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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

## Influencing Factors on Forest Utilisation under Participatory Forest Management Regimes in Nepal

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### Abstract

Despite the crucial role of agriculture in developing countries for the provision of food assets, communities in rural settings are still heavily dependent on forest products. This dependency on forest resources is often argued to be the main driver for small scale deforestation and forest degradation. This study investigates the needs and behaviour of those households who are on the one side affected by forest loss and degradation and are on the other side impacting the resource themselves. It analyses the drivers determining the forest utilisation intensity of rural households organised in participatory forest user groups. Additionally, it is tested whether the forest dependency hypothesis holds true and which role poverty and the availability of product and income substitutes play for the forest use intensity.

The study is based on data collected by a survey of 358 households organised in 8 participatory forest user groups in the Chitwan district in southern Nepal. The survey data covers internal and external household related variables from all five livelihood capitals (*i.e.*, natural, human, physical, financial and social capital).

Our results reveal that the remote households, which have the greatest access to the forest resource combined with the lowest access to alternatives, show the greatest forest utilisation intensity. They are driven by external influences (natural and social capital). The availability of direct forest product substitutes, either from subsistence production (physical capital) or achievable by sale (financial capital) has proven to be the most influential on the overall forest product collection and on the fuel wood collection. This proves the existence of a resource dependency due to a lack of alternatives. Fodder collection is driven by livestock demand and labour allocation (human capital).

Poverty, expressed by total household income (direct and in kind), does not play a significant impact on the forest utilisation intensity. In the considered low income setting of the tested household sample, forest dependency is enhanced by limited access to income and product alternatives not necessarily by plain poverty of the household.

**Keywords:** Community forestry, forest dependency, regression analysis, rural livelihood strategies, subsistence