

Review of community forestry monitoring systems in Nepal

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A study was conducted to review the monitoring systems of various stakeholders involved in local level forest management in Nepal. The purpose of this review is to assess the current status of monitoring, identify and document lessons learnt, and explore gaps and opportunities for possible interventions.

The study looked mainly at two aspects of existing monitoring systems and practices: a) self-monitoring practices of FUGs), and b) collaborative monitoring practices between FUGs and four different categories of stakeholders - Government, donor field projects, I/NGOs and civil society. A review of concepts related to participatory monitoring is made based on the literature, and a conceptual framework has been proposed for the review of monitoring practices in the context of community forestry in Nepal. Key elements used in the analysis include a) meanings and perceptions of monitoring, b) purpose, c) focus and scale, d) approach, processes and tools, e) contributions to adaptive management.

A total of 15 cases from among FUGs as well as their different types of collaborators are analyzed. The cases represent different levels of success and failures, including some innovations in various aspects, under different conditions. Some experimented approaches and methods highlighted by concerned stakeholders during the discussions have also been captured. Emphasis has been given on official monitoring systems of local level forest management, although some informal processes have also been observed. A synthesis of findings on both FUG self-monitoring and collaborative monitoring is made, followed by lessons that can be replicated or used as a basis for further innovations. The emphasis of analysis is on generating lessons from individual cases rather than making comparative analysis.

Data for the study were collected mainly through interactive meetings and discussions, review of documents, and researcher's observation through the period of the study.

In view of widespread confusion and ambiguities about the meaning of the term monitoring, the term has been used to describe the processes of review, reflection and learning which in the context of community forestry has a potential to enhance the effectiveness of the local level forest management. This is possible through a process of adaptive management that relies heavily on the process of monitoring.

The study concluded that monitoring has been in practice at both FUG as well as the supporting institutions levels, although the meanings, purpose, focus and approach vary significantly. All types of stakeholder groups have similar conception that monitoring is the tool or means of controlling the people and processes rather facilitating learning, and this is particularly so with more formal and bureaucratic organizations.

While there are informal processes and forms of FUG self-monitoring, collaborative stakeholders hardly see a scope of self-monitoring integrated with strategic planning within them. Major part of innovations and practices in collaborative monitoring is initiated by bilateral forestry projects, and yet, it was found out that projects still consider monitoring as a discrete part of project cycle, and fail to capitalize on the opportunities of learning through an in-built process of testing assumptions, and reflecting upon outcomes and processes.

Despite having common working spaces and agendas, institutions have limited established linkages with each other to facilitate two-way flow of information. Different institutions, particularly donor field projects have initiated various studies and actions, mainly at pilot scale

but there are few examples of scaling up over space and time. There is very limited documentation of monitoring experiences because of limited commitment to monitoring at professional and organizational levels.

The study cases and analysis describe these issues in specific contexts and conditions, and hence generate some lessons, which form the basis for identifying future directions. There is a need to recognize different types of information needs across different types of institutions involved in community forestry and at various layers within them, as well as a mechanism to facilitate communication, cross-learning and interactive reflections. The main areas of improving the overall monitoring system of community forestry in Nepal are to strengthen strategic planning and self-monitoring at all levels including FUG, and then facilitating participatory/collaborative monitoring systems between institutions, and levels within them. A precondition for this is that all have to understand monitoring as a way of learning, and this requires debates and deliberations among the stakeholders.

