

Factors Influencing Institutional Arrangements for Effective management of Non-timber Forest Products in Community Forest User Groups of Nepal



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Introduction

In some rural parts of Nepal, non-timber forest products (NTFP)-related economic activities contribute up to 90% of households' income (Bista and Webb 2006). Realizing its economic importance, Nepal's NTFP development policy 2004 emphasizes the commercial management of NTFPs in community forestry as a means for poverty reduction (HMG 2004). Pro-poor management of NTFPs in community forest user groups (CFUGs) depend on the institutional arrangements within CFUGs, which are influenced by political, social and geographical factors. To understand the influence of such factors on institutional arrangements, research was carried out in Kalobhir and Mahadevthan, Dolakha district, Nepal.

Objectives

The study analyses the institutional arrangements for managing NTFPs in CFUGs, and to explore the factors contributing to their development

Methods

Data collection was carried out between September 2007 and January 2008. Qualitative and quantitative social science methods were used (Acharya 2005). 14 key informant interviews comprising NTFP collectors, CFUG committee members, traders, entrepreneurs and personnel from external agencies were interviewed, and group discussions were conducted. Both interviews and discussions were recorded using a voice recorder. The transcribed data was analysed with qualitative data analysis software (Atlas ti. 5.0). A mixed approach comprising both inductive and deductive coding was induced (Miles and Huberman 1994). Following the coding we conducted a cause and effect analysis between the codes, and finally the factors influencing the institutional arrangements were identified.



Figure 1: Mahadevthan CFUG settlement and forest



Figure 2: Poorest users of Kalobhir participating in their monthly meeting

Table 1: General characteristics of the selected CFUGs

CFUG Attributes/ Name of CFUG	Kalobhir	Mahadevthan
Forest area (ha)	545	207
No of Household	215	125
Representation of marginalized users in the CFUG committee	*Dalit, women and poor	Women
Number of the poorest users' household	26	3
NTFPs in trade	<i>Daphne bhoutua</i> (Lokta), <i>Edgeworthia gardneri</i> (Argeli), <i>Gaultheria fragrantissima</i> (Machino), <i>Sweritia chiraita</i> (Chiraito), <i>Giardina diversifolia</i> (Allo), mushrooms	<i>Daphne bhoutua</i> (Lokta), <i>Pine cone</i> (Simta), <i>Lichen</i> (Jhyau), <i>Sweritia chiraita</i> (Chiraito), <i>Valeriana waltchaiti</i> (Sugandawal)
Time required to reach the nearest town from the CFUG	About 10 min. on foot	About an hour and half on foot, then three hours by public transport
Associated enterprises	Everest Gateway Handmade Paper Enterprise, situated within the CFUG.	None
Level of external agencies involvement	High	Low

* so-called untouchable or lower cast people according to Hindu Religion



Figure 3: A woman collector carrying Lokta bark after harvesting in Kalobhir forest



Figure 4: A woman making Nepali handmade paper out of Lokta bark in Everest Gateway Handmade paper Enterprise

Results and discussions

> Involvement of external agencies such as governmental and non-governmental organizations had a positive influence for the development of NTFP management plans in CFUGs and establishment of NTFP market linkage as they can support CFUGs with finances and technologies.

> The high economic status of decision makers had dual impacts on the development of NTFP management plans. Management plans for economically less important NTFPs were undermined whereas the opposite was the case for economically important NTFPs.

> Most of the better-off users were against pro-poor programs. However, their intension to keep good relations with external agencies for their personal benefits compelled them to invest community funds for the benefits of the poor (Malla 2003).

> The formation of sub-groups of poorest users and inclusion an *ex officio* member in CFUG committee had not only empowered them to demand pro-poor programs, but also provide them a platform to interact with external agencies.

> The remoteness of the CFUGs from towns had a negative influence as both external agencies and NTFP traders had a tendency to work in more accessible areas.

Table 2: Institutional arrangements at different NTFP management levels and factors influencing them

NTFP management level	Institutional arrangements	Factors				Geographical location of the CFUGs
		Involvement of external agencies	Established market linkages	High economic status of decision makers	Inclusion of representatives from poorest users in CFUG committee	
NTFP management within community forest	Presence of detailed NTFP management plan	+	NA	+/-	NA	-
NTFP marketing	Agreements for regular marketing	+	+	NA	NA	-
NTFP-related pro-poor programs	Allocation of community forest land to the poorest	+	NA	NA	+	NA
	Support to the poorest for purchasing shares of enterprises	+	NA	-	NA	NA

NA: Not Applicable

Conclusions

The involvement of external agencies is an essential factor for the effective management of NTFPs in CFUGs. They can play an important role in developing detailed NTFP management plans and their marketing. As there exists a patron-client relationship between external agencies and committee members, the external agencies can influence CFUG committee members to invest the community funds in pro-poor programs.

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