by their knowledge or through user group networks is some mechanism to get success despite the situation.

Keywords: Community based resource management, community forest user group, conflicts, Nepal