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Community Forestry in Nepal: Addressing Livelihoods of the Poor

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Abstract

The community forestry (CF) programme was formally launched in Nepal in 1978. Following three decades of implementation, it has been globally recognised as one of the progressive models for participatory forest management. At present, about one-third of the country's population have been involved in the CF programme directly managing around 25 % of the national forest through more than 14 000 forest user groups (FUGs).

Beyond its initial goal of forest protection and supply of forest products for subsistence, the CF programme now has been progressively shifted into the issues of good governance, livelihood promotion, sustainable forest management and environmental services at local and national levels.

The FUGs' sensitiveness, decisions and activities in the favour of their poor members are the pivotal issues in CF program. This study, conducted in 2008, explores how these aspects are addressed in FUGs. It depicts an analysis of 309 FUGs of mid hills of Nepal. Different participatory tools and semi-structured interviews were used for the qualitative and quantitative data collection.

The study revealed that significant efforts were made by the FUGs to support the livelihoods of poor members of the communities. Altogether 87 % FUGs had identified poorest households in their groups of which more than two third had already put poor friendly provisions in their forest management plans and were implementing the activities accordingly. The activities included equitable distribution of forest products with positive discrimination to the poorest households (57 %), representing the poor in leadership positions (61 %), providing scholarship to the poor households' children (13 %), employing them in forestry activities (19 %), providing community land for forest based income generation activities (20 %), prioritising them for skill based trainings (34 %), allocating community fund for their income generation (41 %), added with the support to the disaster victimized poor for housing and health services (22 %).

These FUGs were found successful in addressing the livelihoods enhancement issues of their poor members' in the rural communities. Thus, CF programme could be a vehicle to drive the poor communities out of the poverty line through the sustainable management of local forest resources.

Keywords: Community forestry, livelihoods, poor