

Impact of community forestry at Sabla of Terhathum District, Nepal

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Initiated only in the late seventies, the community forestry programme has started showing its positive impacts in society. Such impacts are revealed in the form of income generation, construction works and above all a distinctive awareness of people on the need for conservation of natural resources. The Sabla Village Development Committee (VDC) of Terhathum District of east Nepal has shown one example of such impacts of community forestry in the society. The present paper attempts to communicate information on such activities of the Ranimurti Forest User Group (hereinafter referred as FUG) which have contributed to local development.

Ranimurti Forest User Group (59 households) which is four kilometer north of the Terhathum district headquarter includes Limbu, Brahmin, Chhetry and Tamang communities. There is a natural *Sichima - Castanopsis* forest (approx area 4.25 hectares) mixed with *Rhododendron arboreum*, *Alnus nepalensis* and *Quercus semecarpifolia*. Owing to the gradual depletion of their basic forestry resources such as fuelwood, timber, fodder and bedding materials, the people felt need to form a user group so as to properly manage and utilise their forest which was otherwise converted into bushes. The District Forest Office (DFO) helped form a FUG on June 1992. The first general meeting of the FUG unanimously decided to control grazing and firewood collection. Introduction of a cardamom plantation in pre-defined block as prescribed in the operation plan was agreed.

Preparation and implementation of operational plan

The initial operational plan was intended just to protect forest and its resources for five years. Six months after complete protection, the plan drew argument amongst the members of FUG over collecting firewood. The assembly of July 1993 amended the constitution and the operation plan

making it more practical and that suits according to their needs. Forest management intervention was put into action while dividing forest into three blocks to adopt coppice with standard system; each block having three phases: in the first phase all but three shoots were left in trees; in the second, two of the three shoots were left; and in the third phase only one shoot was left. The advantage of this system is that, within 9 years the whole cycle will be completed and the bush will be converted into high forest.

With this management system prescribed by the then District Forest Officer, and the first phase of which was implemented in 1993, the FUG were able to collect 600 bharies (one bhari = 40 kg approx.) of firewood in the first year and 480 bharis from block 2 of the same phase in the 2nd year. This, to some extent, relieved the FUG members from their burden of collecting firewood.

Income generation activities

Cardamom plantation

Relieved with the burden of collecting firewood, the group planted 10,000 seedlings of cardamom. After three years this much number of seedlings would yield 500 kg of cardamom worth of Nrs 40000 for fifteen years.

Fish production

The VDC has two ponds (one 20 cubic metre and the other is 80 cubic metre of size) potential of fish farming. According to the local people, the ponds were either dug for the use of pedestrians who passes by these or were of some religious importance which was evident from the finding of a sculpture inside one of the ponds.

The bigger pond was cleaned and dugout for fish production. On recommendation of the agriculture development office of Terhathum, two thousands fingerlings of common carp were put into it as a

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potential means of income generation activities. Assuming that after one year a fish weigh one kg and if only half of the fingerlings remain at the end, it would fetch Nrs 30000 at the rate of Rs 30 per kg.

Agricultural crops

Before FUG formation the forests and adjoining agriculture land were open for grazing. The FUG which put some provision on operational plan also to control off-season grazing, deputed herds men to look after their cattle. This measure helped them grow wheat on agriculture land and off-season vegetables in their home orchard to be sold at local market which provided them extra income. It is thus, agriculture productivity was also increased.

Construction works

As a part of community development activities this group felt that it was necessary to construct a much needed foot-trail (2 m x 1000 m) within the village. With the initiation and active participation of the FUG members the construction work could become successful.

Social unity

One of the best impacts of community forestry in Sabla is evident from the progression of social unity. Before formation of the user group and amendment of the old operation plan there were a lot of conflicts concerning development activities. The scenario has changed and consensus development for every proposed activity, has now become an usual phenomenon. After every success of development activities, the bond within the group became stronger. Thus the formation of FUG has once again proved its worth in social unity whereby peoples' participation in every development activities have increased. It has played a crucial role in "bottom up approach" to gain increased recognition of the local problems and issues.

Conclusion

Initially the highest priority of the FUG was to collect firewood and fodder, but, once the group was formed they gradually extended their activities in other sectors of rural development such as income generation, path construction, increasing of agriculture yield, fish production and collection of forest products with a standard pattern, etc. It seems that the formation of FUG which was initially targetted to forest management and utilisation, has also made men and women more aware of common needs of the society and helped each other immensely to increase their self-reliance towards improving the socio-economic status of Sabla VDC of Terhathum District.

Recommendatiions

The above background helps make the following recommendations for the better working of the FUG:

- The degraded forest should be managed with coppice with standard system
- The FUG should implement its operational plan in order to overcome conflicts and to be clear about their needs. This makes working together a lot easier.
- Before making any decisions during the meetings or assemblies it is very important that the people discuss all their problems and needs.
- The operational plan should be amended according to the desire and necessities of insiders so that it can be most practical and effective.
- The forest extensionists should never impose their ideas upon the users; just support only as required by the FUG to implement operational plan.