

Community Forestry and Local Development

A Study of Sukhani Community Forest User Group

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Abstract

Community forestry is small scale, village level forestry practice where decisions and actions are often made on a collective basis, and where the rural population participate in planning, establishment, management and harvesting of forest crops and receive a many or proportion of the socio- economic and ecological benefits from the forests. Conceptually community forestry can range from pure forest cropping on one extreme to combining tree and food crops agro forestry on the other.

In the context of Nepal, according to forest survey, 2016, forest area had covered 44.74 of the total area of the country. This proves the popularly known proverb “Hariyo Ban Nepal Ko Dhan”. Forest alone contributes 10 percent of total GDP; livestock get 40 percent of total fodder from forest foliage. Fuel wood contributes about 76 percent of the total energy sources used in the country, which also comes from forest. Also, much of the agricultural system are directly or indirectly based on the forest.

Community Forestry was introduced in Nepal in 1978. The community forest has been defined as the control, protection and management of the local communities known as user groups. It advocates strong community participation, bottom-up planning and sustainable use of forest resources. The main objective of the CF is to achieve the sustainable forest resources by converting accessible national forest into community forest into in stages. The CF approach has been highly successful in the protection of the forest in the hills of Nepal. The local user groups are responsible for the control, protection and management of the forest. CF advocates strong community participation, bottom-up planning and sustainable use of forest resources. Under this program, 2,312,545 hectares of forest land have been handed over to the community, up to 22,519 user groups, and 21,00,000 HHs were directly benefitted in mid-July, 2020. It shows that after emergence of community forestry program, local developmental activities have been increased.

Key Words: *community forestry, people’s participation, socio-economic factors, local resources, local development.*

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Introduction

The significances of the community forestry approach for local development has been cherished in the world as well as developing countries. All the stakeholders concerned in developmental works have agreed on the role of community forest for changing the traditional community. Therefore, this concept is bearing for the development of the entire nation. Of the various types of forest practices, here we would focus on community forestry approach, the approach which concept, rules and regulations have been leading on these days in Nepal. After that we would recount the role of community forestry on local development.

Concept of Community Forest

The concept of community forestry was introduced by FAO in its publication as “Forestry for local community development” in 1978. FAO has defined community forestry as any situation which intimately involves local people in forestry activities excluding large scale industrial forestry that contributes to community development throughout employment and wages but include forest services which encourage and assist forestry activity at the community level. The legitimating of the concept was also boosted by the adaptation of “Forestry for People” as the theme for the Eight World Forestry Congress in Jakarta in 1978. By the 1980s, the concept of community forestry had become major programme within the forestry policy of many developing countries.

Community forestry is a partnership programme between government and community organization in which government staff plays roles as facilitation and catalyst to identify real use groups to prepare operational plan of forest and constitutions of group and in implementation of community forestry activities. Whereas the community (user groups) is responsible to manage, protect and utilize the forest in sustainable basis (MPFS, 1998).

Community Forestry in Nepal

The community forestry concept in Nepal is a courageous, innovative and future oriented approach towards participatory forest management by local people. Community Forestry Program is widely celebrated as one of the most progressive policy examples of devolving control over forest resources to community-based user groups, which has established a viable procedure for handing over the forests to actual groups of users with a legal status as autonomous and corporate institutions with perpetual succession.

Evolution of development paradigm influenced on the forest policy of Nepal. In 1957, under the forest nationalization act of 2013 B.S. Government of Nepal nationalized all the private forest. From 1957 to 1977; subsequent amendment was made in rules and Act (Joshi, 1999). The legislation proved to be completely ineffective because the act controlled the utilization of forest products and only gave importance on controlling the

users to enter the forest. The Department of forest was incapable of maintaining effective control over thousands of small patches of forest throughout the hills (Fisher, 2000).

The concept of community forestry introduced in Nepal the bills of 1978. But on the subject of conservation The Department of forests was established as a state agency in 1942. After this Forest Act came in 1961 but after sometime this act was promulgated in 1967 to provide additional power to the state foresters.

In 1978, the Nepalese Government introduced Panchayat Forest (PF) and Panchayat Protected Forest (PPF) rules in a response to the failure of the protection of the forest, Panchayat (now replaced by Village Development Committee) was responsible to manage forest within their boundary. Initially, development of forest and other line agencies were willing to hand over only barren and degraded forest lands to the local people in the form of Panchayat Forest and Panchayat Protected Forest because reforestation was the main program of Community Forestry and District for estimating the practices and knowledge of local people. Due to pre-issue of local user, natural forest was also handed over in selected district but Department of Forest did not get anticipated result. The major problem was the ambiguities in program regarding the security of traditional use right, lack of freedom in decision making and use had to function under the structure of Panchayat. Forest could be handed over only to the Panchayat Official within a politically defined area, for example a Ward, VDC and District. However, political boundary for forest did not usual coincide because some forests were common to more than one ward or more than one Panchayat(now VDC). General local people did not appreciate such practice. Issue related to forest ownership and recognition of actual use right is solved by the introduction of the concept of user group in the Decentralization Act 1982. In 1988 Master Plan for Forestry sector prepared which also emphasized on Community Forestry and user level management disregarding of Panchayat. Now Forest Act 1993, Forest Regulations 1995, Operational Guideline 1995 are the effort of Government for the sustainability of community forest, which clearly recognized the involvement of user group (Upreti, 2000).

Nepal, forest area covers 44.74 percent of the total area of the country (DFRS, 2015). That proves the popularly known proverb “*Hario Ban Nepal Ko Dhan*” is alive. Forest alone contributes around 10 percent total national GDP; livestock get 40 percent of total fodder from forest foliage. Fuel wood contributes about 76 percent of the total energy sources used in the country, which also comes from forest. Also, much of the agricultural systems are directly or indirectly based on the forest (NPC, 2019/20).

In Nepal two categories of forest are found on the basis of management. Those are private forest and national forest. National forest has five categories namely, government managed, protected, community, religious and leasehold forest (Shrestha V. , Gender Issue in Community Forestry in Nepal Sustainable Development, 2004).

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are to know the role of community forestry in local development process. However, other specific objectives are;

- ❖ To know the infrastructure development activities on user groups area.
- ❖ To analyze the role of community forestry in income generation of user groups.

Materials and Methods

This study had been carried out on the basis of descriptive research design because the study had focused on to investigate the local development by community forestry in local level. Moreover, the study had found out the income generation of user groups and infrastructure development in that area. Besides, the study had made an attempt to describe the things interlinked to community participation, economic benefits, living standards of user groups and the investigation of explored findings had been described.

This study had selected the community forestry user groups of Mainagar-4 and Arjundhara-3 VDC of Ilam and Jhapa district. Out of 508 user groups, 10 percent (based on the availability of time and resources) 50 user groups had been sampled with simple random sampling with lottery method had been used for household survey. On the process of data collection primary data were generated, the structural questionnaire, semi or unstructured interviews, and observation as well as focus group discussion methods have been applied.

The field survey was undertaken in July 2021. Socio-economic data were collected through the selected sampled first, then from interviews and completing structured questionnaire survey, focus group discussions. The researcher evaluated natural status of the community forest by the method of self-observation. Sampling for the socio-economic survey was selected of CFUGs stakeholders and household selection through simple random sampling. Households representing from different socio-economic criteria, ethnicity/caste representation, accessibility/remoteness of the area, age of users groups, resource status were taken for interview. In total focus group discussions were organized with selected community sub-groups to collect a mixture of information and ideas. Systematic self-observation was made during the research. Physical environment data were derived from observations from the research, which was carried out in July 2021. The concept of livelihoods encompasses varied ways of living that meet individual, household, and community needs. Needs, in this context, are understood holistically, and would include the social, economic, cultural, and developmental. So the variables that have to be measured were considered as the primary database for the analysis. Profit sharing, participation, considered as the primary database of the analysis. Profit sharing, participation, contribution to local development by the community forestry was found by group deliberations, observation analysis and self-administered questionnaire.

Description of Sukhani Community Forest User Group (SCFUGs)

The study was conducted in Sukhani Community Forest User Groups, Ilam & Jhapa Districts of eastern Nepal. This is a predominantly rural economy, with some extra income earned from working in the tourist industry. There are varieties of ethnic groups including Brahmins, Chettri, Rai, Limbu, Dalit, Newar, Kumal etc.

Community forestry is an important component of an integrated farming system, with the majority of animals being stall fed, fodder and bedding coming from forest products. Dung is used to fertilize terraced fields for intensive crop production. There is great interest in community forestry at a village level, and the FUG has an important role to play. A FUG is a representative body from a village, which includes all forest users of a community forest. It has a committee which liaises closely with the local forest ranger and the District Forest Officer (DFO), both from the Nepalese Department of Forests. The FUG has to demonstrate a capacity to conduct forestry operations in order for the DFO to authorize forest management practices. A limiting factor for the FUG is the availability of management formation about the forest, and spatial information on the extent of the resource. Hence, the potential of Public Participation GIS (PPGIS) for empowering the FUG.

Sukhani Community Forest lies on the boarder of Ilam and Jhapa district. Both district user groups are the members. This forest was transferred into community forest by District Forest Office (DFO) Ilam in 2053 B.S. It covers 638.5 hector of forest areas and 508 households are the main user groups. But the number of households might be increased due to the population growth.

Sisau, Saal, Aasna, Latar, Sadhu, Malberi, Karma, Botdhamero trees; *Tiger, Deer, Leopard, Rabbit, Harin, Kaliz, Elephant* animals; *Pheasant, Peacock, Hornbill, Halaso* etc are the important assets. Many other important natural herbal plants, wood, grass and also tourist area is available with short distance. Biodiversity, suitable weather, landscape, temple, ponds, rivers, etc are the extra beauties of Sukhani Community Forest User Groups.

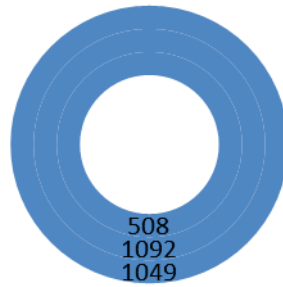
Till 25th years of its establishment, the CF had conducted various developmental activities such as; *road, electricity, school, drinking water, irrigation, plantation, bridge*, etc. “Poverty reduction programme” & “forest management programme” among income generation and awareness programme have significantly contribution in the area. On the period, this community forest had been helping to develop local people, place and others activities. It shows that this community forest is the one of the best examples of conservation practices and utilization of forest resources on the process of local development. The following table-1 and figure-1 illustrates the total population, HHs, male-female population in details.

Table: 1 Total Population of Sukhani CF

Total Population	Households	Male	Female
Population 2142	508 HHs	1092	1049

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Figure-1 Total Population of Sukhani Community Forest User Group



■ 2142

Based on table-1

Local developmental activities initiated by CFUG

Community Forestry has multi-functional ranging from protection and production. It is one of the major resources directly affecting the survival of rural people. It serves services and products to rural livelihood and environment. Community Forestry fulfills subsistence need of women, poor and backward people as well as commercial needs of people. The benefits providing to local communities and environment by community forest of Palpa district range from protection of erosion to religious function to watershed stabilization to biodiversity conservation to community development to upliftment of socio-economic condition (Khatri, 2012).

Sukhani Community Forest User Group had built an office building for the purpose of CF activities. Likewise, they had also built a ground for different community activities. Various infrastructure developmental works like *Electricity, Roads, Bridge, Irrigation, drinking water* programmes have been conducted in the area. It has other various potentialities in future also. All the sampled HHs agreed that after being a member of CF they had got sufficient fuel-wood, leaf-litter and their time saved in forest work. They were also benefited in making of compost for their farmyard. All those activities had no direct effect in their income generation. But indirectly, the time saved from forest work was utilized in their regular activities to earn a bit more.

All the respondents agreed that CF programme had promoted awareness among the people. After the emergence of CF in that area all agreed that CF had changed the life of individuals and the society as followings; increased level of awareness, increased people's participation, social benefits, increased the status of CFUGs women and poor,

increased community development activities, income generation, conflict management, sense of belonging, economic benefits, forest management, ecological benefits, forest products, employment, regeneration of life, forest resources, infrastructure development, capacity development, etc. The following table 2 shows the development activities initiated by CFUGs in the study area until FY 078/79.

Table 2: Developmental works of SCF in the Fiscal Year 076/77 to 078/79

F/Y in BS	Administrative Works	Forest Development	Local Development	Others	Total
2076/77	9,50,000/- (27%)	8,75,000/- (25%)	15,00,000/- (35%)	1,75,000/- (13%)	35,00,000/-
2077/78	10,05,000/- (23%)	12,62,000/- (29%)	17,82,000/- (40%)	2,00,500/- (8%)	42,50,000/-
2078/79	11,25,000/- (23%)	16,40,500/- (34%)	18,04,500/- (37%)	3,00,000/- (6%)	48,70,000/-

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

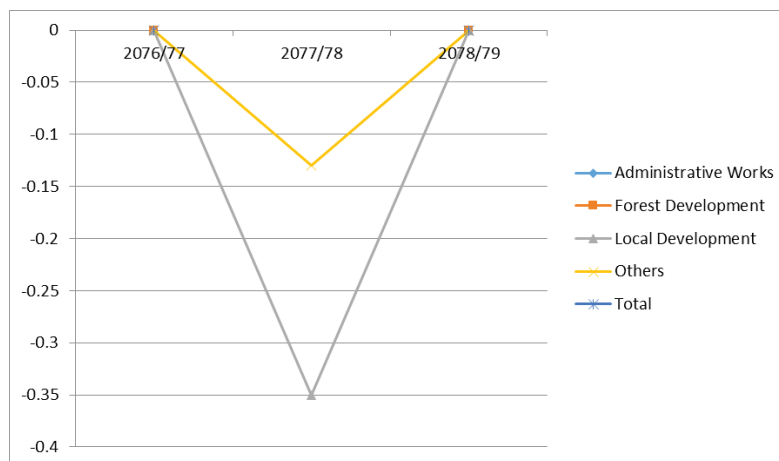


Figure 2: Developmental works of SCF in the Fiscal Year 076/77 to 078/79

The table 2 and figure 2 show the income and expenditure sector of the fiscal year 2076/77 35%, 2077/78 40% and in 2078/79 37% in local development sectors. Similarly, 27%, 23% and 23% in administrative fields. And, forest development; respectively 25%, 29% and 34%. At last others topics (capacity building, awareness campaign, skill development trainings); 13%, 8% and 6% correspondingly which shows the higher priority for local development in the various fiscal years.

The increasing level of awareness to protect forest resources of local people towards CF and its benefits had played important contribution in conservation of CF on sustainable uses. Such successful implementation of CF had increased the level of income generation and infrastructure development which is called Local Development.

Results and Discussions

The study has focused the development of households of selected CFUGs before and after handover and impact of community forestry on the livelihood and local development activities. Out of 508 users groups, 10 percent (50 user groups) had been selected from both municipalities. Sukhani Community Forest User Groups had been selected to examine the objectives which were related to the socio-economic conditions of the HHs and the availability of forest on quality and coverage which impacts in rural development situation. In total 50 HHs had been examined during the study by using simple random sampling. Total 50 households involved in questionnaire survey of which over 76 percent of people were involved in agriculture occupation, in wage labour 10.52 percent, in service 7.89 percent and others 5.26 percent. On the study area education status or level was in between. Most of them were literate, only few were illiterate and less was higher educator. In average; literate 23.68%, illiterate 2.63%, primary 13.15%, SLC 26.31 and intermediate 18.42%. Among the sampled households, the average agricultural land holding per households was 1-3 Bighas. Many of the HHs 34.21% were survived only for three months from agricultural production. So they needed to do secondary service and wage labour for their livelihood. Participation of all the user groups was equal in forest management activities as well as benefit sharing also. Among the sampled house Brahmin-Chhetri 47.36 percent, Limbu represented 23.68 percent, Dalit 15.78 percent and others 13.15 percent. Infrastructural development increased in the study area. Before the emergence of CF, the roads were not black topped, irrigation facilities, low scale of drinking taps, and non-availability of bridge, electricity facilities and telephone access. But CF fulfilled those gaps between people and materials. Every year it has planned to budget for those sectors. CF was capable of supplying forest products as they demanded, especially fuel-wood and leaf-litter. In the process of forest management Heralu were sharing their time on the protection of forest. In the local developmental activities CF had played vital role inside origin, management and conservation. Directly the CF and its activities were not helping in income generating activities but indirectly the time saved from forest work utilized in their regular activities somehow helped to earn a bit more. Among the sampled HHs, 76.68 percent of them had got Kachhi house and 26.1 had Pakki house. After formation of CF, majority HHs were changed gradually. CF has been increased and improved and numerous benefits have been gifted to rural households and local environment. After the emergence of CF, total developmental outcomes achieved by local communities were as social, economic infrastructure and ecological. Sufficient management and protection of CF is for local development and poverty reduction, which shows the programme “Garibiko Rekhamuni”, which programme had helped to empower the local people in income generation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study illustrate that the community forestry program has been supportive to the rural livelihoods more. Improved participation in decision making, an improved condition of natural resources enhanced the interest to develop new schemes.

Community Forestry is a multi-dimensional approach had facilitated to increase the level of awareness, income, self-confidence, interaction and biodiversity. Increasing greenery, biodiversity and healthy environment and networking between and among the CFUGs, DFO, rangers and other stakeholders are also the result of CF.

CF has provided several income generating activities thus, the individual income level and CFUG fund have also increased in Sukhani Community Forest User Group in Ilam and Jhapa district. The generated CFUG fund has been used to develop community infrastructure.

After the emergence of CF, different awareness programs helped to plan the development activities in the study area. Economic facilities improved, show the bright future of the dominant and low economic status people for the 508 improvements of their economic status if it is utilized properly without biases. Therefore, SCFUG is an example and there is no doubt of contribution to the livelihoods of the rural communities and the resources may be utilized in a sustainable way.

Above situation and findings from the study area make the following recommendations for better working of community forestry to get desired positive impact in local development in future.

- ❖ For the betterment of CFUG, close co-ordination between the DFO, village leader and FUG is essential.
- ❖ FUG need to encourage and promote agro-forestry practice.
- ❖ Continue and regular visits by Heralu, Ranger, and Organizer should be increased.
- ❖ People should be encouraged to use improved cooking stove, biogas, and solar energy to reduce the consumption of fuel-wood.
- ❖ The co-ordination between local government and local political body should be increased.
- ❖ FUG should keep their relation with local NGOs to get support in forest activities.
- ❖ In decision making process equity and inclusiveness should be increased in participation of all caste/ethnicity.
- ❖ Local people should be made aware about the importance of forest to human being and ecological balance.
- ❖ Community Forestry should provide training, seminar, workshop, tour, visual program, research programme. These types of programme should be concentrated in the protection, management and conservation of forest resources.
- ❖ Common sentiment of the user group should be taken into consideration rather than the petty political interest.
- ❖ The rate of forest resources is very high and expensive so, they should be available in special discount rate for the user group.

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