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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

The Rationales, Knowledge Forms and Biophysical Outcomes of Community Forest Management in Nepal’s Mid-Hills

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Abstract

The use of local knowledge has been widely reported in natural resources management in many indigenous communities around the world. In Nepal, studies have indicated similar occurrence. The application of local forest related knowledge in forest management as oppose to the adoption of community forest management operational plans, which was a legal tool, with which a particular forest management authority is transferred to a particular community forest user group (CFUG). Despite the suggestions in recent literature that these local knowledge application lead to forest conservation outcomes, the rationale behind the adoption of these local knowledge as well as the biophysical outcomes of the community forest management is still unclear. Using a case study approach, the following questions are being explored in four CFUGs: Which characteristics the forest related knowledge held and used by the communities in community forest management? What are the differences between the actual management practices adopted by the local people and the technical content of their OP? Have the observable temporal effects on tree crown cover of the de facto management been expected and intended by the CFUGs? Multidisciplinary approach that combines qualitative and quantitative research methods was used. Data were collected through semi structured interviews, focus group discussions, household questionnaire survey and field observations. Preliminary results show that the communities are fully aware of some technical inadequacies in the operational plan, which translated into non-implementation of the plan. Results also indicate that communities are fully aware of their environment and its history, as a result, local forest-related knowledge which has been developed over time was resorted to in management paradigm, which in turn suggests that the observed change in forest cover was intended by the communities, as demanded by the topographical difference and community needs in the study area. This study intends to contribute to the general understanding of 'why people do what they do' in terms of community forest management. Forest policy professionals and sociologist could use the result in enhancing effective integration of local knowledge with scientific knowledge to promote locally meaningful and bio-physically sustainable natural resources management.

Keywords: Community forest management, community forest management operational plan, community forest user groups, local forest-related knowledge