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“Development on the margin”

Community Forestry Governance in Nepal: An Analysis from Central to Local Level Stakeholders

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Abstract

Community Forestry (CF) programme in Nepal has been widely recognised as a successful model for decentralisation and devolution of power to local communities in order to manage their community forests and fulfil their forest products needs. Community Forest Users Groups (CFUGs) are the key implementers who protect, manage and utilise community forests in a sustainable basis. Despite of many successful stories, several issues and challenges have been emerging among them good governance is one of the key concerns in community forestry. Several government and non—government organisations are working with Community Forest Users Groups in order to ensure community forestry governance. Several problems related to good governance have been realised at policy makers, service providers and CFUGs level. Whether they are practicing good governance in their own level or not is still quizzical to the public. This paper explores and analyses the community forestry governance at two levels: a) national level for policy makers and service providers, and b) Community Forest User Group level. It tries to come across the main achievements and challenges of community forest governance using five major characteristics of good governance: transparency, accountability, participation, inclusion/equity and rules of law. The study is based on qualitative and quantitative data. At the national level, interview was carried out with forestry experts working in governmental and non-governmental organisations and with the donors who are supporting community forestry programme in Nepal. Quantitative data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science. The findings reveal that community forestry policies are formulated in a participatory manner at national level, albeit there is a need of building an environment for effective coordination, mutual trust and partnership among the stakeholders, i.e., policy makers, service providers and donors. At the CFUGs level, they have been functioning independently but the limited users especially elites and committee members are exercising the power of the whole group, while women and disadvantaged groups are not getting the benefits as expected. It has been concluded that rigorous effort is still necessary to improve the governance both at central and local level and within the CFUGs.

Keywords: Accountability, community forestry, equity, governance, participation, power, stakeholders, transparency