Monitoring and follow-up for community forestry development in Nepal : context of training at district and regional levels

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Monitoring is a management tool. It is a feed-back loop between planning and implementation of development programmes. In community forestry programme of Nepal, the District Forest Office (DFO) staff and the local communities develop a partnership in programme planning and implementation. DFOs plan and implement an annual training programme with the assistance of DANIDA supported Community Forestry Training Project (D/CFTP). A considerable amount of training input is being provided to build-up the capacity of Forest User Group (FUG) members and DFO staff to implement the Community Forestry (CF) programmes. However, the absence of an effective monitoring and follow-up system in district level tends to hamper the efficient use of valuable project inputs.

This article while attempting to suggest a monitoring and field follow-up system to be adopted at district and regional levels, analyses the existing state of training efforts and monitoring needs. Information users and types of information relevant for the purpose is discussed and the monitoring roles of districts and Regional Training Centres is worked out to suggest the detailed methodology for monitoring and follow-up. The article concludes that an effective monitoring and follow-up system at district level is a must to provide insights for realistic planning and management of CF programmes.

Keywords: Community Forestry, Training, Monitoring, Planning tool.

Training is one of the vital aspects that help support the successful commencement of the community forestry (CF) programme in Nepal. It establishes dialogue between its main stakeholders - the Department of Forest (DoF) and the local forest users who need to work together to establish a common property forest management system in community level. The Government of Denmark (DANIDA) supported Community Forestry Training Project (D/CFTP) is being implemented since early 1990s to assist the DoF in the successful implementation of the CF programme in Nepal. The present article reviews the training efforts being put into CF; analyses its monitoring and follow-up needs, and suggests a monitoring and follow-up system to be adopted to improve the district and the regional levels training planning.

Community forestry training and its objectives

Community forestry training aims at capacity building of the rural communities so that they can take-over the management responsibility of the forests they have traditionally been using since time immemorial. The ultimate aim is to help establish a sustainable forest management system managed by the local forest user groups (FUGs) for their common benefits. The 'Capacity Building' refers to the institutional development through the social processes, as well as developing the technical and the managerial skills of FUGs. These two facets are addressed through training as pre-formation and post-formation training support respectively. The pre-formation training support to the FUGs is intended to enable them to carry out:

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- participatory identification of forest users

- organisation of a FUG based on common forestry needs and concerns.

- development of rules (Bidhan) and Operational Plan (OP)

Once approved from the District Forest Officer (DFO), the rule of FUG and the OP, the concerned forest is formally handed over to the FUG as community forest. The FUGs are then legally recognised as an autonomous, self-governing entity responsible for protecting, managing and utilising their community forests in their own interest. The FUGs are therefore, also empowered to make changes and improvements in the OP of their community forests to suit their common needs and concerns.

The second stage of the FUGs' capacity building (termed as post-formation training support) is directed towards building-up of their technical and managerial capability. Training in this stage intends to enable them:

- implement their OP to manage and use their community forests efficiently, amend and improve their OPs as per their common needs and the potentiality of community forests as and when needed.

- co-ordinate and develop linkages with different governmental and non-governmental organisations for necessary support and assist their endeavour to manage and utilise resources in an efficient and sustainable manner.

- generate income through mobilising the resources; utilise income for community welfare; maintain a transparent financial record.

- ensure and enhance participatory decision making and equity in income and welfare distribution; resolve internal and external conflicts.

It is of utmost importance that the local communities must take initiatives to take over the management responsibility of the forest and organise themselves into FUGs. The role of the DoF is to support FUGs working as a facilitator, extension agent and/or mediator. Chhetri (1994), asserts that an interaction between the FUG members and the DFO staff is crucial in the pre-formation stage. In the post-formation stage, however, the DFO needed to stand by the FUG members as technical advisers

for the success of CF programme. This clearly indicates that DFO must have a willingness to help FUGs together with appropriate social and technical skills to perform their CF related job responsibilities. This calls for a need to implement a continual training system not only for the FUG members but also for the DoF field staff, so that an ongoing mutual learning system could facilitate the implementation of CF policy.

Existing district and regional levels training efforts

The district level training focuses mainly on training needs of different stakeholders of CF. Its training are male/female members of FUGs, community leaders, teachers, and women development workers/motivators. However, the untrained and/or newly appointed forest guards and nursery naikes are often trained to assist FUGs to implement CF. Review of the district level training so far conducted reveals that:

- maximum training effort is being put for awareness building and organisation of FUGs.

- a reasonable training effort is being put into building up the CF management capability of FUGs.

- emphasis is being given to FUG networking through training and workshops to encourage bottom-up planning and to develop managerial and financial accountability in FUG members.

Training at regional level has dual responsibility: towards the FUG and towards the DoF field staff. Regional Training Centres (RTCs) attempt to address the training needs of DFO staff such as rangers and forest guards. The RTCs also concentrate on building up the annual training planning and management capability of the District Forest Officers and their assistants through a number of training and workshops in regional and central levels. Other important responsibility of the RTCs is to assist the DFO through their relevant expertise on technical and physical support to help them implement training programmes. To undertake these responsibilities successfully, the RTCs conduct regular monitoring and follow-up at districts to monitor the performance standard of FUGs and DFO staff, and assess their training needs. It has, however, often been realised that an effective monitoring and follow-up system so much crucial for realistic programme planning in the district level is yet to be established in DFOs.

Terms and concepts of monitoring and follow-ups

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is a controlling function of management. It is a feed-back loop between planning and implementation basically to answer what is going on and why. Monitoring usually refers to the process of routine periodic measurement of inputs applied, activities undertaken and results achieved during project implementation. Various definitions of M&E have been given (HMG/N, 1995) but all are to indicate as early as possible any shortcomings so that timely corrective measures could be undertaken to improve project performance.

Follow-up on the other hand, is a continual effort made through field visits to observe the changes taking place as a result of programme implementation. It provides opportunity to learn from those involved in programme implementation, and are effected by it. Monitoring is not a one-off process specially in case of participatory resource management projects. It needs to be repeated at intervals to be of real use. It also requires to be participatory as both FUGs and DoF staff have legitimate interests in the management of community forests (Jackson and Ingles, 1995). Both of them need to learn from each other in course of CF implementation and this is how regular follow-ups become an important need.

Monitoring and Follow-up needs

The ultimate goal of CF is to enable FUGs establish and execute a sustainable forest management system that helps meet not only their basic forestry needs and uplift rural economy, but also conserve forest resources. To assess whether FUGs are being able to manage their forests as envisaged in the new Forest Policy, there is an urgent need to monitor, evaluate and review the CF programmes in its implementation stage. Putting it more specifically, monitoring needs of CF emerges to judge:

- Whether human resource development and training inputs are effective enough in building awareness towards resource scarcity, management needs and CF policy.

- Whether these inputs help communities to organise into FUGs having common forestry needs and concerns.

- Whether the handed-over forests are being protected, managed and utilised efficiently for the interest of FUG members.

- What FUGs are doing to enhance participation and involvement in decision making for management, and to raise the level of equity in benefit sharing.

- What problems are FUGs facing to manage their CF, how those problems are being tackled, and how could FUGs be assisted.

- How can different FUGs learn and benefited from each others' strength and weaknesses.

Above mentioned are some basic questions, which if not answered properly, the CF programmes might not generate desired results. A regular monitoring and follow-up of CF training therefore, is crucial for:

- timely identification of problems that might hinder CF development process, and rectifying them.

- appraising the performance of FUGs and DFO staff, identifying training needs and addressing such needs to improve their performance.

- chanalising training inputs and support services in required directions

- replicating positive and encouraging practices of one FUG in other FUGs through extension services.

- maintaining a CF training information system to develop a standardised planning tool for realistic planning of annual programmes.

Information users of monitoring in CF

Information which is an expensive resource is used as an input to decision making. Since a project monitoring system is an information system to facilitate decision making, each level of management structure needs a different kind of information, with a different level of details. The only rationale for a M&E system is to provide information to those who need it to design and implement projects, programmes and policies (Regmi, 1995).

Decisions in CF are made at various levels. FUGs and DFOs make decisions regarding implementation of the CF policies and programmes, where as, those relating to policy are made at department and ministry levels. DFOs need information to monitor the out-puts in relation to the inputs and activities. The Regional Director's (RD) office and RTCs use the information as baseline data to study the performance of field staff and effect of programme implementation. In the central level Community and Private Forestry Division (CPFD) and the

Community Forestry Training Project use the information to update the management information system (MIS), study the implications of the policy guidelines, and to sort out the problems that need attention from the central level. Ministry and the National Planning Commission also use such information to assess the impact of the development programmes in national level.

Types of information in CF

There seems to exist a wide variety of information to be generated to improve the annual planning process in district level, and to satisfy the information needs of regional and central level information users through monitoring and follow-up of CF training. This solely depends upon the concerned districts to decide as to what type of minimum information should be collected to satisfy the information needs under the prevailing development situation in that district. The information collection however, should comply with the constraints of cost, time and usefulness. A tentatively broad outline of the types of information to be collected for monitoring purposes is listed as :

Types of Information to be collected for CF development

Types of Information	
1. Location/ Composition/Type of CF	2. Background: Organisation/Awareness Level/ Institutional status of FUG
3. DFO-FUG Co-operation/Working Relationship	4. Training: Input, Effect and further training needs
5. CF Utilisation: Institutional Rules and Practices	6. Changes occurring in Forest Conditions and Social conditions
7. Attitude and Aspirations regarding CF Policy	8. Any Other

This can further be specifically worked out as per the specific needs of the concerned districts.

Role of DFO and RTC in monitoring

An overall responsibility of facilitating the implementation of CF programmes through training and other support services at district level lies with the DFO. The RTCs assist to improve or enhance the performance of DFO staff through training, technical, expertise and material support.

This mandate of the DFO and the RTC provides a clear indication of their monitoring role as well. The DFOs, in partnership with the FUGs need to monitor:

- awareness level and performance standard of FUGs involved in CF implementation
- supports being provided and utilised against the changes in forest and social conditions
- further technical and other training needs.

RTCs, on the other hand, need to monitor the performance of DFO staff to improve the quality of service being provided to FUGs. For this purpose, field staffs' perception of the FUGs' attitude and behavior in CF activities needs to be monitored. The training needs of field staff requires to be assessed.

RTCs also need to monitor the activities of the FUGs in order to know whether the programme is running in the right track to generate desired effect and impact. This implies that the RTCs need to cross check and verify the incoming information from DFOs, review FUGs' performance, and assess their training needs, and expectations of the DFO staff.

Aims, objectives and outputs for monitoring and follow-up of CF training at district and regional levels

Forest user committee which could be in a stage of preparing OPs, or ready to implement them; or even waiting for DFO's decision for handing over forest, are often given training regardless of which category they belong to, and what specific training needs they have. Such mis-allocation of training inputs is because of an inappropriate training information system. RTCs however, have been doing their best to avoid such mis-allocations through planned monitoring and follow-up activities at districts, and assisting DFOs in annual planning process. But a self-sustaining planning and management system must exist at districts if DFOs need to have an ongoing partnership in CF management with FUGs. This indicates the urgency of a well-functioning monitoring and follow-up (M/FU) system at district level as a realistic tool of planning and management.

Based on the works done by Shahi *et al.* (1995), the aim, objectives and expected outputs of M/FU in the context of training at district and regional levels are resuggested here.

District level

Aim

To establish a valid annual training planning tool that could guide the pre-and post formation training support to FUGs.

Objectives

1. to develop/maintain a detailed FUG training register, and to analyse the training inputs within the district

2. to conduct participatory assessment of problems of FUGs in different stages of CF implementation

3. identify their training needs and required support services.

Outputs

• An established Training Information System including training register, training input maps and recommendations including further training needs and localities.

Regional Level

Aim

To assess the CF situation in districts, and the capacity and training needs of DFO staff and FUGs. This is to be done in order to explore ways of improving capacity of field staff and FUGs

Objectives

1. to map and analyse the training input given by DFOs to FUGs.

2. to map the CF situation existing in districts and to get DFOs opinion on field staff and FUGs of the district.

Outputs

• Systematic data sheets showing CF situation of districts regarding CF hand-over, OP revisions, households participating, DFO staff present, etc.

• Maps showing density of han-dover per VDC.

• An updated training register for DFO staff.

• Findings of interviews with DFO staff and selected FUG members.

Methodology for establishing M/FU System

Basically a Logical Framework Approach (LFA) is applied to design an M/FU system for a

development project. In case of CFTP however, the project provides assistance to 38 hill districts through 5 RTCs to plan and implement annual training programmes as per the project objectives. In this sense, every district plans and implements its own project adopting a bottom-up planning process. It implies that DFOs also take over the monitoring and follow-up responsibilities so as to have an effective planning tool in district itself. Therefore, a basic methodology for carrying out M/FU at district and regional levels becomes much more appropriate for the establishment of a realistic planning and management tool. Suggested methodology is given as :

Suggested Methodology for M/FU

Step 1 (a)	Collection of Information (data gathering, checking, recording/ reporting)

Step 1 (b)	Cross-Checking/ Verification (record keeping, updating)

Step 2	Analysis of Information (compare to targets/schedules etc.)

Step 3	Investigation of Problems/ Constraints (detailed studies as necessary)

Step 4	Corrective Measures/Action To Improve Performance (immediate action, improved planning, etc.)

Methodology suggested for district level M/FFU

The suggested methodologies are in line with the works done in the Western Regional Training Centre. It can further be modified through practical experiences to suit the local information needs of the DFO.

Development of a baseline training information system

In order to make best use of already existing information (through secondary sources and the monitoring activities of the past), the DFOs should carry out following activities:

• maintain a record on which FUG (belonging to each Range Post/VDC) is in what stage of CF process before or after hand-over.

- maintain/update a detailed VDC-wise training register showing in detail the information about the individual recipients of all the training provided by DFO.

- calculate the number of training days in pre- and post-formation stages provided to each VDC against the CF handed-over. This data will give a holistic situation existing at the district in terms of *training inputs provided in pre- and post-formation stage versus community forests handed over*.

- take three copies of the district map showing VDCs and indicate the range post boundaries into them. Use the training input information to categorise it VDC-wise into low, medium and high input in pre- and post- formation stages separately. Use this data to develop a Pre- and a Post-formation Training Input Map showing level of training input in each VDC. Use the third map to show the handed over CFs. A comparative study of these three maps is expected to reveal the imbalances in training input such as *forgotten areas* and those *too much attented*. The combined information generated through these maps is believed to work as a planning tool for DFO.

The above mentioned procedure provides a baseline training information system which could be grouped range post wise. Each range post should be provided with the information relevant to them to conduct regular M/FU, update the baseline information in range post and report to the DFO.

Implementing annual M/FU programme

The DFO should plan as per the procedure suggested below to develop and implement annual M/FU programme:

- In every Range Post approximately 20 percent of FUGs falling under low, medium and high training input categories of pre- and post-formation stages respectively, should be selected for regular M/FU, also ensuring that at least one FUG from each category in every range post is selected for quarterly M/FU. Rangers should be trained to practically use the monitoring tools and techniques, collect/analyse information and report to the DFO. Trained Rangers should be assigned to do this job in their respective range posts.

- At district level, the incoming information in the form of M/FU reports of the range posts should be verified through cross-checking. For this purpose, at least 2 to 5 percent of FUGs can be selected from among the FUGs being monitored in range post level. The cross-checking should be done by the DFO and/or AFO through field visits using participatory methods. The cross-checking of information will also enable the DFO assess the FUG-DFO staff working relationship and their training needs.

- Based on M/FU reports and findings of field visits the DFO should: update the information system; analyse the information to assess any problems that might hinder progress; explore for solutions to such problems and report to RTC/RD/ CPFD

Methodology suggested for Regional level M/FFU

Development and maintenance of a database for M/FU

At regional levels, the RTCs are suggested to do the following activities:

- compile the incoming information regarding pre- and post-formation training inputs and districtwise CF handover.

- develop training input maps and charts in relation to district wise CF handover situation.

- maintain/update a DFO staff training register

- maintain a human resource database showing movement of trained/untrained man power (position, transfer, deputation, vacancy, etc.).

- This information should be shared amongst the RTCs so as to make efficient use of trained manpower and training inputs.

Implementing annual M/FU Plan

RTC should plan as per the procedure suggested below to develop and implement an annual M/FU plan:

- make a list of the activities to be monitored in each district based on the previous years' achievements of individual districts, the problems they are coming accross and their current annual training programmes.

- select at least six FUGs randomly in each district to represent the low, medium and high

training input in pre- and post formation stages for annual monitoring purposes.

- categorise the district's man power on the basis of the training input given to them and their involvement in CF activities. Select staff randomly from each category for monitoring purposes.

- develop an annual M/FU plan on the basis of above information. Assign M/FU responsibilities district wise to the RTC staff, prepare and approve the annual M/FU work programme.

- The RTC staff should use participatory techniques such as transact walk, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and group discussions with randomly selected male and female FUG members and DFO staff to conduct annual M/FU. The information generated should be cross-checked, verified using different methods. Verified information should be analysed and matched with the information provided from DFOs to produce an abstract of findings and recommendations. The database in the RTC should be updated using this information regularly to serve as a planning and management tool for coming years.

Conclusion

Planning and management of participatory resource management projects such as community forestry at districts needs to go side by side with a regular monitoring and follow-up activities. Experiences have shown that such participatory projects decide their course of action through a continual learning opportunities created for the stakeholders of the project. It is crucial that the CF programme implementors get involved in regular M/FU activities for the CF to achieve desired results.

In the implementation level, the M/FU system needs to be simple to involve people. It should also generate enough information to guide for a realistic annual planning. Hence a simple, cost and time effective M/FU system designed on the basis of clearly defined and precise objectives has been suggested. It is expected that the system will continue to improve through incorporating experiences gained during the real situation.

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