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Can Community Forestry Survive in Restructuring New Nepal?

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Abstract

Nepal is the pioneer of people centred forestry in the world. It has started community forestry in 1978. Since then, the country has achieved wider name and fame for mobilising people participation to restore degraded forestry resources and sustainable supply of forestry products to local community.

Nepal is predominantly an agrarian country with very diverse geographical and cultural conditions. The elevation range is unpredictably varied within the narrow stretch. The elevation varies from 70 m asl at South to the 8848 m asl at North. The country is divided into three regions on this basis; Terai (17%), Hill (68%) and Mountain region (15%). Terai is most populated region with nearly half of population whereas the North is very sparsely populated. Altitudinal variation has tremendous influences in social, economical and environment equilibrium.

Despite of all these differences, government promulgated same sets of community forestry throughout the country. The community forestry has achieved some successes in maintaining the greenery, restoring the degraded lands and supplying forest products to the community in hilly regions. But, it has different consequences and externalities in the Terai and Himalayan regions.

As in the Terai, the local terrain ethnic groups have been displaced further south by the hill migrants in the course of time, have been indirectly barred from their traditional rights over natural resources. The forest is being handed over to local people who are in proximity to the forest. The distant user cannot be involved in community forestry.

During the recent period of political upraise and transformation of Nepal to the Federal system, community forestry is certainly going to be questioned at least in terrain region where the most commercial and productive forestry resources is still available. During these periods of political turmoil and over realisation of the communal rights of hill migrants and local people, the communal conflicts will multiple in coming days and deforestation would go on simultaneously. The preliminary symptoms has already been realised in this direction. The pros and cons of community forestry in the context of terai region in Nepal, and perspective solution to the perceived challenges would be analysed and presented.

Keywords: Community forestry, Nepal, political change