

Collective Action and Equity in Nepalese Community Forestry

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
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Dedicated to

The loving memory of my parents:

Hari Kumar and Astha Kumari Shrestha;

Father-in-law: Chandreswor Man Singh

and

Sisters: Chini and Bishnu; brother: Mangal Shrestha.

ABSTRACT

This thesis critically analyses collective action processes and outcomes in Community Forestry through the concept of embeddedness. This research focuses on the questions of when people cooperate, how and why collective action emerges and evolves, and what leads or does not lead to equitable outcomes. The thesis makes a fundamental distinction between equality and equity. The research focuses specifically on the Nepalese experience with Community Forestry (CF), which is regarded as one of the most progressive CF programs being implemented in one of the poorest countries in the world.

The thesis adopts an integrated research approach involving multiple actors, scales and methods with a focus on local level CF processes and forest users. This study considers the Forest Users Group (FUG) as a unit for analysis. Field work was conducted in three FUGs from the mid-hill region of Nepal over seven months between August 2001 and February 2002. The field research moves downwards to the household level and upward to the district, national and international level actors. It employs a combination of the process analysis and actor oriented approach and qualitative and quantitative methods to understand how CF is being driven, who is driving it and why CF is advancing in a certain direction.

The study shows that the emergence, evolution and outcomes of collective action in CF are complex and varied due to specific and changing socio-cultural, economic, political and ecological contexts. Without understanding the complexities, in which peoples' motivation and collective action are embedded, we cannot explain the emergence and evolution of collective action in CF. This thesis challenges the rational choice tradition and some key points of Common Property Regimes (CPR) theory and highlights the concept of embeddedness in participatory natural resource management.

The thesis highlights the problem of decentralised CF policy and the forest bureaucracy. Decentralisation universally imposes a formal democratic system based on equality without acknowledging unequal societies. In Nepal, there has been little reorganisation of the forest bureaucracy. Despite being an international model for community forestry, in Nepal the existing bureaucracy has been unable or unwilling to transfer knowledge to forest users.

The thesis concludes by stating the need to avoid the pitfalls of some democratic principles associated with standardisation and formalism. This means transforming bureaucratic norms and ideology. Context is central for the sustainable and equitable management of natural resources. It must be further researched and applied in decision-making if CF is going to achieve its potential to improve the condition of forests and the welfare of rural people.

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LIST OF ACCRONYMS

AAH	Average Annual Harvest
C&OP	Constitution and Operational Plan
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CF	Community Forestry
CPFD	Community and Private Forestry Division
CPR	Common Property Regimes
DBH	Diameter at Breast Height
DDC	District Development Committee
DFO	District Forest Office
DFOf	District Forest Officer
DFRS	Department of Forest Research and Survey
DoF	Department of Forests
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal
FUGC	Forest Users Group Committee
FUGs	Forest Users Groups
HHs	Households
HMGN	His Majesty's Government of Nepal
HQI	Household Questionnaire Survey
I/NGOs	International Non-governmental Organisations
IABP	International Agencies and Bilateral Projects
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
LRMP	Land Resources Mapping Project
MAI	Mean Annual Increment
MOFSC	Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation
MOPE	Ministry of Population and Environment
MPFS	Master Plan for Forestry Sector
NARMSAP	Natural Resource Management Sector Assistance Programme
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
NPC	National Planning Commission
NRs	Nepalese Rupees
NTFPs	Non-timber Forest Products
ODA	Overseas Development Agency (UK)
OP	Operational Plan
PF	Panchayat Forests
PPF	Panchayat Protected Forests
RECOFTC	Regional Community Forestry Training Centre
RFA	Rapid Forest Assessment
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
SSI	Semi-structured Interviews
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
VDC	Village Development Committee
WATCH	Women Acting Together for Change
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WCFS	World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development