Approaches to extension in forestry: experiences of community forestry in Nepal

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The success of participatory forestry depends largely on the effectiveness of forestry extension. Forestry extension in Nepal became pertinent while implementing community forestry programmes which expanded widely and intensively since early eighties. However, extension has been inseparable part in all types of forest and natural resource management. It is dynamic and evolves with the various developmental phases of forest management.

Forestry extension was first introduced through extensionist to forester approach. Later it turned to forester to forest users approach. These approaches played a great role during planning phases of community forestry. Now users to users approach has evolved during the implementation of community forestry operational plans. This has been very effective forestry extension approach to achieve success in participatory forestry.

The paper sketches the history of evolution of forestry extension in Nepal. Case studies based on forestry extension through users to users approach are presented. Sustainability of the approach and its effects in forest resource management is discussed. The users to users approach is recommended for achieving the goals of participatory forest management.

Keywords: Forestry extension, Community forestry, Forest User Group, Sindhupalchok District, Nepal

Forestry extension is inseparable for all types of forestry activities. This has a significant role in the forestry development in the developing country. Assuming the infant stage of forestry in such countries, various approaches and methods have been imported from developed countries through: adoption of curriculum in local training and educational institutions, providing oversees training for local professionals, and employment of expatriate in forestry projects. However, approaches are being evolved while implementing participatory forestry programmes in such countries. As a result forestry programmes which neglected the extension in the beginning, turned towards extension approaches in their succeeding phases of implementation.

Extension in Nepal's forestry was recognised more seriously only after the implementation of community forestry in late 1970s. However, this has now become an important part in all types of forest and natural resources management.

This paper attempts to deal with various approaches to extension in forestry and is based on author's experiences while implementing community forestry at various districts in Nepal.

Forestry extension

Various definitions of forestry extension have been proposed (FAO, 1986, and 1988; Sim and Hilmi, 1987). Gautam (1995) has defined forestry extension in the Nepali context as an interaction between the forestry staff and local users by which the latter are motivated to manage their forestry resources. However, the interaction need not be necessarily between forestry staff and users, but can be within and between the users group also. However the definition of management have dynamic paradigm, and changed from afforestation to protection; to the present context which includes all aspects of managing forest resources, regeneration to the distribution of forest products. The change in paradigm of management resulted in changes in the approaches and messages in forestry extension.

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Thus the approaches to extension in forestry in Nepal can broadly be grouped in sequence as - extensionist to forester, forester to forest users, and users to users.

Extensionist to forester approach

Initially forestry extension was conceived as a process to teach the people about the role and importance of forests, assuming people do not know about the benefit of tree and forest. Furthermore, this philosophy agreed that users should be kept-off forests. And, forestry staff had no good relation with forest users.

When the community forestry programmes were initiated in late 1970s, a need to improve the relation between users and forestry staff was felt. Accordingly, extensionist from disciplines of sociology, anthropology, etc. other than forestry, were involved in the central level. They were involved to develop the extension material, and conduct seminar workshops and training for foresters working in the field of community forestry. Thus the forester had to implement the extension programme developed by outsider.

Later, when the forest users group initiated forest management, the extension's demand came to the technical package too, and so the role of the extensionist other than foresters was reduced whereas responsibility of extension forester increased. Thus the forestry extension approach turned to forester to forest users.

Forester to forest users approach

When the community forestry programme gained momentum foresters had to be equipped themselves with the skill of forestry extension. At this stage, it was designed to strengthen the forest users in managing forest resources through organising training in the field. This approach performed better than the first one but still there remained a gap between the person involved in the training and the general users. So, forestry extension emerged as an approaches of forest users to users.

Forest users to users approach

This is the most recent approach evolved itself with the effective implementation and monitoring of operational plans of community forest users groups. Its details are presented through some case studies from Sindhupalchok, a hill district in the central Nepal.

Case studies

Bidyalaya FUG

Bidyalaya FUG emerged as a leading FUG in Bansbari village development committee (VDC). The users of this FUG discussed and formed a committee in 1988. They used to have regular monthly meeting to review the status of their forests. Later in 1993, they were able to prepare an operational plan with the support of forestry field staff. The area of the forest was 30 ha and total number of households were 55. Forest was of both natural and plantation.

Bidyalaya forest contributed to the emergence of the several FUGs in the VDC : Bhumisthan, Khokako forest, Rankedeurali forest, Salbisauna forest, Lohsepakha forest, Birautapakha forest, Jamunepakha forest, Ampghari forest, Maitarkabase forest and Taripakha forest.

The main motivating factor behind Bidyalaya FUG is to reduce the management problem in their forest. Various approaches encountered are presented below.

Joint meeting of users of neighbouring forests

Bhumisthan forest is adjoining to the Bidyalaya forests. Owing to the lack of management system, users of this forest poached fuelwood from the Bidyalaya forest. Although the offenders from their own group, were penalised they could not realise penalty from those offenders from the users of Bhumisthan forest. So they initiated their efforts to motivate the users of Bhumisthan towards managing their forests. Accordingly, they organised a joint meeting of the users of three forests - Bidyalaya, Bhumisthan, and Salbisauna. This resulted the formation of users group in Bhumisthan and Salbisauna forests with operational plans prepared, approved, and now effectively implemented.

Users with dual membership of FUG

As some the users of the Bidyalaya forest are also the members of both Khokako forest or Maitar forests of Bansbari VDC, they were used for extension works in the respective forests. It became a very effective approach to motivate formation of users groups and initiate management in their respective forests.

VDC chairman has more responsibilities

The chairman of Bansbari VDC is a member of the Bidyalaya forests, and thus he was given the responsibility of extension in other forests of the VDC. He organised discussion in all the VDC meetings, and raised interest to form FUG in other villages. The VDC chairman attended each and every meeting called for the initiation and development of community forests in his area. This resulted hand-over of all forests within Bansbari VDC to the respective users.

Involving users in conflict resolution

The users of Ampghari forests were settled in ward 2, 5, 6 and 7 of Bansbari VDC and ward 2 of Phataksila VDC, whereas forest is located in ward 5 and 6 of Bansbari VDC. When the users settled in ward 5 and 6 of Bansbari, the VDC initiated to manage Ampghari forest by themselves excluding the users settled in other wards and VDC. It invited a serious conflict and could not be resolved for long even with the efforts of respective government forest staff (the rangers). But, after a time lapse, some active users of Bidyalaya forest managed to resolve it for the smooth functioning of Ampghari FUG.

Awards

After evaluating the performance of all FUG in the district, Bidyalaya FUG was awarded third and first prize in two consecutive years. These instances were publicised in the area. It resulted the better performance of Khokako forest and Maitar forest to win prize in the following year.

Dahapokhari and Gaurungthok FUGs

Dahapokhari (26 ha and 56 households) and Gaurungthok (20 ha and 119 households) forests are located in ward 9 and 6 of Haibung VDC respectively. Separate FUG for each of these forests were formed in 1992 and handed over in 1993. These two forests are located more or less in the two extreme sides of the VDC. Forestry office conducted a training on forest management in Dahapokhari forest by involving the users of both the FUGs. With this they could see the improving condition of their forests.

As the people of Haibung VDC were dependent to Shivapuri Wildlife Reserve - a restricted forest, they had very hard time to fulfil their need of forest products. The FUGs of Dahapokhari and Gaurungthok realised the situation and decided to involve in the formation of users group for each of

the forest and initiated management as community forest. Within a year, they were able to form FUGs for five forests - Khalu forest, Jugepani forest, Ghodchang forest, Phagu forest and Majuwa forest. Such success story had made the others to initiate community forest activities in their respective wards. Other approaches adopted to attain the success are:

Participating as resource person in the training

Government forestry office and Action Aid Nepal - a NGO, organised various training programme in the area. Members from both the FUGs were involved as resource persons. It became easy to discuss about the result of forest management efforts. This finally contributed towards gaining confidence in such initiatives.

Participating in the FUG meeting

Once the initiatives were observed in various villages, members from Dahapokhari and Gaurungthok FUGs actively participated to prepare operational plan and handover of community forest - sometimes voluntarily and sometimes through invitation. Their participation made easy to motivate the general users to form group.

Publicity of achievements

The Aasetar-Batase community forest (129 ha; 328 households) which was handed over in the mid 1994 performed very well within a very short-time. As a result they were able to complete a water supply project with the fund generated from supplying forest products, such as leaf-litter, grass, fuelwood etc., from their forests. This activity raised to a respectful FUG amongst its users and those of adjoining areas whereas the condition of other adjoining community forests of the same VDC were degrading. Organising simply an informal meeting to explain their achievements of completing water supply scheme, helped other FUGs to gain confidence.

Discussions

Emergence of new approaches

The case studies had shown that several approaches of forestry extension based on forest users to users are emerging with the advancement of community forestry at Sindhupalchok District. These approaches are becoming more effective than those introduced by the government and other externally

funded projects. The basic reason for emerging such approaches is to safeguard forest resources against others users, especially neighbouring villages.

Almost all approaches are participatory. The similar level and status of the resource person with that of participants has helped a much more open and lively interactions which focuses on factual issues rather than imaginary.

Such participation had also proved that, forestry extension is not an expensive activity, we used to consider in the past. Present approaches are most cost effective and the cost incurred is productive, and it involves local expenditures.

Such users to users approach, without external support, could rapidly cover a large area and number of FUGs. The sustainability of this approach is not challenged.

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