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Benefit Sharing in Community Forestry in Nepal: Do Poor Actually Benefit?

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Abstract

Community forestry (CF) in Nepal is said to be a successful, innovative and future-oriented participatory forest management program. 17,600 Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) manage more than 1.6 million hectares of national forest, and in thirty-two years of its initiation CF approach has evolved as a viable mechanism of handling forest to autonomous user groups with legal status with perpetual succession and as a means to generate benefit - that the group can mobilise on its own interest. Benefit sharing among the members within the group is less emphasised even though it determines the socioeconomic upliftment of marginalised groups in caste and class based hierarchical Nepalese society.

Five, three and two CFUGs were selected from Dolakha, Gorkha and Chitawan district respectively. 136 forest users and 39 committee members, 9 political party leaders and 3 district forest officers were interviewed. Records on the forest products and income sharing were used from district forest offices and CFUGs. Moreover, group discussions with the pro-poor identified by the respective groups were conducted. Ten, one in each CFUG, pro-poor houses were visited and family members were consulted to know if they are satisfied with the existing mechanism. CFUGs' constitution, operational plan and minutes were assessed.

Result showed that one of the approved objectives of all CFUGs was status upliftment of socioeconomically marginalised sections of the group. The CF had fulfilled around 68 % of the demand of products and users depend on other sources such as agricultural fields. Poor users, and users facing problems, got the forest products free-of-cost or in discount - up to 90 %. 16, 4 % and none of the income was expended by the poor in Dolakha, Chitawan and Gorkha respectively. None of the CFUGs from Chitawan and two in Gorkha did not conduct well-being-ranking in order to identify the poor, so that the actual poor did not get their benefits.

Poor identification through well-being-ranking like in Dolakha could ensure that the real poor got their benefits. Implementation of legal obligation to expend at least 35 % of CFUGs' total income in pro-poor programmes could improve the socioeconomic status of marginalised groups.

Keywords: CFUG, marginalised, pro-poor, socio-economic upliftment, well-being-ranking, community forest