

Assessing Community Forestry Institutions: Evidence from western Nepal

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Introduction

Since the past two decades, most of the developing countries including Nepal have initiated decentralised forest management. The devolved model of community forestry approach is expected to address the livelihood needs of rural people through management and utilization of forest resources while at the same time protect the local ecology. However, the success of contributing community forestry on the diverse need of forest users highly depends on the practice of good governance: participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law and inclusion/equity.

Objectives

To evaluate the effectiveness of community forestry institutions vis-à-vis their governance and management structures.

Study Area

- The study area is situated in mid western Terai (plains area) in Nepal called Banke district, 507 km west from the capital city of Kathmandu
- The district covers an area of 225,836 hectare, of which 113,295 hectare is forests (51%) and 57,252 hectare (25%) is Agriculture land
- The total population is 385,840 of which 67.5% are economically active engaged in agriculture, high dependence on natural resources and forests.
- The population density is 123 people per sq. km with a growth rate of 3.5%,

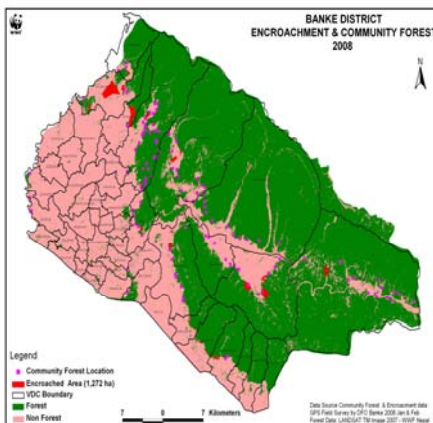


Fig. 1: Study area of the district Source: District Forest Office, Banke (2008)



Fig. 2-3: Forest users were getting fuel wood (left) and women was supported by CFUG for livelihood programme (right) Source: field study (2008/09)

Methods

- Three community forest user groups (CFUG) were selected for the study which are Gijara, Shreejana and Bavanpurwa.

- Data was collected using various social science methods: workshops, household survey interviews, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were carried out in all respective CFUG.

- Five major dimensions of governance: accountability, participation, transparency, rule of law and inclusion/equity were assessed with the help of a set of indicators with four rating scale (4= very high to 1= very low).

- The set of indicators explaining each governance dimension was developed before the workshop and matrix ranking was used to rank each indicator according to the set of criteria.

- During workshops, participants were asked to provide score on 'governance indicators' based on group consensus. Scored values of 'governance indicators' were used to visualize the gap between the current status and desired level of governance practices through 'spider web diagram'.



Fig. 4-5: Users were participating group discussion (left) and research assistant was taking interview with member of CFUG (right) Source: field study (2008/09)

Main findings

➤ Out of three cases, two groups (Gijara and Shreejana CFUGs) were found to have well functioning governance structures. In particular the system of accountability and rule of law are well established, and financial transactions are more transparent than in Bavanpurwa CFUG. Consequently, forest users in these two groups also benefit in terms of livelihood and economic returns.

➤ The system of governance in Bavanpurwa CFUG is very weak. Executive committee is not accountable to the forest users and financial transactions are not transparent. Resulting most of the decision and benefits are captured by local elites.

➤ A close look reveals the preconditions why the governance systems in the two cases of Gijara and Shreejana CFUGs looks better. These are:

- forest users enjoy high access to the forest products
- availability of the resources in the community forest
- domination of the leadership by hilly origin people
- motivation and commitment of the group
- economic condition of the users
- following rule of law
- mutual trust and understanding among actors, and
- close monitoring from forestry sector service providers.

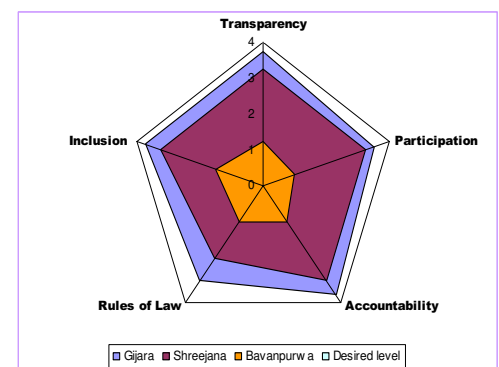


Fig. 6: Spider web diagramme showing status of governance in three CFUGs

Acknowledgements

We are thankful to Austrian Exchange Service for providing financial support to first author for PhD project

This poster is part of PhD ongoing project "Performance of community forestry governance in Nepal"