Section VI - ANALYSIS

Chapter 11: Emergence of collective action in CF

11.1 Introduction

Previous chapters presented results of three case studies and a multi-level/multi-stakeholder study. This chapter presents the analysis of the results. It moves horizontally between the case studies and extends vertically from the local to the district, national and international level actors. The chapter analyses how and why collective action emerged at the local level by comparing multiple cases, multiple-levels and multiple stakeholders and by explaining the causes, consequences and implications of the findings. The analysis is carried out through "back-solving", which requires linking the findings with contextual and situational factors of individual cases (Oakerson 1986).

There are four sections in this chapter. Firstly, the perceived forest degradation is presented as the context for an initiation of collective action in CF. Secondly, the initiation of collective action is discussed in three modes; lack of self-emergence and an intervention by the DFO, self-emergence and recognition by the DFO and self-emergence, but no recognition by the DFO. Thirdly, institutional processes involved in the handover of forests from the state to local communities are discussed. This section also explains how and why people participate in the emergence process and how and why the DFO acts as the driver for the emergence of CF. The chapter concludes by summarising key findings and their implications for CF.

11.2 Before CF: forest degradation as a context for CF

Before the introduction of CF in Nepal, forest degradation was believed to be widespread. In the three case studies, forests were degraded because there was no effective forest management. The state's forest policy introduced a "control and command" system to exclude local people when users' livelihoods were closely dependent on forest resources. Users often covertly challenged the state's forestry system by disobeying rules and continuing their practices. This was because the forest management system was unfair as it was not attentive to the needs of forest dependent people and was therefore ineffective to halt the forest degradation. The state forests often became de facto open access as government failed to enforce rules (see Heltberg 2002). The effectiveness of forest policy depends on the extent to which the policy is responsive to local contexts.

The forest degradation was perceived to be problematic by local users and by the state and international donors in the 1970s. The national and international discourses of deforestation in the hills of Nepal triggered a rapid flow of grants to support extensive afforestation activities. The

findings suggested that such discourses provided rationale for the state to implement restoration programs using local users as helpers, rather than involving them in setting the objectives. The state's initiatives were planned and implemented in such a way to ignore local needs, expropriate traditional rights and gain control over local resources. As indicated in the case studies, long before the emergence of CF, the forest restoration was informally initiated by users in Bagbhanjyang, was formally introduced by the DFO in Laglage Pakha and was by both in Pragatisil. However, degradation continued partly because users' initiatives were not legally backed up by the DFO in Bagbhanjyang. Since there were no secure rights and recognition, there was a weak sanctioning mechanism to control illegal activities. In Laglage Pakha and Pragatisil, the state's restoration and protection program was not effective because it failed to account for the local needs and practices. This meant that the identification of problems and formulation of solutions by external stakeholders failed to take account of local needs, indigenous system of forest use and traditional rights and such externally supplied interventions were unhelpful to restore the forest. The need for local level collective action became more prominent among policy makers, donors and users.

Forest histories in three cases indicated that the degradation of the forests was due to changing social, economic and political factors. For instance, the state-controlled forests in Laglage Pakha historically supplied raw materials for housing and industrial development in Kathmandu. The political decisions to relocate the district headquarter to Damauli and the development of market and infrastructure led to the over-use of Bagbhanjyang forests. The construction of the Prithivi Highway and linkage to a major regional city, Pokhara, caused the illegal cutting of Pragatisil forests. The need for forest products increased in line with the increase in population and during the political crises. This is consistent with Arnold's (2001b) view that the degradation of forests is linked to social, economic and political changes. The understanding of issues of forest resource management should be based on the historically changing socio-economic and political factors.

11.3 Initiation of collective action in CF

CF is an ongoing and interactive process. As an official program in Nepal, it is generally assumed that the emergence starts from the formalisation of the FUG by the DFO. However, the emergence has often been associated with the initiation of collective action for forest use and management well before the official process. Since the initiation is important to drive the future of CF, it is important to analyse how the initiation occurred and who initiated the process. Arnold (2001b) suggests that the origin of CF can generally be categorised as CF intervened by the state and donors, and CF self-initiated by local people. The findings of this study suggest that the emergence of collective action in Laglage Pakha CF was promoted by the DFO, while it was self-initiated by

local people and later recognised by the DFO in Bagbhanjyang. This study also found that as in the case of Pragatisil CF, it is also possible for collective action to be self-initiated, but undermined by the DFO. This indicates the possibility of CF operating under indigenous and externally sponsored system (see Fisher 1989). Hence, it is important to explain how and why collective action self-emerged in some places, not in others.

11.3.1 Lack of self-emergence of collective action and an intervention by the DFO

In Laglage Pakha FUG, collective action did not self-emerge, but the FUG was formed by the DFO. Laglage Pakha users largely depended on the local forest for essential forest products which they could not afford from the market. Laglage forest and community are small with clear boundaries and the community is ethnically homogenous, in which most people share identities, meanings, culture, language and have strong trust and reciprocity to each other. Several attributes such as small size, well defined boundaries and heavy dependence on forests, shared norms and trust are identified by previous studies that facilitate the emergence of collective action (e.g. Wade 1988; Ostrom 1990; Baland & Platteau 1996; Ostrom 2000a). This means that a focus on size, boundary, dependence and other factors is unable to explain issues underlying the lack of self-emergence of collective action in Laglage. Something else hinders Laglage Pakha users to initiate collective action.

What factors made users at Laglage unable to challenge the state's controlling policy that officially excluded them and ineffectively managed the forest? First, a forest restoration program imposed by the DFO not only undermined and destroyed the local social and political system, it also created conflicts and fear among local users who lost a sense of ownership as the presence of forestry staff and the state control over forest resources increased over time. When people lost a sense of ownership, the high level of dependence on the resource actually encouraged individual action, rather than collective action, which is an exception with the proposition that a dependence on resources facilitates collective action (Wade 1988; Ostrom 2000b).

Second, the initiation could not emerge because the external interventions neglected social relations. The DFO employed forest restoration program treated all local people as being equally responsible for the forest over-use and abuse. It ignored or failed to realise the existence of a social hierarchy in decision-making structure. In Laglage, which is a *Magar* dominated village, there was a presence of highly trusted ethnic leaders, who were socially obliged to work for the community. Subsequent changes in forest policy emphasised political institutions such as *Panchayat* for decision making, which sidelined ethnic leaderships. Since ethnic leaders were not consulted, respected and recognised, they felt their social reputations tarnished and therefore, were not keen

on supporting external programs. Instead, a collective anger and a sense of revenge developed among users as ethnic leaders expressed concerns over such interventions. This is similar to Mosse's (1997) observation of CPR in India that the imposition of formal organisations of democratic societies based on equal rights often contradicts the indigenous system of social relations. Therefore, it highlights Wade's (1988) emphasis on social reputations in facilitating collective action, and looking into embedded social relations for understanding the CPR (Fisher 1994). An external intervention, which overlooks an existing social relation and assumes an egalitarian decision making structure within a hierarchical community, may hinder the self-emergence of collective action.

The above discussion suggests that the initiation of collective action calls for recognition of an existing social hierarchy. Intervention should therefore, emphasise socio-culturally respected people (i.e. elites) to initiate collective action. In Laglage Pakha, collective action emerged only when the DFO staff strategically consulted ethnic leaders, invited them to meetings and valued their views and interests more than other users. This type of discrimination, however, challenges an underlying philosophy behind participatory resource management that aims at inclusive decision making and contradicts the idea of procedural equity. Nevertheless, the same may not necessarily apply to other cases, such as different cultural communities, or with respect to the social status earned from an accumulation of wealth or educational degrees. The key argument is that the universal application of external intervention may violate social norms and culture. Interventions should therefore be based on the specific social relations and other contexts, in which the community is embedded. This highlights the calls for an importance of social relations (Petrzelka & Bell 2000) and contextual factors (Edwards & Steins 1999) in understanding human behaviour in CPR. Is it possible both honour and respect elites while listening and engaging with the marginal members of the community?

11.3.2 Self-emergence of collective action and recognition by the DFO

Local people in Bagbhanjyang challenged the state's exclusionary forest policy and established informal arrangements to combat deforestation. The self-initiation was triggered not by direct economic benefits foregone due to the forest loss, but by a common fear that the continuing situation was collectively disastrous. Most people strongly believed that increased landslides and flooding in Damauli were caused by the rapid deforestation and that, their town was in danger due to its geographical proximity to two major rivers and mountains. Therefore, they committed actions to prevent and mitigate environmental catastrophe. This collective fear, while consistent with Ostrom's (2000b) proposition that a common understanding is likely to facilitate the self-emergence of cooperation, actually implies that under certain extreme situations of collective fear, collective interests can produce collective action.

Collective fear in Bagbhanjyang FUG was driven by two factors; social belief and political leadership. First, since the majority of Damauli population had migrated from the hills, they traditionally cut trees, practiced slash and burn agriculture and witnessed landslides and soil erosion followed by tree felling. Therefore, they had a belief that rapid deforestation and environmental catastrophe were linked. Second, some key individuals who were active in politics were influential to accentuate collective fear and need for the community to act collectively. Together with national and international discourses for communities acting for environmental protection, a few local political leaders persuaded people to establish a forest protection committee. With experiences from political meetings and other collective initiatives, these leaders had both the willingness and capacity to organise collective action. This is consistent with the critical mass theory of Oliver (1985) and Macy (1990) that some heterogenous individuals with previous experiences in political actions can make collective action possible. Clearly, a critical mass can have an important role in the emergence of collective action.

Interdependent social and economic forces operated across different scales and facilitated the rise of collective action in Bagbhanjyang. When the local market in Damauli was developed and connected with other markets, there was a dramatic increase in the values of land and labour as well as an increase in economic opportunities. Consequently, the majority of users were prosperous as the market and businesses flourished and were more able to afford alternatives to forest products. The new linkages quickly familiarised the community with global and national discourses of community based environmental conservation. The Bagbhanjyang community had both the resources and reasons to accommodate such a strategy and to initiate a collective action. This implies that the emergence of collective action in forest management is influenced by the external linkages, economic prosperity and various discourses of collective forest management.

Increased linkages also exposed Damauli's religious identities, such as Vedas' Cave, Parashar's Cave and Panchayan Temple, the value of which was realised once visitors flooded into the town. These religious identities were historically within the forests. However, the degradation of the forest means that the community appeared to have disrespected religious identities, which was a humiliation to an economically prosperous community. To mitigate this, the community worked jointly in forest protection. This implies that the increased linkages exposed community weaknesses, but negative exposure does not necessarily produce negative outcomes at the local level. It is therefore important to link socio-economic processes occurring at different levels with the outcomes at the local level (Blaikie & Brookfield 1987).

The pre-existing collective action and supra-legal community arrangements were recognised by the DFO for three key reasons. First, the DFO was unable to undermine collective initiatives due to the presence of strong political support and politically initiated arrangements. In the restoration of

democracy in 1990, the success of collective action in the political arena created group solidarity and popular belief that joint action can succeed to arrest forest degradation and to defy the state's controlling mechanism. During the democratic restoration period, government officials were open to intense public scrutiny and vulnerable to political influences. Undermining the existing arrangements meant to face widespread protest. It was not possible for the DFO to undermine collective action in forest management. This is an example of a successful collective action in politics triggering collective action in other areas.

Second, the overlap between the location of the DFO and Bagbhanjyang community in Damauli meant that many community members had daily interaction and good relationships with the DFO staff, some of whom were also residents of the community. While the overlap between the users' settlement and the resource location may enhance the likelihood of collective action (e.g. Wade 1988), the recognition of collective action is possible when the DFO office and users' settlements overlap.

Third, the extensive road linkages and market access meant that already protected forest was economically attractive and was vulnerable to over exploitation. With a history of political crisis being associated with the deforestation in Bagbhanjyang and the effectiveness of the DFO predominantly being judged in terms of forest protection, the DFO had no choice but to perpetuate what was actually working, rather than to try new arrangements. Again, historically grounded analysis is important in understanding the emergence and evolution of collective action (Mosse 1997).

This recognition meant that there was a perpetuation of the existing arrangements, which primarily aimed at protecting the forest. This has two further implications. First, as there was no provision for use, the forest closure in Bagbhanjyang shifted the use pressure to nearby areas. The recognition created an illegal timber trade between villagers and Bagbhanjyang users. Nearby forests were degraded. This is consistent with Malla et al's (2003) findings that a strict closure of forests in some areas could shift the pressure elsewhere. The recognition of pre-existing arrangements in one area therefore needs to account not only the utilisation aspects of the community, but also the impacts to other forests and communities.

Second, the recognition of self-emerged collective action did not mean that the DFO promoted equitable collective action. In fact, the existing arrangements were initiated and heavily influenced by some political leaders to win votes. The strict protection measures would have direct and more severe impacts on the poor and fuelwood sellers who closely depended on forests. This pattern is widely reported in previous studies (e.g. Graner 1997; Timila 1999; Upreti 2001; Malla et al. 2003). However, it was not challenged by the poor users because they were tied with a complex set

of social relationships. Since the political leaders, who are often among the wealthy and higher caste members, have traditionally provided jobs, foods and security to the poor and lower caste, disobeying or challenging their decisions could risk essential livelihood means. Similarly, within the caste-based Bagbhanjyang community where the poor users are generally seen as service providers belonging to the low caste, failing to serve the rich and higher caste people may be seen as committing a social crime. The poor and lower caste users were therefore forced to accept the forestry decisions made by the rich. This is consistent with Baral's (1999) claim that social embeddedness and patron-client relations may lead the poor to confirm inequitable decisions. This is an example of the ways embedded social relations are important in understanding community forestry processes (e.g. Peters 1987; Fisher 1994).

11.3.3 Self-emergence of collective action, but no recognition by the DFO

In Pragatisil FUG, collective action self-emerged, but was subsequently undermined by the DFO. The self-initiation was made possible by religious, institutional and socio-economic factors. First, the *Kalika* temple located within the forest meant that people respected the goddess and informally protected the forest surrounding the temple. Cutting trees was believed to set off *Kalika's* anger, which could bring imminent disasters. This is similar to what Acharya (2003) discussed about traditional processes to protect trees of religious and spiritual values in Nepal.

Second, collective action may have emerged by an inspiration from an institution highly regarded by the community. In 1976, Queen Aisworya initiated a plantation program to mitigate a severely flooded area of Pragatisil. This was heavily supported by the DFO. Since the Monarchy in Nepal is observed as a divine institution and the Queen as a symbol of a Hindu goddess, people at Pragatisil were inspired and felt obliged to follow the initiatives of the Queen. Users started to protect the forest and environment. This is a reminder that not all institutions are narrowly economic.

Third, a practical reason for the emergence of collective action may be to respond to the *Sukumbasi*[1] problem. As the Prithivi highway was completed, highway labourers and other landless people occupied the land along the highway and constructed temporary houses. Since the area was close to a major regional city, Pokhara, it was attractive for many *Sukumbasi* to settle in Pragatisil. New migrants, as well as previously settled migrants, gradually encroached on the forests and even threatened areas surrounding the temple. Traditional residents were concerned with the way their forests were being captured and destroyed by *Sukumbasi*. The government was struggling to address the *Sukumbasi* problem at different levels. Consequently, local people

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[1] Sukumbasi are people, generally landless and who encroach government land (often forests) to construct temporary houses with a view to a permanent settlement. This problem was widespread and often enmeshed with increasing poverty and hidden political support. There have been many attempts to address this problem. In some places, the Forest Department also used bulldozers to dismantle these settlements. However, it remains a challenge, particularly for the forest department.

established collective arrangements for controlling *Sukumbasi* and protecting the forest. This signifies that collective action in forest protection could emerge as a response to problems brought about by socio-economic change and development initiatives.

However, self-emergent collective arrangements were undermined and new arrangements were imposed by the DFO. The DFO justified the imposition as being essential to resolve conflicts regarding who the users were, and what was the boundary of the forest. This conflict was inevitable because the collective action was initiated to control newly migrated *Sukumbasi* encroaching the forest. The exclusion and control strategy employed by the traditional users, created a community division between a group of traditional residents and a group of *Sukumbasi*. The struggle for the land and forest products intensified as *Sukumbasi* were settled in, and organised into, a community and the traditional residents devised stricter collective arrangements. *Sukumbasi* had, however, openly challenged the traditional users because they did not have a close socio-cultural relationship with traditional residents. Since these new migrants were often industrial labourers generally working in factories and road construction, they were not dependent on the traditional local wealthy people mainly employing labourers for agricultural purposes.

It is implicit that the imposition of the FUG has served the interest of the DFO. The DFO was keen to ensure protection of the plantation because it was at the economically profitable stage. There was a hesitation to transfer the use rights of such a profitable tree crop to local users, hitherto solely protected by the DFO. More importantly, the DFO had to ensure the protection because it was established by the Queen. The protection-oriented approach established by the traditional users was suitable for the DFO's interest. This had support from traditional users, as they saw it as a reinforcement of their previous strategy. However, the *Sukumbasi*, who often lived closest to the plantation site, posed a great danger and had to be included for the protection to be effective. The DFO therefore included them in the FUG, despite the pressure from traditional users to exclude them. While the protection-focussed strategy was not generally favourable for the *Sukumbasi*, they abided by new rules because they saw opportunity to become legitimate users of the forest. This way, the imposition of new collective arrangements is generally linked with the protection-oriented need of the DFO.

The imposition also favoured the interests of the elites, who were mostly wealthy in terms of their large land ownership and were closely involved in the process of imposition. Elites were mostly from among the traditional users, who lobbied for including their religious and protection interests within the new arrangements. The DFO had involved elites because it needed a means to carry out field processes quickly and effectively to meet the annual target. The imposition came as a deal between the elites and the DFO staff, which included strict-protection mechanisms. While initially attractive to many users, it served the interests of the elites and DFO. *Sukumbasi* were regulated to

access and use the forest and thus lost more than they gained as legitimate users. This shows that it is possible for community elites to involve in, and benefit from, external imposition if their interests are compatible with the interests of the state agencies.

In a nutshell, the implications of imposing the external arrangements can be explained by three key points. First, the lack of close social relationships can create social division and conflicts. Then, the divided community is vulnerable to external imposition. Second, external interventions mainly serve external interests. Third, it is possible for the community elites to benefit from external imposition if their interests are in line with the external interests.

In Nepalese CF, the formation, recognition and imposition of collective action explained above are influenced by the forest policy and legislation. The policy and legislation require the Department of Forests (DoF) to facilitate users in formalising and legalising collective action. This basically involves a process that institutionalises collective action. Following is the analysis and explanation of the institutionalisation processes and implications of the study.

11.4 Institutionalisation of CF: the handing over process

The emergence of collective action is not formally secured or sustained unless it is supported by policy and protected by legislation. The forest policy in Nepal involves a formal process that legally transfers the state's rights and responsibilities concerning to forest management and use to a group of local forest users (i.e. FUGs). This "handing over" policy is backed up by the forest legislation. The legislation requires two separate processes for the establishment of an institution to which the roles and rights are transferred; the formation of Forest Users Groups (FUG) and Constitution, and the preparation and approval of Operational Plan (OP). Within these two processes, many sub-processes are possible. These processes are supposed to be owned and controlled by all forest users. However, in practice, the procedure rarely achieves this ideal. Since this process involves a formal and legal process of transferring the roles and rights from the state to the locally established institution, I refer to this as a process of institutionalisation of collective action (or institutionalisation process).

While the institutionalisation process[2] is a foundation for the future development of CF, the study of three case studies and a multi-level/multi-stakeholder study found that the actual process was poor because it lacked effective participation of all forest users. Consequently, the process was not

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[2] It is important to note that the evidence discussed in this section is based on what people presently perceive about their past experience. The evidence may therefore be affected by the impacts and current understanding of CF. However, to understand the process of institutionalisation, this research has used a triangulation approach to cross-check the same evidence from different ways, using a number of methods such as HQI, SSI, group discussion, information talks and observation.

controlled and driven by all users, but was driven by the DFO with the use of community elites. The process was poor because it significantly deviated from what is required by policy.

11.4.1 Ineffective participation of users

Participation of users is very important in the process of institutionalisation. In Nepal, the forest policy provisions all forest users to be actively involved in the process of FUG formation. The Forest Act 1993 and Forest Regulations 1995 empower local people to prepare the Constitution and Operational Plan (C&OP) by themselves (HMGN 1993, 1995, 2000). The actual practice rarely achieves this ideal. Pragmatically, effective participation involves users attending meetings as well as significantly contributing in the final decisions. The findings indicated that there was no effective participation of all users in the institutionalisation process (Sections 7.2, 8.2, 9.2 and 10.3 and Figures 7.1, 8.1 and 9.1).

One reason for a lack of effective participation was that many people did not attend meetings and assemblies (Figures 8.1 and 9.1), which may be because the forest users were unaware about the formation process (Section 10.3). A significant proportion of forest users did not attend in Bagbhanjyang because the process was swift, such that many users did not know about CF to be introduced. Those, who knew, did not prioritise attendance because their direct dependence on forests was marginal. On the other hand, in Pragatisil FUG, a lengthy, but less intensive process meant that many users thought the process had already collapsed. Users, who knew the process was active, did not attend because their attendance could reinforce the power of higher caste users. In both cases, many users had a significant level of uncertainty as to whether all users were identified. On the other hand, there was an impressive level of attendance in Laglage Pakha (Figure 7.1) because most users were identified and informed about CF by the trusted leaders of an ethnically homogenous and heavily forest dependent community. Since most users have traditionally followed community leaders, the attendance was an obligation for users to maintain social relations. As Fisher (1994) argues, people's conformity to rules may be due to them trying to maintain social relationships.

The above discussion suggests that the attendance of users in meetings and assemblies depends on a number of factors. First, the attendance depends on embedded social relations, awareness on users identification and the intensiveness of the process. Second, the attendance may be related to the level of priority given by the community to CF activities, which depends not only to economic dependence but also to social and political factors. Third, people may not participate in the process because they believe that others would benefit from their participation (Uphoff 2000).

Another reason for the lack of effective participation may be because the majority of those who actually attended the meetings and assemblies did not express their needs and views (Figures 7.1, 8.1 and 9.1). Many users did not speak because the level of awareness was low regarding the process of CF and their roles and responsibilities in CF (Figures 7.1 and 9.1). As a result, they did not know what to do, as they were not informed about, and prepared for, the meetings. The majority of FUG members in Laglage did not feel the need to express their views because their views had been historically represented by their trusted leaders (Section 7.2). In Bagbhanjyang, the majority of users were not able to express their needs and concerns in front of wealthy users because they were heavily dependent on wealthy users for their livelihoods and expressing views in front of them could challenge and anger wealthy users. On the other hand, the level of expression among Pragatisil users was higher than in other cases because many users were unhappy with, and only marginally dependent on, the elites who were trying to dominate decisions. In order to understand why and when people speak or do not speak in meetings and assemblies, it is necessary to look into the issues of knowledge and socio-economic relations within which they are embedded.

Another reason why the participation of users was not effective was widespread elite domination (Sections 7.2 8.2, 9.2 and 10.3), which in all three cases was associated with the DFO staff only liaising with elites. Sometimes, elites consulted the DFO and then the DFO staff followed the elites (Section 8.2). Either way, the elites were placed in a focal point, which is consistent with previous studies (e.g. Lama 1999; Malla et al. 2001b). Elites were disproportionately supplied with information and empowered with authority. They were happy to take up the authority and lead the community because they benefited most from it. Then, there is a risk of misrepresentation of community interests by the elite who can seize the control of the process (Cernea 1993). The process is not inclusive and not representative of the whole community, contradicting with the policy and concept of participatory forestry. There is a need for the DFO staff to change their focus on elites and facilitate an inclusive process.

However, the DFO's focus on elites is difficult to change because there is a two-way synergy established between the DFO and local elites. Elites help the DFO to implement the state's formal requirements to local situations more effectively and efficiently. The DFO often provides conditional financial and technical support and sometimes personal incentives to the elites. To capture such support and benefits, the elites accommodate formality within local informal practices, which may, however, bring significant changes in the way local processes occur within the community. One visible change may be that the elites became non-representative and unaccountable to users, and accountable to the DFO. According to Ribot (2002), agencies often choose non-representative and upwardly accountable local authorities to transfer power, but they

can actually create a situation, in which local authorities become non-representative and unaccountable to users. In such cases, the elite domination becomes dangerous for participatory forestry as the livelihoods of the local people and the existence of traditional trust and culture in the community is threatened. Clearly, an intense focus on the elite members may be understood as a threat to the livelihoods of the community and the sustainability of CF. However, it does not necessarily depend upon how other interests align.

Elite domination is not always uniform and problematic. For instance, in Pragatisil FUG, the domination was intense because the process was imposed in a situation of widespread social conflict. Such domination is problematic because the elites had deliberately seized opportunities to express or overlooked the expressed views through the power of wealth, politics and caste hierarchy (Sections 8.2 and 9.2). Therefore, as Bryant and Bailey (1997) argue, the understanding of unequal power relationships is important in the analysis of environmental and social problems. On the other hand, the elite domination in Laglage FUG, while it was widespread, was not problematic because it was socio-culturally accepted and embedded in the ethnic relations (Section 7.2). This evidence suggests that elite domination, which may be externally viewed as a problem, may not always be problematic when CF is seen from a social perspective. Again, social relations are important.

The lack of effective participation may be because the participation was passive. While the attendance of the poor, women and lower caste respondent users was higher than other users, the vast majority of them did not express their needs and views (Sections 7.2, 8.2 and 9.2). Clearly, the participation was a tokenistic type of participation in Arnstein's ladder of participation (Arnstein 1969). The high level of attendance in Laglage and Bagbhanjyang may be related to users' self-motivation, resulting from a high level of dependence on forests. On the other hand, the poor users in Pragatisil may have attended to challenge the historical usurpation by higher caste users in the forest access and use. Conversely, the attendance of the poor may have been coercively obtained by the elites to reinforce their interests. Either way, the mere attendance means that the disadvantage groups have higher level of uncertainty in regards to whether all actual users have been identified and included during the institutionalisation process (Sections 7.2, 8.2 and 9.2). The higher level of attendance, but lower level of expression implies that disadvantaged people actually wasted their time and labour-power by attending the meetings, while their needs and views were not necessarily included in decisions. Instead, their attendance may have enabled the elites to claim the decisions as legitimate and participatory. Agrawal (2001b) argued that it is possible for CF to have participatory exclusions. This is an example. Without effective participation, needs cannot truly be addressed and people with unaddressed needs are difficult to mobilise and conflicts may readily erupt.

11.4.2 DFO as the driver

One of the reasons why the process of institutionalisation was poor is because the DFO was the driver of the process. The findings clearly indicated that the DFO controlled the formation of user groups, organisation of meetings and assemblies and preparation of Constitution and Operational Plan (C&OP) (Figures 7.1, 8.1 and 9.1; Sections 7.2, 8.2, 9.2 and 10.3). There are four key reasons for such control. First, the process was controlled because it was a pragmatic necessity for the DFO, which is required to apply uniform legislative guidelines in practice. Second, the field staff may have controlled the process to achieve annual target within time limits and resources constraints so that they could receive incentives (or escape official recrimination). Third, the DFO controlled the process because at the very beginning, the processes were complex and not easily understandable for the majority of illiterate users. Fourth, the control may be rooted in the culture and structure of the forest bureaucracy because despite the change in policy, there were no significant changes in the conventionally trained forestry staff and upwardly accountable and target-oriented bureaucracy with an institutional priority on forest protection. Then, it was the matter of necessity and legislative and institutional requirements that made the DFO's ownership and control over the handing over process inevitable. This is a challenge to Agrawal's (2000) and Fisher's (1990c) arguments of decentralisation that local control is more functional than state control. There is a need to transform the universal and target-oriented policy and legislative requirements shaped by the bureaucratic system of policy implementation. The underlying issue is essentially about the custodial culture and scientific tradition of the forest bureaucracy that heavily informs the policy and legislation, rather than the problems of the implementation.

The DFO's one-sided control was made possible in the institutionalisation process by the lack of other organisations' involvement in the process (Figures 7.1, 8.1 and 9.1). This may be because of the assumption among the senior foresters at Department of Forests (DoF) that the DoF and users are the only relevant stakeholders necessary to implement CF. Other organisations, such as local governments may have been deliberately excluded because the previous partnership between the DFO and local government did not work to address ecological as well as socio-economic issues. Clearly, the isolation of CF process was contradictory with the policy which provisions users to obtain assistance from donors, local governments and other institutions (HMGN 1993). The institutionalisation process should encourage other organisations that would support and empower forest users to control the process or check and balance the state's control over forest users.

One of the ways the DFO maintained the control over the process was by not spreading awareness or by creating misunderstanding among users about the Constitution & Operational Plan (C&OP). While the findings revealed that users perceived the C&OP as having recognised the local use systems, the majority of them were uncertain about who should prepare the C&OP and how these

should be prepared. Those, who knew about C&OP, shared a view that the C&OP were prepared at once with the DFO and was considered as sacrosanct. Instead, C&OP should have been prepared in the two-step process and should be thought as users' aid to manage forests on a sustained basis for the continuing benefit of the users. Additionally, users misunderstood that the preparation of the OP meant that they were allowed to use the forest however and whenever they wished. This is not the case as the OP is an agreed document between the state and local users with some stern terms and conditions. Clearly, it is necessary for the DFO staff to facilitate users to prepare a Constitution at the first step, followed by the OP. This needs an extensive focus on awareness raising activities so that the C&OP are strongly embedded in the local needs, knowledge, values and expectations. However, it must be understood that the DFO staff may not focus on such activities because increasing awareness may risk their control over the C&OPs.

The findings indicated that the DFO staff drafted the Constitution and OP by ignoring the views of the local users (Sections 7.2, 8.2, 9.2 and 10.3). Gilmour and Fisher (1991) argued that when the objectives are externally set, it is likely that the local plan serve the external interests, rather than the interests of the local forest users. Additionally, externally created local rules often do not represent and are not accountable to local communities (Ribot 2002). Fisher (2000a) suggests that users may not participate in CF simply because they do not wish to promote someone else's agenda. The participatory bottom-up vision of the forest policy practically remains top-down. Therefore, in order to address local needs and the users setting their own objectives, the prescriptive nature of the policy has to be transformed. For this to happen, one of the first steps is to explicitly differentiate between the facilitation and implementation process so that the DFO staff genuinely understand their role as a facilitator, not an implementer, of CF.

The findings from the multi-levels/multi-stakeholders study clearly indicated that the DFO staff formed the FUG (Section 10.3). This suggests that the policy is clearly compromised in practice. Why does this discrepancy occur? First, villagers may be unaware of the process and new institutional operation, which is complex and not easily comprehensible for many illiterate villagers. Second, there is a discrepancy between policy vision and legislative provision. By legislation, the DFO is also authorised to hand over the forest to communities, while the policy envisages the DFO to support forest users. The ambiguity between the roles of the DFO as supporting versus controlling agency gives the DFO a space to become a controller, rather than a facilitator. Third, the action of the DFO may be more driven by its institutional and professional interest and constraints than the long term policy vision. In the study, many respondents perceived the DFO emphasising the conservation of forests more than anything else (Sections 9.2 and 10.3). What this discussion implies is that the vision of the policy may be understood by the forest

officials, but cannot be assumed to be implemented because there are multiple factors influencing the policy implementation.

Two consequences of the DFO's control of the handing over process were that users were unhappy with the DFO and dissatisfied with the process (Sections 7.2, 8.2 and 9.2). The majority of users were unhappy because they were not properly identified by the DFO (Sections 8.2 and 9.2), and because the process was lengthy and ineffective showing the lack of real interest of the DFO to hand over a productive forest in Pragatisil (Section 9.2). There were questions in regards to the legitimacy of the process because the DFO staff only informed a limited number of people to impose the preset agendas to communities (Section 8.2). The unhappiness may have emerged because the DFO staff did not carry out widespread awareness raising activities and thus many users did not know about CF and their roles and responsibilities (Section 7.2). While the general assembly was organised, it was used as a forum to legitimise the process and pass the rules made by elites and shaped by the DFO. The needs and views of the users were largely overlooked. The unhappy members of the community are less likely to develop a sense of ownership of CF, which is important for the sustained cooperation in CF.

Despite the process being controlled by the DFO, the handing over the forest to communities was considered a good initiative because it helped the protection of forests (Sections 7.2 and 8.2), which was highly valued because many users had witnessed the forest degradation and faced adverse consequences. Users cooperated with the DFO staff to restore the forest area. This implies that if the outcome is likely to be improved through an initiative, users welcome the initiative and cooperate with the DFO, regardless of the process being controlled by the DFO. Therefore, the control over the handing over process by the DFO should not be assumed as a reason for the failure of users to cooperate with the DFO staff. In addition, users' cooperation should not be solely judged as the indicator of their happiness with the process and the DFO.

11.5 Summary of key findings and their implications

The above discussion suggests that the emergence of collective action was based on the rationale that the forest degradation was widespread. Over time, external initiatives failed to restore the forest because they ignored local needs, expropriated traditional rights and controlled over local resources. Clearly, as Sarin (2003) argues in the Indian forest management context, failed state-managed access regimes calls for a return to local, collectively organised management settings. The proposal for collective action emerged from the normative assertions that the present situation was either inefficient or unfair, or both. The response to the contemporary policy failure in forest management and the proposal for collective action at the local level can be better informed by the political ecological analysis of forestry issues.

The discussion also suggested that the origin of collective action in CF is variable. The origin may be, but is not limited to, either the intervention of the state and donors or by the self-initiation by local people and recognised by the DFO. Sometimes, it could emerge when users self-initiate collective action, but the DFO undermines it to impose new arrangements. In any case, the initiation essentially involves an act of political leadership, which may be endogenous to the group, or supplied by an external source (White & Runge 1995).

When collective action is due to the intervention of external actors, a close appreciation of internal social relations is needed. Despite several attributes, such as size, dependence and trust that previous studies identified as being likely to facilitate the emergence of collective action, collective action may not self-emerge in a community because external interventions have undermined existing social relations. For collective action to be organised, the intervening agencies need to recognise social relations. It implies that human motivation can be better understood if we look at individuals' behaviour being embedded in social relationships (Peters 1987; Fisher 1994). Despite social-economic heterogeneity, under certain extreme situations of collective fear, collective interests may produce collective action. Therefore, socio-economic heterogeneity in local communities should not be grossly considered as a barrier to effective community forestry action.

The self-emerged collective action may be recognised by the state agency when the DFO office and users' settlements overlapped and there is a close personal relationship between the staff and local people. Users' forestry actions are embedded within the wider interpersonal relations. It is possible for collective action to be recognised when the state agency is unable to challenge political leadership. On the other hand, even when social and religious beliefs aided to initiate collective arrangements, the state agency may undermine such arrangements if there are social divisions and conflicts. Clearly, the historically and politically grounded analysis is important in understanding the emergence of collective action (Mosse 1997).

When the state agency is involved in the official institutionalisation of collective action, forest users' participation can be ineffective and the process be driven by the forest agency. The emergence of new collective action involves creating or redistributing rights and duties which affects power and authority (White & Runge 1995). However, the underlying issue is essentially about the custodial culture and scientific tradition of the forest bureaucracy that heavily informs the policy and legislation, rather than the problems of implementation. A change in forest policy is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for genuine participatory forest management. Instead, it demands a change in policy environments, forest agencies and forest users and their relationships (Hobley & Shields 2000).

The target-oriented, universal and blue-print approach of the state agency encourages community elites to meet the agency's interests. When the process is driven by the DFO, it is also possible for CF to have participatory exclusions (Agrawal 2001b). While the focus on elites and organisation may make collective action more effective or efficient for some tasks (Meinzen-Dick et al. 1999), an intense focus on the elite is a threat to the livelihoods of the community and the sustainability of CF. However, not all elite domination may be socially problematic when CF is seen from a social perspective. Therefore, it is important to look at social relations in understanding the CPR (Peters 1987).

The DFO's control over institutionalisation processes does not necessarily lead to users failing to cooperate with the DFO staff. Therefore, the control over the handing over process by the DFO should not be assumed as a reason for the failure of users to cooperate. However, the DFO's control over the process does create a situation, in which decentralised CF policy is implemented through centralised structure and mechanisms. This is clearly a significant issue of implementation of participatory policy. This evidence also shows that despite the progressive CF policy in place, it is possible for the state to control the processes by misapplying devolution. Therefore, how and why implementation processes are occurred and whether or not these processes are equitable, are important aspects for analysis.

Chapter 12 - Evolution and outcomes of collective action in Nepalese CF

12.1 Introduction

Once the institutional arrangements have emerged and are organised for repeated collective action, FUG members are expected to implement rules, make decisions and manage forest resources. Many old rules are challenged and new rules emerge. The processes are essentially lively, interactive and evolutionary as they are associated with, and continually conditioned by, the FUG's internal as well as external factors. These factors are predominantly related to people whose needs, interests, priorities and culture change over time. Accordingly, some people may continue to actively cooperate, while some may discontinue, become passive, or are forced to continue cooperating. The evolution of collective action is therefore central to CF.

This sections deals with how and why collective action has evolved at the local level. The evolution is generally considered as positive sign of community cohesion and increased institutionalisation of CF. Evolution may, however, also result in negative consequences. A useful way to interpret evolution is therefore a change from simple processes to more complex processes leading to both positive and negative consequences at the local level.

There have been changes in the forest policy and practices in Nepalese CF. Notable changes can be seen in institutional structure and operational strategies of the state's forestry department. Forest users are more experienced, the FUG more matured and forest resources are formally managed. Besides foresters and forest users, various actors, such as donors, NGOs and civil society are involved in, and influential to, CF processes. However, what is often overlooked is, whether collective action has become a participatory and equitable process that is operated and controlled by all users. The following sections discuss the evolution of collective action and outcomes under four interconnected themes; forest management, benefits of CF, distributional equity and procedural equity, followed by a conclusion that summarises key findings and their implications.

12.2 Forest management and collective action

Forest management is the fundamental process in CF involving coordinated sub-processes of protection, enrichment, conservation, and utilisation of forest resources. The findings indicated that forest management has evolved from basic activities, such as defining the forest boundary and protecting the forest by the DFO-provided forest watchers to more active management, such as rotational forest patrolling by users, regular block-wise silvicultural operations and plantation of income generating species. In theory, these processes are expected to be inclusive of all users and

are driven by the FUG, while help from the DFO and other institutions is useful, but not central. However, there are issues concerning whether, how and why people work collectively towards the protection, management and utilisation of forests.

a) Forest protection

Collective action can be seen from the presence of effective forest protection, which is the key aim of CF. The findings clearly indicate that the protection of forests has been effective, either through direct efforts of users (in Laglage) or through forest watchers (in Bagbhanjyang) or sometimes both (in Pragatisil). Different protection systems are employed in different FUGs according to their socio-economic and geographical contexts. For instance, the forest is protected through rotational patrolling in Laglage Pakha, in which all users, who are mostly poor and heavily dependent on forests, participate in protection activities, are aware of the forest boundary and have a low level of conflict (Figure 7.2). On the other hand, the forest is protected by forest watchers in Bagbhanjyang FUG as many users, who are relatively wealthy and marginally dependent on forests, do not participate in protection activities, but the FUG employs forest watchers necessitated by the proximity to Damauli town and vulnerability for illicit cutting (Figure 8.2). In Pragatisil, a combination of rotational patrolling and forest watchers system is employed to resolve conflicts in forest protection. This aims at involving all users, particularly the poor whose participation is crucial in protection activities (Figure 9.2). This evidence suggests that users may be capable of understanding of the trees, forests and their systematic management in the heterogenous social, economic, political and ecological contexts (Thapa & Weber 1994). Effective forest protection may be achieved, not through universal mechanisms previously employed by the state forest management regime, but by different mechanisms determined by CF users as suitable for their specific local contexts.

However, some distinctions can be made in terms of the effectiveness of different protection systems. Direct efforts of all users in rotational patrolling indicate users' genuine willingness in forest protection, which may arise from a sense of ownership and community cohesiveness. However, employing paid forest watchers, while depending on the size of the forest or who is paying for watchers, shows less willingness and confidence of users. This also inherits some characteristics of custodial forest management that are inconsistent with the fundamental concept of participatory forestry. On the other hand, a combination of both systems in Pragatisil indicates the presence of coercive element to obtain users' participation in the context of persisting conflicts. However, the existence of conflicts does not necessarily hinder people from working collectively and achieving effective forest protection. When comparing these systems, direct efforts from users is more promising than the other two because of a sense of ownership among users. However, any

system cannot be imposed as the feasibility and effectiveness largely depend on the FUG's specific socio-economic and ecological contexts.

b) Forest management and utilisation

Forest management has evolved from basic protection activities to a stage where users are carrying out silvicultural activities, such as weeding and thinning to improve the condition of forests. The change in forest condition is perhaps one of the fundamental indicators for evaluating how CF is evolving. The survey of the perceptions of people indicates that the condition of forests has significantly improved (Sections 7.3.1, 8.3.1, 9.3.1 and 10.4.1). Rapid Forest Assessment (RFA) of three community forests shows that the forest condition and availability of forest resources have improved (Sections 6.2.2, 6.3.2 and 6.4.2). Soil erosion and landslides problems are generally non-existent and degraded lands have been converted into dense forests. Improvement in forest condition was one of the most frequently cited statements by all stakeholders who often compete to take credit for this achievement (Section 10.4.1). This finding suggests that CF is reversing degradation and regenerating degraded areas. This is a great achievement and an endorsement for CF in Nepal and is consistent with previous studies (e.g. Maharjan 1998; Branny & Yadav 1998; Yadav et al. 2003).

The improvement in the condition of forests is probably due to a number of interrelated causes. The key stakeholders involved in CF have learnt from historical processes leading to the degradation as well as improvement of forests. The rise of CF policy, based on the learning from indigenous practices and the failure of the top-down model of forest management, have provided motivation for stakeholders to effectively protect forests, regulate extraction and exclude non users. Additionally, the maintenance and protection of forests are linked with social and economic processes, in which forests play a vital role. Findings suggest that forests provide social, economic and religious benefits to users, persuading them to carry out effective protection measures, plantation and improvement activities. Moreover, the political processes have changed over time and greatly influenced forest management approaches. Policies are made, the staff re-trained and institutions are promulgated to support users to improve forest condition. As Nightingale (2003) concludes, the improvement of forest condition is associated with the historical, socio-economic and political processes. Therefore, any attempts to improve the forest condition should attend to the historical, socio-economic and political processes, in which the forest has to be managed.

Despite improved condition of forests, there are four key issues identified by this research. Firstly, improved forests mean that the ability of forests to supply forest products has increased. Results indicate that if forests are scientifically managed, Laglage FUG can potentially meet timber demand, but it may not meet the demand of fuelwood and foliage. In Bagbhanjyang, the FUG may

meet the fuelwood demand, but may not meet the demand of timber and foliage. On the other hand, Pragatisil FUG may not meet the demand of timber, fuelwood and foliage. This suggests that improved condition of community forests have not reached the stage whereby they can supply sufficient and suitable forest products to forest users even if they are "optimally" managed and used. Additionally, the match between the demands and availability of different forest products varies across locations and changes over time. Therefore, the popular assumption of an improved forest being able to produce surplus forest products, which can be sold and generate income for the FUG, is seriously flawed.

Secondly, there seems to be a common assumption that the forest condition has improved through CF, with no specific distinctions being made for different sites. Findings indicate that the condition of forests is better in Laglage Pakha FUG than other cases in terms of the number of stems per hectare, while the condition is better at Bagbhanjyang FUG in terms of biomass per hectare. As a result, the potential availability of forest products per hectare is higher in Bagbhanjyang FUG than in the other cases. The forest is younger in Laglage Pakha FUG with a large number of seedlings, while the number of saplings and poles are significantly lower in Pragatisil FUG. The findings also show that there is a low number of trees (< 70 stems per hac), which indicates that the forests are regenerated from the barren lands with no or few trees prior to CF. The better forest condition of Bagbhanjyang may be due a significant underutilisation in comparison to other two cases, leading to higher availability of forest products per hectare. Underutilisation may be due to institutions being devised in such a way that no products are allowed to be freely harvested. On the other hand, forest products availability for each household is higher in Laglage Pakha FUG because of the lower number of households in the FUG and higher number of trees. This evidence suggests that there are many factors working together to improve forest condition and these factors and their extent of influence vary from one location to other, leading to different condition of forests and product availability.

Thirdly, as Brown (1999) argues in the context of forest co-management in Africa, collective forest management is better for biodiversity conservation than single-purpose forest management. The research indicates that CF is not ideal for biodiversity conservation. The findings show that all forests have low species diversity. The trees and poles are dominated by few species promoted by the FUG for their particular social, economical and political values. For instance, Laglage Pakha FUG has retained *Chilaune* and *Katus* species in place of *Pinus* species because of the former being native to the area and offering multiple benefits. On the other hand, Bagbhanjyang and Pragatisil forests are dominated by *Sal* species because users see a high economic value of *Sal* timber and other religious values (making *Tapari* (plate) and *duna* (bowl)). These economic, social and political factors mean that the forest is dominated by some species under CF in comparison to

a forest protected as a national park. However, given that forests are often established in degraded areas in the first place, as Fisher (2000b) argues, they should be judged in comparison to what was there before, not against some theoretical ideal. Considering the increasingly active management of forests under CF with a specific selection of species conditioned by socio-cultural, economical and political values, CF is unlikely to focus on biodiversity conservation.

Fourthly, the research clearly indicates that the forests are underutilised as the harvest of forest products is far less than what is available. Underutilisation of community forests has been identified by previous studies (Malla 1993; Malla et al. 2001b; Springate-Baginski et al. 2003a). The implication of underutilisation is that there are foregone opportunities from sustainable product harvesting, processing and marketing of both timber and non-timber forest products. Current practices clearly neglect commercial or monetary possibilities (Malla 1993), while the subsistence focus of CF has also been compromised. This is not consistent with the provisions of the Ninth Five Year National Plan (1997-2002) that has called for commercialisation of CF. Community forests could be, and should be, better utilised. So, why has underutilisation occurred and persisted in CF? Many factors, such as technical knowledge, marketing linkages, legal and administrative bottle-necks have worked together. These factors can be categorised as political and knowledge related.

The underutilisation of forests is caused by politics of forest management that deprives users obtaining and exercising a real authority to harvest forest products. Wood et al (1995) argue that forest agencies emphasise the conservation objectives and communities and other stakeholders the development objectives, but the former may become dominant due to its political, financial, technical and other backings. The protection approach is popular at the DFO because DFO's institutional efficiency is being judged in terms of the protection of forests, rather than management of controlled use. After the endorsement of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992, the bureaucracy is obliged to meet conservation objectives. For this, the state retains authority indirectly by fixing certain conditions, in which there is flexibility for minor activities, while most important decisions are set by the state at the higher levels. As Ribot (2002) argues, most decentralisation policies are being constrained by the key natural resource management authorities persistently held at higher levels of the government.

The emergence of CF has not brought about the shift in decision making assumptions underlying the state as controller. Instead, custodial ideas of the DFO making the decisions for people (often covertly) have simply been reinforced and put on work in the new policy context. Therefore, there is a need not only for real devolution of power, but also for a change in conceptual and ideological assumption about the role of state bureaucracy as a facilitator, not as a decision maker and implementer of CF.

The politics leading to underutilisation has been supported by the elite members who often hold the FUGC position and hijack the FUG. Elites dictate the protectionist ways of managing forests as they depend less on communal forests and therefore, protection-focus does not have a significant impact on them. For elites, managing protection is easier than managing controlled use. Accordingly, institutions are devised in such a way that a limited quantity of forest products is extracted, mainly as a part of forest improvement, not to meet users' needs. As a result of the limited use and protection focus, most users are deprived of their basic forest products needs and are constrained by the rules administered by the FUGC. The central issues are to minimise use so that the forest condition is improved, while users' needs and supply potential of forests are peripheral. CF may meet the conservation objectives, but it is at the expense of poor users who are mostly dependent on forest products. Therefore, there is a need for further devolution within the FUG to address the needs and interests of the poor.

The underutilisation and difficulty about productive management of forests is related to knowledge and skills required for users to utilise forest products without threatening the long term sustainability of the forest. In this study, it was observed that local elites, disadvantaged groups or government staff cannot confidently say some level of use is better than no use. There are no conscious processes of learning in terms of forest management and use. Despite three decades of implementing CF, findings indicated that there is still a lack of appropriate approaches to assist the FUGs in developing monitoring and reporting mechanisms that could effectively help to reflect, review and adapt their forest management practices. Users seem to have a low level of confidence on forest use and they are highly dependent on the DFO to guide for increased use of forests. The findings indicate that the vast majority of users highlight the need financial and technical support for forest management (Sections 7.3.1, 8.3.1 and 9.3.1). The discussion also indicates that users lack knowledge about how increased forest use leads to the deterioration of forests and when the DFO may take back CF from the FUG. Consequently, users emphasise the indirect use such as eco-tourism and other non-extractive uses, but are unable to carry out active utilisation of forests. Despite a clear policy regarding forest utilisation, under-utilisation continues because of the lack of proper knowledge and the DFO highlighting forest conservation. Clearly, the issue is not only the knowledge and skills and supplying better tools, finance and other support, but also the underlying interest of the forest agency to maintain the forest cover.

Despite significant underutilisation of forests, people continue to engage in collective action in maintaining the forests. This needs a closer analysis with a reference to the benefits of CF.

12.3 Benefits of CF and collective action

Livelihoods benefits are the fundamental elements of CF and are seen as an underlying part of the rationale for CF. Implementation of CF is largely based on the relatively unquestioned assumption that CF will provide widespread benefits that motivate people in sustained collective action. Contrary to this, the research indicates that the benefits from CF are very limited. CF is supporting the local livelihoods far below the potential, particularly in relation to poorer users. There are examples of local users becoming worse off as a result of CF. The case study results reveal that the harvest of forest products is minimal in comparison to the individual users' demand and potential availability of products (Sections 7.3.2, 8.3.2 and 9.3.2). There appears to be a huge gap between the demand and supply of forest products while forests are significantly underutilised. The direct benefits for other actors, such as the state forest agency, are not significant (Sections 10.4.2 and 10.5.2). This affirms the findings of Malla (2000) that contributions from CF have not been substantial. Despite the policy commitments to support livelihood benefits, much remains to be achieved. The evidence highlights the issues regarding the theoretical view that CF is based on the needs and interests of the local people which safeguard and diversify the multiple benefits from the forests (Brown 1999). It also questions the optimistic observation by Winrock International (2002) that CF in the mid-hills of Nepal is one of the few notable success stories in the national context of poor public sector management and improving people's livelihoods. Then, an important question emerges; why have the benefits of CF been so limited?

The research indicates that the direct reason for limited benefits from CF is the underutilisation of forests. However, the underlying reason behind it is the persistent control over forest management and utilisation decisions by the DFO to meet its conservation interest (Sections 7.3.1, 8.3.1 and 9.3.1). While the policy is committed to give full use rights to users and users have some power to make decisions, these decisions are seriously constrained by various rules and circulars, and by the overriding power of the DoF. The circulars issued from the DoF for clarifying issues often counter legal and policy provisions. Therefore, as Fisher (2000a) explains, the arguments of limited benefits from CF is based on flawed arguments because the problem is largely about the control of forest resources, not about the limited flow of benefits. Due to the absence of real devolution of decision making and limited real access of forests for the FUGs, the users do not have power to demand and receive CF benefits. Obviously, the transfer of rights is limited and incomplete (Agrawal & Gibson 1999; Ribot 2002). The underlying reasons for a lack of devolution and secure tenurial rights are due to institutional rigidity within forest departments and the failure of policy attention on devolution and secure rights. There have been many changes in terms of techniques and training, but the underlying control structures are largely sustaining so do the lack of benefits

to communities. There is a need for a genuine devolution of power to local levels so that the use of forests is controlled by the users themselves.

As a result of CF benefits being limited, many users are frustrated about not being able to meet their subsistence needs, while there is a potential for the forest to do so. For instance, a ban in charcoal extraction has frustrated the blacksmith in Laglage Pakha, while many users questioned why dead trees were lying in the forest instead of being utilised. Many users seemed to have repeatedly expressed their voice in the assembly and meetings to increase utilisation of forests, but these views have been ignored. Users have also shown their frustration by openly criticising the FUGC (as in Pragatisil FUG). This is consistent with Deutsch's (2000) theoretical argument that people show frustration when the procedures result in repeated unfavourable outcomes. This may result into the weakening of community solidarity and intensify conflicts, potentially leading to withdrawal from collective action.

How and why people collectively act despite limited benefits?

Despite the limited contribution of CF and increasing frustrations from many users, the findings indicate that the majority of users attend meetings, participate in forest protection and management activities and confirm rules. This means, collective action continues to exist. Contrary to the common assumptions that individuals will only act collectively to receive benefits, the evidence implies that individual benefits are not the sole, or even the primary, determinant for collective action. As Leach and Mearns (1996) argue in the context of African environmental management, there is a need to move away from macro-scale approaches and policies towards a more situation specific focus because local people who depend on forests for inputs in their livelihoods may experience their own problems and solutions. Collective action may have been influenced by situation specific factors and by reasons beyond the expectations of benefits. Then, what factors make people to continue in collective action?

a) Economic and subsistence importance of the forest

The research indicates that the forests provide at least some products and other benefits, which are important for users' livelihoods. In Laglage Pakha and Pragatisil FUG, CF plays a crucial role for meeting people's subsistence needs for leaf litter, fodder, firewood and timber. Many users at Bagbhanjyang FUG buy timber at a relatively lower rate than in the market. Findings also indicated that users are aware of the environmental benefits. Additionally, the findings from different stakeholders study indicate that the cooperation of people in CF has been conditioned by indirect benefits, such as the creation of the nation's identity for Nepal as a home of CF and attracting donors, recognition of local rights over forest products and contributing to the state

economy by reducing the costs of forest conservation (Section 10.4.2). With such diverse importance of forests, non-cooperative free-riding or defection is not an inevitable strategy.

b) Anticipation of future benefits and CF orthodoxies

Findings indicate that users have a high anticipation of future benefits in terms of generating income and carrying out community development through the sustainable use of forests, particularly by non-extractive uses (Sections 7.3.3, 8.3.3 and 9.3.3 and 10. 4.2). Such anticipation of benefits may be because users have previous knowledge of the benefit of collective action in a number of social, economic, cultural and political activities. Forest users have traditionally collectively used forest products and they know when and how forest products can be harvested and used for certain purposes. Users have learnt by doing and are becoming more interested, active and confident in the utilisation of forest resources. As North (North 1994) has argued, the most fundamental long term source of change is learning. This evidence implies that, given a conducive policy and institutional environment, experience and knowledge are the pre-eminent determinant of sustained collective action.

Second and probably the most influential reason for strong anticipation of benefits may be from well known explanations that CF has the potential to significantly contribute in livelihood improvement, income generation, community development and environmental protection and thereby, achieving sustainable development[3] (Section 10.2.2). This discourse highlights the enormous potential of CF to supply forest products and other benefits, which is further reinforced by the forest policy that has clear provisions enabling the FUGs to own all forest products and generate group income by selling available major and minor forest products. Many users receive training and develop skills and knowledge and improve social capital. Then, the FUGs will emerge from a sectoral forest management institution towards assuming a wider community and household development role. The discourse concludes by projecting CF as a great vehicle for improving livelihoods and alleviating poverty.

Forsyth (2003) has discussed environmental orthodoxies as the explanations continued to be used in policy making, despite the accumulation of evidence to suggest they are flawed. These explanations are based on certain problems and solutions, which are a widely held understanding and commonly accepted as facts within popular and political debates. The discourse discussed above is the CF orthodoxy because as the research indicates, CF is yet to fulfil the basic needs for forest products and there is no significant level of income generation, community development or poverty alleviation. The focus on income generation and community development has actually interfered with poor people's livelihoods. However, the balance between the forest conservation

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[3] It should be noted that achieving sustainable development depends on how it is defined by different stakeholders.

and wider benefits, and income generation and community development is popularised in such a way that this is seen as *the solution* to problems. This is being presented and popularised by the DFO as legitimate and accurate representation of reality, which is providing a rationale for collective action. Clearly, there is a need to understand the complex social and political influences upon how we explain CF problems and possibilities. We need to rethink factual explanations because the supposed factual explanations of CF benefits are highly problematic and overlook both biophysical uncertainties and how people value forest changes in various ways. The use of these orthodoxies universally and uncritically may undermine both forest management and social development by adopting simplistic approaches to the causes of forest change, and by encouraging forest policies that may only restrict local livelihoods.

c) The "comparative advantage" of CF

Despite the limited flow of products, the relative benefits of cooperative forest management over other available alternatives are higher and therefore, the situation under CF has been perceived to be better than the previous situation. The change in users' perception has been mainly because there is a perceived improvement in the condition of forests. This is consistent with the previous findings that the motivation of individuals to engage in collective action is strongly affected by their perceptions of the conditions of a resource, not by the actual condition (Agrawal 2000; Gibson et al. 2000). Under the current system, users have received at least some products without fear of being prosecuted from the DFO, while the state management of forests as an alternative poses a risk of being prosecuted. Unlike the past experience of deteriorating forests and decreasing forest product availability, the flow of products has been perceived to have improved under CF (Figure 7.2, 8.2 and 9.2). However, the findings also suggest that the flow of products is not occurring as much as it could from the potential availability of forest products. This perceived comparative advantage of CF over the state administered forestry has made the users feel a sense of ownership, a realisation of responsibility and pride of achievement even if they may not have become better off as much as possible from CF. This suggests that sustained collective action in forest management may be linked with the changing perceptions of users that CF is relatively better than other available alternatives and that it has achieved comparatively better outcomes than the previous system.

d) Wider benefits in the process of collective action

Interdependent forest users are not motivated, solely or perhaps even principally, by the intended outputs of collective action, but also by the benefits of participating in the process of action. In Laglage Pakha, users' participation is not only to receive forest products, but to remain a part of ethnically homogenous society as individuals are linked by ties of kinship, shared ritual obligations and concerns. Cheating can lead to social exclusion and deprivation of social and ethnic benefits.

In Bagbhanjyang, users do not expect a significant level of direct benefits, but their participation is due to shared religious belief and is conditioned by a complex variety of needs to obtain political power, labour or income within the patron client ties. In Pragatisil, users have kinship ties, a strong caste system and labour relations that necessitate them to continue cooperation. As Race et al (2003) argue, CF is more than providing forest related benefits, but is also pursued for social benefits. Motivations and concerns related to these interdependencies appeared strong and formed the basis of various expressions of collective action. The forest policy makers may have expected that dependence on forests and exposure to the costs of forest degradation and scarcity of forest products would serve as strong basis for participation. They are wrong. These findings indicate that external agents seeking to improve participation should seek to assure that the process of action adheres to the logic and norms guiding existing social institutions and processes enmeshing people within interdependent relations. Again, understanding why people collectively act, one needs to assess existing interdependent relationships.

People are interdependent for number of ways and this interdependency facilitates (or hinders) collective action. Baland and Plateau (1996) argue that heterogeneity of endowments and homogeneity of identities and interests facilitate collective action. However, a number of other studies have found ambiguous impacts of group heterogeneity on collective action (Baland & Platteau 1999; Bardhan & Dayton-Johnson 2000; Veldeld 2000). The case study results indicate that homogeneity in terms of ethnicity, caste, wealth, identities and interests within the groups of local people may facilitate collective action. For instance, Laglage Pakha is more homogenous than the other two and collective action seems to be continuing with less problems. However, the research has also indicated that heterogeneity of interests between various actors at different levels does not hinder collective action to continue. For instance, collective action of forest users appear to be primarily influenced by the flow of forest products, while the state forestry officials are interested in saving or increasing the state-revenue. The business users see CF as an initiative to forego income generating potential, while non-government organisations highlight the income generation for local people. This evidence implies that group homogeneity may facilitate collective action at the local level, but the heterogeneity of interests at different levels may not hinder collective action. Scale is an important aspect for understanding the effect of homogeneity (or heterogeneity) on collective action.

Findings indicated that forest users have realised that if they restrain their use of the forests and contribute towards protection, other people also do the same. There is an established expectation of reciprocal behaviour. Users expect to participate in forest management activities and have to provide excuses when they choose not to participate. This suggests that social norms exist, in which people are expected to cooperate in actions that provide forest resources. As Petty and Ward

(2001) argue, social capital such as norms, trust and reciprocity, are important factors which enable people to engage in collective action.

e) Political factors

People continue to cooperate in CF, not only because of the benefits, but also because of the politics that force them to do so. For instance, many users in Pragatisil do not wish to participate in the meetings, but they participate because the higher caste, land-wealthy elites at the FUGC will otherwise impose heavy fines for non-attendance. Users in Laglage Pakha are mobilised by the orders and deliberations of ethnic leaders, who hold customary power to guide people within their ethnic territory. Resistance may result in a serious reprimand or even social exclusion. Wealthy elites in Bagbhanjyang control the deliberations of the poor through the provision jobs or credit. Less powerful users are forced to participate, even when the consequences are negative. Metz (1995) has stated that development in Nepal has been greatly affected by indigenous elites, who have monopolised power and wealth, thereby impoverishing the majority of population. The caste system and its ideology seem to have a profound effect on Nepalese CF. There is a need to question and challenge the politics of CF being inherited through the caste system.

Another aspect of the relationship between politics and collective action in CF can be analysed with an appreciation of the ongoing political conflict in Nepal. Due to the increasing political instability, including the Maoists insurgency hampering development work at the local level, CF is increasingly affected as the government's presence is limited only to the district headquarters and major towns. The conflicts in the rural areas have created considerable insecurity, making it difficult for various agencies and bilateral projects to carry out CF activities at the field level. In particular, it is difficult to work in the forests, which are often controlled by the Maoists or the security forces. However, there has been some progress in CF initiatives. Despite the gloomy political background, it is praiseworthy that collective action in CF has continued and user's efforts are relatively less affected by the current political crisis than other government initiatives. This is probably because CF has been generally established with democratic processes to manage forests that are needed for all sections of the community and unlike other government programmes, CF directly involves local people to meet their needs and interests. This suggests that collective action can be evolved in critical situations if the processes are participatory and the outcomes directly affect people's livelihoods.

12.4 Distributional equity and collective action

One key argument of this thesis is that from the inception of CF, equity issues have been overlooked while rural development issues are persistently highlighted. However, there are

conceptual, pragmatic and ethical reasons for CF to explicitly address equity. As a reminder, equity concerns fairness about how decisions are made, benefits shared and to what extent CF affects the disadvantaged groups of the FUG. The fairness is both procedural and distributional. This section deals with distributive equity that can be interpreted as the fairness of the outcomes of decisions.

Although the current extraction and distribution of benefits from CF is limited, given an enabling policy and institutional context, improving forest condition and confidence of users, it can be assumed that the benefits are going to increase. It is frequently argued that people will remain interested in collective action as long as they feel that their interests are not adversely affected and that, they have received fair outcomes. The question of what is to be distributed and to whom it is distributed is important in the debate of equity (Boyce 1994). Then, how do people evaluate the fairness of outcomes? First, people may consider distribution as fair that rewards people in proportion to their efforts (e.g. Taylor 1988b). Second, people may consider fair distribution as equally benefiting to all regardless of costs or efforts (e.g. Rawls 1971). Third, people may consider distribution as fair when it is based on the specific need and concerns of people, either because they are deficient or more oppressed relative to others, or because they have a need for greater resources than others (e.g. Raz 1986; Parfit 1991). The analysis proceeds with the third argument because it has been argued that from the inception of CF, the concept has generally been directed towards the needs of the rural poor (see Arnold 2001b). Equity, in this view, is therefore concerned with the priority given to those people, who are worse off in the community and involves positive discrimination. I focus on the distribution of direct benefits; forest products, and income generation and community development because these are the most notable and immediate outcomes of collective action in Nepalese CF.

12.4.1 Factors associated with inequitable benefit distribution

The research indicates that despite the formal provision of equality in local and national policy and implementation processes, benefit distribution is inequitable because it does not reflect the needs of the users, with the more needy receiving more support. What are the factors responsible for distributional inequity in Nepalese CF?

a) Illusive egalitarianism – "no equality"

First, we need to deal with the reality that equal distribution is not happening in practice. Inequitable benefit distribution occurs when some users gain a disproportionate share of benefits from the formal provision of equality. Findings indicate that advantaged households are receiving more of high value products, such as timber and fuelwood than the poor and female households, while a slightly higher quantity of low value products such as leaf and fodder are received by the

disadvantaged (Sections 7.3.2, 8.3.2 and 9.3.2). This may be because high value products, particularly timber, are sold at auction. The disadvantaged groups receive higher quantity of low value products not necessarily because they are free, but primarily because advantaged sections are not interested in these products. Such inequitable distribution of products from CF in Nepal has been reported by Malla et al (2001a), Neupane (2003) and Malla et al (2003). This implies that the formal provision of equality can actually lead to unequal outcomes when influential and powerful people directly exercise their power to distribute benefits. Therefore, as argued by Mosse (1997) in the analysis of CPR in India, it is crucial to understand that the system of use and distribution on the ground is conditioned by the existing structure of authority traditionally exercised by the rich, higher caste and male users, not by a formal provision of equal share and responsibilities.

Even when the distribution of benefits is equal in practice, disadvantaged users are likely to suffer more from the protection focussed equality system than the advantaged because strict restrictions are imposed to access for certain products which are of no interest to the wealthy and powerful, but which are important to others. While many users perceive that distribution of benefits is being done on an equal basis, the disadvantaged users have divergent needs with fewer private resources and their gaps between demand and supply of resources are greater. Findings indicate that there are no separate arrangements for the poor and rich users, while the users' needs are not fulfilled (Sections 7.3.2, 8.3.2, 9.3.2 and 10.5.2). The specific needs of users are not considered as the needs of charcoal for blacksmiths in Laglage Pakha are not considered at all, even when the majority of users depend on the service of that blacksmith. In Pragatisil, a tea-shop owner is frustrated because the distribution system is too rigid and the FUGC is not serious about the intensive fuelwood needs of the tea-stall. For him, the rule for equal rights and share is meaningless because he only needs fuelwood. However, there is no system that enables him to swap or sell his share of fodder or leaf to others. As suggested by Adhikari et al (2004), therefore, a transferable use right over certain forest products may be a useful consideration in Nepalese CF.

The evidence suggests that equality of shares has counter productive impacts on different sections of the community and consequently, the disadvantaged users have to suffer more than the advantaged. This is essentially because the disadvantaged users do not have sufficient access to suitable forest products. As Brendler and Carey (1998) argue in defining CF, forest users should have access to the land and its resources to receive equitable benefits of forest use and management. Therefore, the policy makers and facilitators need to recognise that a formal provision of equal share may have negative impacts to the worse off section of the society. A useful way to address this is organising differential access and use rules for different sections of the community so that the distribution matches the specific needs. If peoples' prosperity changes, the system has to adjust by redefining different sections and amending the rules accordingly.

b) Resource limitation and the question of survival - "Unable to gain equitable share"

Walzer (1983) argues that the road to an egalitarian society not only depends on equal opportunity and equality of outcomes, but on the equality of conditions or circumstances which influences the opportunities and the outcomes. Findings indicated that inequitable benefit distribution occurs because decisions made at assemblies do not reflect the unequal conditions and constraints of the particular groups. Consequently, the disadvantaged groups are not being able to take up their share due to the lack of resources, such as time and labour needed, when their survival issues are constantly threatening their daily lives. For instance, the protection focussed forest management restricts access and use of forest products and the poor users, who depend more directly on forests products, do not have supplementary resources to access and use the forest equally when it is open for all (Section 10.5.2). This may have little effect on wealthy people. In terms of gender capability, equality is inherently based on a flawed proposition as the male and female, who are supposedly allowed to collect forest products freely, cannot collect and carry the same amount of forest products due to physical constraints (Section 10.5.2). There is formal equal opportunity and equal rights for all, but due to unequal conditions and constraints, the disadvantaged groups cannot grab the benefits available on an equal basis. Therefore, it is important to recognise that users start with unequal conditions and circumstances and therefore, current formal provision of equality is not sufficient for equitable distribution of benefits.

c) Entrenched politics – "the deprivation of equitable share"

Perhaps the most important reason for inequitable benefit distribution is the politics of implementation processes that distort the formal equal system and deprived the disadvantaged section of an equitable share of benefits. Findings clearly indicate that the distribution process is carried out by the FUGC, which is controlled by the DFO (Sections 7.3.2. 8.3.2 and 9.3.2). How has the politics led to the deprivation of equitable share for disadvantaged users?

Firstly, inequitable benefit distribution may be due to the politics coming from the pre-existing social hierarchy and unequal power relations in Nepalese societies. There is a sharp social division in terms of caste system and its ideology, which has a profound impact on ordinary Nepalese (Bista 1991). Elites and non-elites are divided from birth, based on their belonging to a certain caste. Further hierarchies are created in terms of wealth, education and political power, and more elites emerge or existing elites are strengthened. These elites possess a good deal of power, prestige and wealth which establish them in a central position to control the actions of non elites. They control local affairs and the nation's political economy by capturing the political and bureaucratic positions and controlling the state policies and implementation processes at different levels. They also have extensive linkages with other local elites and regulate the resource management to fulfil their interests (Section 10.5.2). This has been a perpetuating historical

process, in which cooperation and benefit sharing has never been equitable (or even equal) in Nepalese society. Instead, non elites have been forced to depend on elites for various social, economic and political reasons. The needs and favour from the elites become constraints for non-elites to become unable to demand for equitable share of benefits. This contradicts Blaikie et al's (2002) claim that caste and ethnic differences in Nepal do not necessarily influence matters, such as distribution. It is consistent with Nozick's (1974) theoretical claim that justice is historical and whether a distribution is just, depends upon where it comes about. Therefore, to understand inequitable distribution of benefits, we need to examine how it is influenced by historical, social, economic and political processes. Clearly, CF must be examined as a part of larger system.

Secondly, there is a politics of communication and information flow, which is closely related to awareness levels and fair opportunity to voice opinions. Findings indicate that the majority of users do not know how distribution process should occur. Even some FUGC members have a poor awareness of the distribution process. The FUGC members do not always inform users about auctions, while users are repeatedly asked to participate in forest management. Information provided by the DFO goes to the FUG through the FUGC, but the information seems to be retained (or intercepted) by the key members of the FUGC. Clearly, there is a problem of information flow, which has been used (deliberate or not) as a tool to mobilise users and resources at the discretion of the FUGC. As theoretical justice literature highlights, people are not given opportunity to learn and voice their opinions (Lind et al. 1990; Galston 1986). When the disadvantaged users do not have an opportunity to express their needs and concerns, inequity is exacerbated. Therefore, the issue of communication and information flow requires attention, both in the process of decision making and implementation at the local level. The DFO and other external support agencies can promote information flow and communication practices directly in the FUGs.

Thirdly, the politics can be seen from the channelling of CF benefits into communal activities, such as community development, rather than targeting the needs of the disadvantaged groups. Findings indicate that despite the policy not hindering the FUGC to mobilise the fund, the FUGC has not loaned funds to poor users. The fund has been either deposited in the bank, or used for forest watchers, office management, constructing roads and schools (Sections 7.3.3, 8.3.3, and 9.3.3). The tendency of keeping the money in the bank may be due to the FUGC being uncertain on methods to spend and administer the funds, or because they perceive the risk of losing the money on loans to poor people. Instead, the DFO and key members of the FUGC support the communal focus of CF benefits. Overall, community development is one of the interests of the state bureaucracy, while developments, such as the construction of local roads, tend to benefit, to a greater extent, the wealthy who can afford vehicles or carry out business. The evidence suggests that there is a great potential for the FUGs to enhance equitable share of benefits, but currently the

FUGC are hesitant to initiate these activities due to lack of understating of methods and the problem of trust. There is a need for technical support to raise awareness of the possibilities and confidence of the FUG members and building of trust in the FUGC.

Finally, the politics of benefit sharing can be seen from nepotism in product distribution. Findings indicate that the FUGC members give out forest products to friends and relatives at their discretion, particularly in places where forest products are sold. The FUGC at Bagbhanjyang is criticised for selling timber to friends and relatives. At Pragatisil, the chairman of the FUGC has given more fuelwood to households who are closer to him. This evidence suggests that the poor users may have been unfairly penalised by the auction system. Clearly, this system must be changed so that the poor and minorities get fair access and use of available resources.

12.4.2 How and why people collectively act despite inequitable distribution?

Widespread inequitable benefit distribution in actual practice has frustrated many people, but collective action has continued. It is therefore important to analyse why people have ignored or tolerated distributive inequity.

a) Equality is progressive in a semi-feudal society

Collective action in CF seems to be strongly influenced by different stakeholders' perceptions of challenging the deep-rooted oppressive system prevalent in the wider society. Perceived equality of contribution and benefit distribution has been considered as a progressive initiative in Nepalese society, hitherto an oppressive and feudal society (Section 9.3.2). The equality system has challenged historically rooted and presently hegemonic oppression in other sectors. The system has at least conserved the forest unlike the previous system (Section 8.3.2). This has provided relative satisfaction among users. However, since the benefits are not significant, the perception of formal equal and secure rights over benefits is established to such an extent that it has almost completely overshadowed issues of equity. This implies that when users have a strong perception of comparative advantage of the present system in relation to the overall system in the society, cooperation continues despite inequitable distribution of benefits. Clearly, promoting an equitable system in CF needs to take account of the wider social system, in which CF is embedded.

b) Risk and uncertainty in the new system

Berkes (1989), in his study of communal fisheries in Turkey, has shown that common property is largely about risk sharing. Contrary to this, the findings indicate that people may not share risk if there is a considerable uncertainty about the alternative system based on equity. One aspect of uncertainty is that requirements for equity may stimulate social division induced by the discriminatory provision of benefit sharing. Giving more to the poor may upset the rich, who have

more resources at their disposal, for conservation efforts (Section 10.5.2). On the other hand, there is uncertainty associated with the improvement of resources and possibilities for income generation and mobilisation. Findings indicated that in Nepalese society where poverty is high and income sources are low, when money is available, there will be many problems. Income can be captured by elites, leaving the disadvantaged groups worse off. Therefore, people tend to accept the status quo and tolerate persisting inequity, rather than risking further inequity. The attempt to directly implement the discriminatory distribution system needs careful thinking about risks and uncertainties that may hinder people to accept an equitable distribution system.

c) Discourses against distributive equity

White and Runge (1995), in their analysis of the emergence and evolution of collective action in watershed management in Haiti, argue that certain controversies, dilemmas and discourses establish rationales for collective action. Findings indicate that there are discourses that argue against distributive equity, which typically include three responses, one based on denying distributive inequity, another based on excusing it, and the third opposing it. The "denial" retort is that although distributive equity is desirable, flaws in existing research make it almost impossible to identify particular instances of distributive inequity. Proponents of the denial argument often say that although poor and minority communities may appear to be victimised, much of the evidence for their discrimination is anecdotal (Section 10.5.2). This is not enough for policy transformation.

Using the "excuse" response, the discourse against the distributive equity does not directly deny distributive inequity, but argues that the benefits of avoiding it do not outweigh the costs of correcting it. Instead, the orthodoxies give two arguments to put the alleged inequity into perspective. First, on balance, victims of alleged distributive inequity may benefit from CF as the victims might suffer worse from higher product shortages and other costs if they would not have CF. Second, the discourses charge that the mere correlation of CF and the presence of poor or minority communities does not prove that inequity was actually caused by CF. There may be other reasons to trigger inequity in CF.

Discourses opposing distributive equity are based on the assumptions that equity is the task of the state forest management and CF as a people's system, is not a suitable platform (Section 10.5.2). The discourse, shared by politically inflicted users and frustrated politicians, claims that the poor are the main forest destroyers (Section 10.5.2), implying that there is a need for a stronger restraints to control the destructive actions of the poor, rather than equitable distribution of products.

What this implies is that discourses against distributive equity may often be myths which can act as rationales for people to join and continue collective action. Therefore, any attempt to understand

issues of distributional equity needs to take a serious account of current discourses surrounding equity (or lack of it).

d) Enclosure of default CF policy framework

One reason for people acting collectively in CF is that they do not have choices within the existing CF policy framework whether to cooperate. They must cooperate if they want CF. Since users need forests and CF is the only approach that gives secure legal rights and ownership of products to users, the intention to become a part of CF is usual, particularly for the rural poor. However, when they are involved, they must act within the default CF policy framework. Inspired by the national and international democratic developmental framework, the policy does not require equity as such, but formalises processes and outcomes based on an equality principle. Consequently, the DFO has not promoted equity in policy or practice, neither is it required by the policy and state legislation (Section 10.5.2). In fact, the DFO may have serious difficulty in promoting equity because it requires the elites to give up a part of their share to the poor for the sake of equity (Section 9.3.2). Therefore, while under this present framework, enhancing equity seems to be difficult, as people cannot stop cooperation just because it is not equitable. It is fundamentally related to the CF problems and solutions being informed by the state of knowledge, assumptions and understanding that shape policy. There is a need to rethink the way problems are identified and solutions proposed in order to formulate CF policy that enhances equitable benefit distribution.

12.4.3 Should we aim at distributive equity?

Given the above findings, one question emerges; should we aim for distributive equity in CF? Findings indicate strong support for benefit distribution on the basis of equity principle, rather than equality principle (Sections 7.3.2, 8.3.2, 9.3.2 and 10.5.2). The underlying rationale behind such support is the fact that the disadvantaged groups have something to offer and gain from CF. Efforts from the disadvantaged groups are feasible to achieve and is important for enhancing and maintaining forest health. However, they are persistently frustrated by equality principle, in which they do not receive sufficient or suitable products. They may be inclined to disregard the forest protection rules set in place by the FUG, even though the consequences of being caught are substantial. Not recognising the valuable efforts of the poor may induce forest degradation and affect the stability and sustainability of the FUG.

The issue is not that the disadvantaged groups have contributed efforts towards forest protection and therefore their contribution should be equally rewarded. There are important practical and ethical reasons such as heavy dependence on forests and limited means of alternatives, for equitable distribution in unequal society (Section 7.3.2). As Arnold (2001b) argues, the inception

of the concept of CF in general is directed towards the rural needs, in particular the needs of the rural poor.

Aiming for distributive equity necessitates changes to the institutional design of CF systems if they are not to discriminate against the poor groups they are meant to benefit. In part, these changes might emerge from within the CF system. If the assumption is that a version of CF will and should remain intact, how might it be reshaped to benefit the rural poor? In principle, the idea would be to create a set of synergies such that richer and poorer villagers gain from a broader system of forest development. For this, there is a need for mechanisms to improve the livelihoods of the rural poor. In doing so, it must be recognised that such proposals and mechanisms will be blocked by current better off groups. All systems of forest management in Nepal are bound up with social, political and economic processes and structures which are not advantageous to the rural poor, and which take its cue from existing structures of inequality in the distribution of land and rights to local people. Therefore, one important aspect is to understand processes and structures that lead to inequitable outcomes.

12.5 Procedural equity and collective action

Distributive equity in the allocation of CF impacts is necessary, but not sufficient in promoting equity and enhancing collective action because the focus on distribution tends to ignore the institutional contexts that influence or determine the distribution. It is important to understand procedural equity, without the analysis of which, we will not understand the real causes of inequity that affect collective action. Procedural equity refers to the fairness in the processes of decision making and implementation (hereafter "the processes"). The processes are fair when they are guided by an approach of affirmative action[4], in which the poor, women and other disadvantaged groups will have a greater access to, and influence over, the way decisions are made and implemented than other users.

Procedural equity directly relates to users' participation, which is an integral component of CF. An implicit assumption is that increasing users' involvement in such processes will lead to greater acceptance of the decisions made from these processes. The Brundtland Report stressed that increased public involvement in decision making facilitates equity in resource allocations (WCED 1987). Such involvement is also justified for upholding democratic principles, providing opportunity for conflict resolution, and increasing the acceptability of decisions (Lauber & Knuth 1999). Therefore, it is important to assess and understand whether the processes are equitable, and

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[4] Affirmative action or positive discrimination is an approach that gives priority to the poor, women and other disadvantaged users within the FUGs; both in processes of decision making and implementation and in benefit distribution. Both "affirmative action" and "positive discrimination" are used in this thesis to refer the same meaning, and therefore are changeably throughout the thesis.

how and why equitable (or inequitable) processes emerge and are sustained. The research indicates that there is little procedural equity in the cases studied because of the lack of affirmative action in the processes (Sections 7.3.4, 8.3.4, 9.3.4 and 10.5.1). Two aspects of procedural inequity are found.

First, there are formal provisions for equal participation, rights, access and share, which are themselves not helpful for enhancing equitable processes. The supposedly equal participation is not equal in real terms because the relative weight and importance of time and resources between the poor and the wealthy is not equal. This finding is consistent with WATCH's (1998) observation of Nepalese CF that equal distribution and treatment of all users has detrimental effects on the poor, women and certain occupational groups. Clearly, the formal provision of equality can only reinforce inequality and disadvantage those who are already in a disadvantaged position.

Second, the formal equal provisions are not equally implemented in practice. The findings indicate that the level of participation is different, with the poor and disadvantaged groups of the FUGs participating more than others (Section 8.3.4). Good participation was seen in Laglage Pakha compared to the other two cases, stemming from social cohesion and dependency on forests. However, the participation of most users is passive because the processes are dominated by the FUGC and controlled by the DFO. A distinction needs to be made between the presence of users in FUG meetings and their active participation. As Malla et al (2003) argue, an emphasis on reaching the poor and disadvantaged beyond the FUGC and other elites is needed. The evidence suggests that neither the formal provision of equality is itself sensitive to the needs and concerns of the poor, nor can it be implementable in practice. As Raz (1986) argues in justice literature, equality principles are often counter productive to help worse off groups and to achieve equity, the priority must be given to the worse off sections based on their concerns. Therefore, there is a need to transform the policy and implementation towards giving positive discrimination to the poor and minorities.

How can we work towards positive discrimination to the poor and minorities? An important step is by understanding how and why inequitable processes emerge and are reflected in unequal societies of Nepal. This research indicates that procedural inequity is reflected in three major ways; namely a) the poor and minorities do not participate in the processes, b) they participate but, they do not (or cannot) voice their needs and concerns, and c) they participate and voice their needs, but their needs and concerns are not included in the processes. These reflections are conditioned by the complex set of interconnected factors related to a) socio-cultural and economic circumstances, b) knowledge and c) politics, which also shape situations for users to continue collective action. Following these three conditioning factors, the remaining section discusses the reflections and

reasons of procedural inequity and explains why people continue in collective action and how equitable processes can be enhanced.

12.5.1 Society, culture and economy – Social embeddedness

Timsina and Ojha (2004) argue that problems in participation and decision making are rooted in the structural inequality and stratification of Nepalese society. Similar to Bangladesh where attempts to benefit the poor and disadvantaged groups from CPR are constrained by widespread social inequalities (Khan 1998). The research indicates that semi-feudal social structures, supported by previous feudal political and economic regimes, have sustained inequality and hierarchical social processes. This became the underlying force in CF processes and has sustained inequities.

The reflection of procedural inequity is related to economic reasons. Findings indicate that the poor and minorities, who depend on forests, do not participate because they lack time and resources for CF (Sections 8.3.4, 9.3.4 and 10.5.1). Since the livelihood benefits are not substantial, there is a low expectation from CF, while the priority is to meet their most urgent needs. On the other hand, users, particularly the wealthy, who are less dependent on forest products, do not participate in the meetings and assemblies because they too lack time, but for different purposes; to operate businesses or continue jobs (Section 8.3.4). Some users in Pragatisil complain that they do not participate because meetings are sometimes organised during their cultural and ritual celebrations. As Mearns (1996) argued, there is a need to look at the commons within the context of other activities carried out by the people.

Inequitable processes are conditioned by socio-cultural interdependence. Sometimes the majority of the poor, women and other disadvantaged users participate in the processes, but inequity occurs when many of them do not (or cannot) express their needs and concerns by themselves (Sections 7.3.4 and 9.3.4), and the decisions made by the elite do not represent or prioritise their needs and concerns (Section 8.3.5). The lack of voice may be due to the social-cultural system (as in Laglage), in which village leaders are traditionally responsible to voice on behalf of the villagers for a range of communal activities. The processes of CF become a part of wider social system where the presence of villagers is often intended to support the leaders, not to present their independent views (Section 7.3.4). Users are dependent on the leaders in a variety of ways that constrain them to express their needs and views during the discussion and negotiation process (Sections 9.3.4 and 10.5.1). Instead, the majority of users accept the decisions (i.e. the presence of "yes-syndrome") and continue collective action. The presence of obvious bias or inequities is rarely questioned, let alone challenged. The prevailing CF approach does not question these types of relationship in the villages (ActionAid Nepal 1999). People are dependent on the group leader,

who is responsible for distributing outcomes among the group members. In such cases, the possibility of exploitation by the relevant authority is high.

The power generated from socio-cultural hierarchy can force people at the lower end of the economic or social hierarchy to cooperate with those at the upper end of the hierarchy. For instance, the high-caste and wealthy users in Bagbhanjyang may threaten to withhold employment or credit from the poor if they fail to cooperate. Similarly, using their power, community members may threaten women with reputation loss or even with violence if they break the rules of collective functioning. Failing to comply with the deliberation of ethnic leaders in Laglage would lead to a fear of social exclusion (Section 7.3.4). In other words, cooperation may appear to exist despite procedural inequities, emerging from socio-economic inequalities and a conflict of interest between different sections of the community because it is imposed by some through the exercise of social and/or economic power. People may follow the rules out of coercion rather than consent, even when the costs from cooperation outweigh the benefits. Contrary to the general assumption of collective action as a voluntary act, this evidence shows that it can be a non-voluntary act. As Fisher (1994) and Baral (1999) illustrate in the analysis of Nepalese CF, there is a need to recognise the importance of broad social relationships in explaining conformity with collective agreements.

Inequitable processes exist when some sections of the FUG may be excluded from participating in the activities of local institutions because of socio-cultural norms. Wade (1988) analyses a CPR in India and demonstrates that socio-cultural norms condition people's collective behaviour. A case in point is the female seclusion norms which sometimes prevent women in Nepalese societies from attending village meetings even when they would like to contribute. Village spaces, in which men congregate, such as tea stalls, are spaces that women of "good character" are expected to avoid. Cultural norms discourage women, both at the household levels and within meetings where contributions may be actively discouraged, with comments like "the hen has started clucking". The lower caste users, who are religiously classified as untouchables, are secluded by the other sections of the FUGs by not sharing food or water. Norms often require disadvantaged users to sit on the floor, while the wealthy and older men sit on cots or chairs. Even where everyone sits on the level, often the poor, women and lower caste tend to sit at the back or on one side where they are less visible. This makes them less effective in raising their concerns, while the issues raised by the more prominently seated people receive priority. Moreover, the presence of senior family members makes other members hesitant in attending meetings, or speaking up at them, or publicly opposing them. The hierarchy that marks respectful family behaviour also tends to define community interaction. These notions are often carried over to formal village meetings. A fear of reputation loss or family reprimand, or cultural norms which have been internalised, restrict the poor, lower

caste and women's mobility and interaction in public decision-making bodies. As Cocks (2003b) argued, there is a clear difference between innovative and secular societies and the rigidities of caste, religion and tradition. Therefore, the recognition of socio-cultural norms to perpetuate inequitable processes is important for challenging simplistic assumptions about the nature of cooperation that often presume the voluntary nature of collective action primarily influenced by the cost and benefits of these actions.

Petty and Ward (2001) argue that social ties are important assets which influence the management of environmental resources. Findings indicate that social ties tend to institutionalise and perpetuate procedural inequity. For instance, the horizontal ties established by marriage are strong in the FUGs where the families of the bride and bridegrooms are expected to have smooth and long-lasting relationships. In the caste-based Nepalese societies, the ties of descent are also strong and require the sons and daughters to obey their parents and the juniors to follow their seniors. Besides, there are inter-caste friendships such as *Miteri* (i.e. same sex friendship) that constrain people's behaviour and limit people to freely choose certain course of actions. Sometimes, the ties are vertical between different groups, in which senior members of a relationship chain establish connections with other individuals (or groups) within or beyond the community to enhance or reinforce their status. When different groups have competing or conflicting interests and priorities, nepotism and bias are mediated primarily along the lines of social ties forming much of the conflicting agenda and opposing activities. These ties may form the basis of social division where a strong faction assumes authority at the expense of a weaker. Clearly, these ties institutionalise and perpetuate inequitable procedures and outcomes. Thus, the understanding of social ties is important to identify how and why certain inequitable processes and outcomes are produced and perpetuated.

What can be done about these socio-cultural and economic factors leading to inequitable processes? The evidence suggests that socio-cultural and economic factors are crucial for users to voluntarily participate in decision making and implementation processes. Clearly, participation of all users must be emphasised because, as Arnstein (1969) argued, so many people can be missed or disempowered in decision making processes if their participation is not emphasised. However, a superficial emphasis on participation is not enough. Sometimes, participatory methods are used to encourage inclusive decision making, but as Mosse (1995) argued, these methods have been unable to uncover and understand the complex social relationships which determine who is and is not present, who does and does not speak up in the community gatherings. There is always a danger that the so-called participatory policies with ineffective participation may fail to result in the desired forest conservation incentives among the rural poor (Pavri & Deshmukh 2003). Without effective participation, participatory policies may become a form of covert privatisation

that lead to centralised resource control, yet existing within common property ownership (Anderson 2000).

The question remains; how to promote effective participation in a socio-culturally and economically stratified community so that procedural equity is enhanced? Nelson and Wright (1995) argue that a clear distinction has to be made between participation as a means i.e. a process of achieving the aims of a project more efficiently, effectively or cheaply, and participation as an end, i.e. a process of giving control of a development agenda to a community or group. Clearly, there is a need for the latter form of participation, but the process must give positive discrimination to the poor and minorities within the community. Otherwise, as Cernea (1993) argues in the analysis of decentralised natural resource management projects, many well-intended initiatives fail when local elites misrepresent community interests and seize control of the processes. The positive discrimination must create a situation in which the poor and minorities can express their needs, concerns and limitations. When their voices are included in the decisions, their needs or other hardships would be seen as a community concern and not just the concern of individual households or the poor and minorities alone. This could pressure the FUGs to not only extract more forest products or provide income generating options, but also to find additional solutions to problems. This would increase the voluntary cooperation of disadvantaged groups.

However, the evidence also suggests that collective action is not always voluntary. Some sections of the FUGs are excluded from participating in the processes or their participation is passive because of social interdependence, hierarchy, norms and ties. It is important to recognise that, as Quiggin (1993) argues, successful management of CPR prevails with significant inequities because of the people's value systems and social and economic interdependence.

These empirical findings are supported by arguments in theoretical literature that actions always take place in a broader social context that affect the action of individuals and interfere with self-interest (Zurin & DiMaggio 1990; Granovetter & Swedberg 2001). Therefore, as Petrzelka and Bell (2000) argue, the functioning of CPR cannot be understood as the aggregate product of the private decision making of individuals, but trust, norms and power all influence actions and thereby offset pure self-interest. Collective action, as Peters (1987) demonstrates in the analysis of CPR in Botswana, is embedded in social relations and cultural systems. Clearly, there are important grounds for challenging assumptions about the nature of cooperation that presume the voluntary nature of collective action is primarily influenced by the economic cost and benefits of these actions. As Fisher (1994) argues, human motivation can be better understood if we look at individuals' behaviour being embedded in social relationships.

12.5.2 Knowledge and discourses – Discursive embeddedness

Knowledge is important to the way CF decision making and implementation processes proceed as it is closely related to information flow, communication and awareness levels. Knowledge shapes how the processes are perceived to be inequitable (or equitable). The perception or evaluation influences users' participation. It also frames the existence and continuation of procedural inequity. When people are knowledgeable, their participation is effective to make and improve rules. Knowledge may come through the experience of people, or it may be from other sources, such as scientific methods. Whatever the case, it is generally assumed that forest users have knowledge of CF concept and procedures and are aware of and have internalised their rights, roles and responsibilities. This research indicates that the majority of users are aware of the basic facts that forests have been handed over to the community, but there is a wide variation in the level of awareness amongst users, with the poor and disadvantaged users having a very limited level of awareness. It is therefore important to analyse how knowledge and inequitable processes are related and what is the relationship between users' knowledge and participation. This helps to explain whether and how to improve users' knowledge in terms of enhancing procedural equity.

Brown et al (2002a) argue that CF is a knowledge-intensive process and as the process advances, more information and support from agencies is needed for communities, but off-the-self approaches are unlikely to work. Findings indicate that the DFO staff have employed a target oriented quantity-maximizing approach to implement CF which has led to some poor and other disadvantaged users not being able to access information and become aware of the concept and formal procedures of CF. As a result, they completely lack knowledge on how and when to participate. This happens when at one end, the DFO staff tend to skip awareness raising activities to meet the annual target, and perhaps receive official incentives (or avoid penalties). At the other end, the staff interact with community elites, organise meetings and distribute leaflets to them. Information is given to the elites assuming that it will be transmitted to users. However, the elites intercept such information, or transmit only that information (only after manipulation) which helps to meet their interests (Section 9.3.5). In between, extension and awareness activities are organised and leaflets are distributed to users, but often the information is complex and incomprehensible, and methods employed are not suitable for mostly illiterate users. There may be other reasons for the poor and minorities lacking knowledge about CF processes, but an underlying reason is the approach that the DFO employs to implement CF.

This is a serious equity issue because those users, who lack information, may be left out of the process, but they may be the ones who are the most important for maintaining the forests. The advantaged groups who have knowledge and information can easily mislead or even exploit the poor and minorities. Clearly, the information flow processes employed by the FUGC and DFO,

such as extension and awareness camps, distribution of leaflets and pamphlets and invitation and meetings are unfair because the poor and minorities are deprived the opportunity to be involved and voice in the process due to lack of necessary information (Section 10.5.1). This line of reasoning fits well the theoretical explanation of Lind et al (1990) and Thibaut and Walker (1975) that a procedure is fair when people are given the opportunity to directly participate and voice their opinions in decision making. An improved flow of information within the FUGs is needed so that the poor and minorities have access to information, which helps to increase their participation and enhance equitable processes. The focus must be on the form and mode of delivery because it is possible to give accurate and sufficient information in such a way that it debilitates people.

More commonly, inequitable processes emerge when the majority of poor and minorities have access to insufficient or inaccurate information leading to limited knowledge and understanding of the concept and procedures of CF and their rights, roles and responsibilities under CF (Sections 7.3.4, 8.3.4, 9.3.4, 10.2.1 and 10.5.1). The previous studies in Nepalese CF also found a poor awareness of the basics of CF concepts and the policy objectives behind it, and also the roles and responsibilities amongst users (Malla et al. 2003; Springate-Baginski et al. 2003a). Further, Malla et al (2003) found that the awareness levels are lowest among the poorest groups.

A key reason for limited knowledge may be due to poor information flow and communication among users, the FUGC and DFO staff. For instance, the poor and minorities may be poorly informed about timing and locations, but may not be informed about the mechanisms of discussion and negotiation processes. The DFO staff, who are the main source of information, may not have sufficient knowledge themselves. The academic degrees being provided by the Institute of Forestry[5], have limited focus on CF concepts and procedures. Technical forestry subjects still dominate most courses in intermediate, bachelor and master levels, while the graduates are mostly employed by the government to implement CF with a major focus on social aspects. The graduates are not fully aware of, and confident to address, socio-political aspects of CF, which is central in their key role as facilitators. As a result, users may participate in meetings, but due to limited knowledge, they either lack confidence to express their voice, or their expressions may be misleading. Participation either becomes attendance, or it may support someone else's agendas.

Secondly, as the research indicates, limited awareness of users is related to the DFO staff, who have knowledge and information, but wish to retain or provide misleading information to control the FUG's processes (Sections 7.3.4, 8.3.4, 9.3.4 and 10.5.1). For instance, the DFO retains the authority to approve the OP and resume CF. There are instances when the staff did not give

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[5] The Institute of Forestry (IOF) is the only institution that provides forestry education in Nepal at intermediate, bachelor, master and now, PhD levels. It has two colleges in Hetauda and Pokhara and is a part of Tribhuvan University; the biggest and oldest public university in Nepal.

sufficient or accurate information about the new requirements related to forest inventory and annual auditing. The staff have promoted the OP as the reference document contrary to the policy vision of it as a working document. Insufficient and often inaccurate knowledge about CF processes limits users' confidence to manage the forest (Sections 7.3.5, 8.3.5 and 9.3.5). The forest agency's desire to maintain power over forest resources may lead to a lack of clarity amongst users about what could be achieved through the FUG. This is consistent with Fisher's (2003b) observation that some forest authorities desire to maintain authority over valuable resources. Authorities must recognise the value of giving accurate feedback and providing explanations of actions and decisions. This allows individuals to understand how their contributions have affected outcomes, which may enhance users' motivations towards collective action.

What is the impact of limited knowledge on collective action? The research indicates that limited knowledge about CF has constrained people to act effectively and equitably together, but it has not stopped them from continuing cooperation. People continue cooperation for a number of interlinked reasons, which are discussed in Section 12.4.2. In some cases, the lack of or limited knowledge on CF processes motivate people to get involved in collective action and gain new knowledge and improve their existing understanding. The research indicates a sense of ownership of forests among users, which may have motivated them to learn and improve the understanding on how to effectively manage their forests. This is, however, unlikely to act alone. There are other reasons for sustained cooperation. One reason relevant to knowledge is that people are influenced by different views and discourses associated with certain social, economic and political forces, that provide rationale for collective action.

Findings indicate that there are various discourses that justify procedural inequity. The first type of discourse provides "denial arguments" and asserts that inequitable processes of CF are not a problem at all. Instead, it supports the need for such processes because it is not practical for the processes to include everybody putting their views and making decisions (Section 7.3.4). Since these denial views are highlighted by the powerful individuals and organisations, both from within and beyond the FUGs, users continue collective action in anticipation that their turn will come in the future and they would be able to include their wishes in the decisions.

The second type of discourse is "excuse arguments", which acknowledge the problem of inequitable processes, but asserts that the problem is not related to the processes at all, but is rooted in a fundamental difference in human behaviour. This argument asserts that it is extremely rare to find individuals with similar personal capacity and other dispositions. Because of this, some users are capable of expressing their views and wishes in meetings and assemblies, while others are not (Sections 10.5.1). This discourse suggests that when women or poor users do not participate to the meetings or even when they participate, but do not speak (or are unable to

express), other users should not be blamed for capturing the decision making process. This view supports the personal development and empowerment of individuals. Many users may continue in collective action because their personal dispositions will be improved and one day, they would be able to express and influence decision making processes.

The "excuses argument" proposes that nothing is perfect in the world and that, there are problems of inequitable processes in CF. These problems are not limited to CF, but associated with democratic systems of governance. Findings indicate that the processes of decision making and implementations are established on democratic foundations, such as election of the FUGC. Once elected democratically, they have the mandate to decide on behalf of people. CF is a form of social work so there needs to be some pioneering people who must initiate activities. The leadership is a part of democratic culture and the processes employed by the leaders may not be equitable for some groups of the community (Section 10.5.1). In this view, the problems of non-inclusive and non-transparent processes are the problems of implementing the democratic process correctly, or of about the majority rule of democracy, not a problem of CF (Section 10.5.1). Collective action in CF is maintained as users perceive this concern as the role of political leaders to correct this problem.

Contrary to the above discourses, inequitable processes are problems of CF and should be addressed for enhancing forest conservation and users' livelihoods. In fact, different discourses are constructed by, and suited to, promote the belief, value and interests of the powerful individuals, while the poor and minorities are forced to accept it. Supported by power, the discourses are widely accepted in the policy circle and have heavily influenced policies. As Forsyth (2003) argues in reference to critical political ecology, these discourses are translated into policies and subsequently, they impose unnecessary restrictions on the livelihoods of marginalised people. As Stott and Sullivan (2000) argue, it is important to emphasise the discursive relations between humans and their environment and the narratives that support power relations which in turn maintain hegemony over people and the environment. Clearly, as Blaikie (1985) argues, environmental realities are social constructions and therefore, it is important to recognise the processes of how different people construct the reality and how they are translated into policies and practices.

Knowledge, society and politics – mapping their connectedness

The above discussion indicates that CF is a knowledge intensive discursive process. However, an underlying issue emerges: should we improve the existing knowledge base and transfer the available knowledge to users? Can this promote and enhance equitable processes that prioritise the needs and views of the poor? I argue, this is often not the case. The existing knowledge of CF does

not significantly and sustainably help forest users or other relevant stakeholders to address CF issues including procedural inequity. In fact, focussing on the transfer of existing knowledge and communication strategies, we have missed the underlying reasons for procedural inequity. There are several reasons why transferring the current state of knowledge to forest users would be of little help for sustainably addressing CF issues.

Firstly, CF knowledge is difficult to correctly and sufficiently transfer to forest users within the existing institutional structures of the forest bureaucracy that ignore the social settings, in which knowledge is transferred. Findings indicate that the DFO staff still lack respect and confidence about the capacity of local institutions to manage the forest sustainably. These institutions are reoriented and strengthened, often reinforcing the custodial culture, but with new tools to involve local people in forest management. With the existing bureaucratic structure and tradition, it is unable or unwilling to provide sufficient and correct information to local forest users. The information supplied to users aims to institutionalise, strengthen and sustain the presumably weak village institutions. However, as Cleaver (2000) argued, institutions are not necessarily weak or unsustainable, but may be highly robust because they are interlinked with the social and historical milieu. The underlying problem is not about the knowledge flow per se, but is the existing bureaucratic structure that ignores social aspects of users to whom knowledge is assumed to be needed and transferred.

Secondly, the institutional structures of forest agencies, their visions and working styles, are not compatible to, and sympathetic with, local social structures and the indigenous knowledge base. Due to the lack of institutional compatibility (see Fisher 1990c), the DoF staff either do not supply information, or they cannot do it in the context of the incompatible local system. Consequently, indigenous knowledge traditionally used in local forest management is not taken account. However, the local knowledge may be more suited to local conditions than scientific knowledge. Soussan et al (1995) viewed the lack of attempt to discuss and recognise the indigenous knowledge in Nepal as a lost opportunity. The problem is largely institutional and overlooks or often contradicts the existing social structure and local knowledge system. The knowledge base for CF must integrate both local and scientific knowledge, which enhance each other as stakeholders seek to understand complex problems and to find effective solutions. Through such shared knowledge bases, users produce better information on which to base decisions and are more willing to work towards consensus in their deliberations. The trust and respect that result from such processes reduce top-down, command and control processes and relationships of earlier management styles, and facilitate the development of networks, which distribute knowledge and decision making more equitably. The result is a more participatory process, in which stakeholders with a diverse array of values, networks, and goals provide checks and balances on decisions and actions.

Thirdly, the forest agencies often make wrong assumptions about the nature of the community to which the knowledge is supplied. They aim at transferring knowledge to communities having a common interest to acquire knowledge and that they will passively take up whatever is supplied. Unlike the conventional wisdom of planned intervention, villagers are not the passive recipients of development (Long & Long 1992b). The interests of the community may be diverse and their cooperation depends on problems under consideration. It is wrong to assume that there is a presence of a clear community of interest at the level of the resource system (see Turner 1999; Campbell 2001). Further, as Mosse (1997) argues in the analysis of tank irrigation in India, it is crucial to understand that programs and external stakeholders never confront a static consensual tradition at the local level. Instead, they interact with contested domains of power and meaning. Clearly, knowledge issues are enmeshed with politics and power.

Knowledge, society and politics are mutually linked, and CF problems and explanations are thoroughly embedded in social and political practices. However, even if knowledge is transferred to local users and is internalised and correctly used, there is a problem in the nature of existing knowledge and the issues of power involved in it. The production of CF knowledge, mostly generated from empirical analyses, is heavily influenced by scientific methods of sampling and inferences. They employ quantitative methods to find "facts", which are often socio-economically and politically irrelevant. Qualitative methods are marginally used and when they are, they are employed to assist quantitative methods. Heavily influenced by orthodox forestry science, these methods and tools simply search for universally acceptable laws of nature based upon practices that guarantee accuracy and lack of political bias (Forsyth 2003). These tools are persistently used by powerful policy makers as the only rigorous way to assess and understand forestry problems and devise suitable solutions. Thus produced knowledge is often misleading and inappropriate, but persistently informs policies that often unfairly penalise the poor (ibid). Therefore, as Fisher (2003b) argues, most efforts in CF have treated the problems too much as a matter of knowledge, while real barriers to more fundamental progress in CF are power and control issues. Clearly, the excessive focus on knowledge alone is not sufficient to address diverse problems of CF. Issues of power are more often central than the issue of knowledge.

12.5.3 Politics and unequal power relations – Political embeddedness

Politics and unequal power relations are major factors that lead to inequitable processes and outcomes in CF. While CF generally aims at transforming the politics by changing the existing unequal power relations among users and between the users and the state and other organisations, findings indicated that there is no significant change in such relations. Instead, previously powerful organisations and individuals have regained the power within the formal CF processes and controlled forest management, utilisation and distribution processes. The poor and minorities are

marginalised and often worse off from the introduction of CF. Findings indicates that inequitable processes created and sustained by politics and unequal power relations are reflected in three major ways, namely i) The elites, ii) The state, and iii) Conflicts.

i) The elites

One way that politics appeared in the processes is through elite domination. Findings from three case studies clearly indicate that the elites (including the members of the FUGC) dominate the processes and influence the final decisions and implementation (Figures 7.5, 8.5 and 9.5 and Sections 10.4.3 and 10.5.1). There is a strong perception that the FUGC is more powerful than general users and controls the use and management of forests (Figures 7.6, 8.6 and 9.6). These findings are also shown by previous studies (Lamsal 1997; Malla et al. 2003; Timsina & Ojha 2004). Is this domination problematic in CF? The elite domination, particularly through the formal organisation, the FUGC, is problematic because it directly affects the level and effectiveness of users' participation and has negatively affected the livelihoods of the poor and minorities (Section 10.5.1). Users are not happy with the way the FUGC works and therefore, there is a need of change the existing FUGC and its formal decision-making style (Figures 7.6, 8.6 and 9.6). Hence, it is important to analyse how and why elite domination occurs in order to better understand the ways to address equity issues.

Committee forestry

Elite domination is conditioned by socio-cultural factors and intra-group politics, leading to committee forestry. The research indicates that the members of the FUGCs predominantly come from the upper caste or wealthier sections of the FUG. In all FUGs, previously powerful elites, who often generate their power from the caste hierarchy and unequal distribution of wealth, capture the key positions, such as secretaries and chairmen (Section 10.5.1). Those elites, who do not find key positions, are not interested in general member position, but influence from outside through their better kinship or personal relations and inevitably control what issues are raised and which way decisions go. The poor and minorities, who are socio-culturally and economically constrained, are unable to access or influence the decisions. Instead, the chairman and secretary often exercise arbitrary discretion in taking decisions without even consulting the users' assembly, or even other members of the FUGC. Consequently, CF becomes committee forestry; sometimes chairman or secretary forestry (Section 10.5.1). This is consistent with Fisher's (1990c) discussion of the "committee syndrome" of the Nepalese forest bureaucracy that often prefers dealing with committees. This phenomenon, also found by other studies (Springate-Baginski et al. 2001), may be generally inevitable from the nature of society in rural Nepal and village politics, where the more wealthy and powerful assume dominant roles. However, committee forestry is problematic for several reasons.

First, committee forestry lacks legitimacy because the FUGC, as a local decision making authority, does not fully represent and account the views and concerns of users, but is often accountable to the DFO (Section 8.3.5). This research indicates that the FUGC members are often selected by the DFO staff. The chairmen and secretary identify themselves as powerful decision makers and implementers of CF because the DFO's transfer of power is understood as given to the FUGC, not to the whole FUG. The poor and minorities are forced to follow the FUGC that is perceived to be legally powerful to prosecute them. Heavily influenced by the working styles of the DFO, the operation of the FUGC appears to be more of a bureaucratic organisation, rather than the people's democratic institution (Section 7.3.5). The FUGCs are establishing a formal office, buying furniture and stationery and establishing a notice board of the executive committee members. The key members of the FUGC seem to be more guided by the advice and backing of the DFO than by the users. This line of thought fits well with Ribot's (2002) argument that the legitimacy of a local authority may be a product of fear, or may come entirely from powers and backing given to them by the governments. When the FUGC as a decision making body lacks legitimacy, the people's satisfaction with decisions and the support for the decision making body is reduced. As Taylor (2001b) and Lind and Taylor (1988) argue, the lack of legitimacy may create the perception of procedural inequity where people are unlikely to accept decisions. It is essential for the FUGC to be legitimate, but the heavy influence of the DFO staff may only exacerbate illegitimacy for the FUGC.

Second, committee forestry often lacks neutrality. Findings indicate that the chairmen and secretary are favouring the rich and powerful members. They generally view the poor users as ignorant of the value of the forests (Section 7.3.5). The meetings and assemblies are organised in a formal settings where the poor and minorities cannot express in front of the large mass (Section 9.3.5). The information is not suitably and sufficiently communicated to all sections of the community. As Leventhal (1980) argues, the presence of such bias shows the lack of procedural fairness. Cohen (1985) explains that a frustration effect arises from a perceived bias by the decision maker. The decision-making structure must be changed to address the frustrations of these individuals. Equitable decision-making processes need to become the basis of FUG support to move away from top-down committee forestry and toward bottom-up community forestry.

Third, committee forestry leads to the centralisation of power at the decentralised level. Ribot (2001) argues that participatory policies often empower and rely on community elites. Findings indicate that the majority of users including the poor and minorities are largely unaware of their rights, responsibilities and legal provisions within which decisions can be made because the FUGC has poorly communicated or deliberately intercepted (or filtered) information meant to be transmitted to the lower levels (Section 9.3.5). Generally, there is poor transparency in

implementation activities as the majority of users are uncertain whether the FUGC has correctly implemented the OP. There appears to be a centralisation of power at the decentralised level. Clearly, there is a need for further devolution within the FUG.

Why has committee forestry existed? This is essentially due to the imposition of a formal system in the informal setting of social relations. Mosse (1997) argues that the formal organisations of democratic societies are generally based on the principle of equal rights, which are often in contradiction with the indigenous systems of social relations. This was observed in the cases studied in relation to the problem of elite domination. The FUGs are imposed in Laglage and Pragatisil FUGs based on the principle of equal rights. The FUGC was established as an executive organisation that is run by the locally elected representatives (i. e. the FUGC members as leaders). The power relation has been restructured by the formal establishment of the FUGC as an executive body that administers decision making and implementation activities. Failing to account for the existing social hierarchy, the key positions of the FUGC were captured by the elites who often closely cooperated with the DFO staff. Clearly, the committee forestry suits the bureaucracy. Therefore, as Mosse (1997) argues, it is crucial to understand the existing system of forest management being supported by the structure of authority, not democratic decision making.

Participatory exclusions

A major problem of elite domination is that it leads to participatory exclusions. Agrawal (2001b) argues that it is possible for participatory exclusions to exist in CF because women users, who attend meetings and express wishes, can be effectively excluded by the village elites in the final decisions. This is clearly evident in the cases studied. Sometimes, users participate, but do not express their views due to various constraints and the FUGC fails to include the poor and minorities (Sections 9.3.4 and 10.5.1). At other times, users express their views, but these are ignored by the FUGC (Sections 7.3.4 and 9.3.4). It is also found that when the needs and views of the poor are included in the final decisions, implementations by the FUGC is flawed. The research indicates that the FUGC has often called for the assembly to give recognition to decisions already made by the FUGC members (Section 7.3.5). The participation of the poor and minorities is meaningless because their interests are effectively excluded. There needs to be an effective leadership (by the FUGC) to genuinely represent the different interests of its constituent groups. Otherwise the interests of the already influential can predominate.

Participatory exclusions emerge from pseudo-democratic processes universally employed by the DFO to implement CF. The majority of users seem to have been involved in the process and supported the decisions, but the real concerns of the poor and minorities are excluded. This exclusion may be unknown to the poor immediately after the decisions are made. When the

decisions are formally rectified and on the way to implementation, it is too late to change the decisions. On the other hand, most often the poor users know that their interests are being excluded, with combined forces of socio-cultural, economic and political limitations, the poor and minorities are unable or unwilling to challenge the decisions. There are instances when the FUGC has called for the assembly to give recognition to decisions already made by the FUGC members (Section 7.3.5). In such cases, participatory exclusions create a misleading situation whereby the poor and minorities may join to celebrate the success of CF and its inclusive decision making processes, while their participation has been used to meet the interests of the elites. Although this problem stems from elite domination, the underlying mechanism is the adoption of a universal formal process that encourages elites, which ignores the existing socio-cultural, economic and political hierarchy at the local level.

In the event of participatory exclusions, the interests of the poor and marginal groups suffer. To help poorer and marginal groups, the promotion of affirmative action in the decision-making and implementation processes should be a priority. There may be an option to form separate sub-groups in FUGs to decide issues concerning the poor and minorities by themselves. Such groups may meet at a suitable time and location without the influence of the elites. Such processes can help poorer members to gain confidence in expressing their needs and concerns and becoming more assertive and self-motivated. However, FUGC members may not normally recognise or implement special measures without some encouragement. Outside support agents and networks of FUGs can promote consideration of the needs of the poor through consciousness-raising interaction with the FUGs and FUGC. Under the current formal mechanism of CF, however, the FUGs seem to be operating in cooperation with the DFO, while various stakeholders at different levels have limited (or no) influence or support to the FUGs (Figures 7.8, 8.8 and 9.8). The efforts must come from collaborative efforts of the network of users, other civil society actors, international donors and the DFO staff.

b). The state

The state has an important role to play in the formation of decentralised CF policy and its effective implementation. However, the research indicates that decentralised policy made at the higher level of the government does not necessarily promote equity and most resistance to decentralisation comes from within the state.

The decentralised CF policy and legislation in Nepal are made at the higher level of government. The policy has exacerbated inequity by universally imposing formal equality without acknowledging the specific context of socio-culturally and economically unequal societies. Cortner and Moote (1999) claim that decentralisation of environmental governance enhances

fairness, but in this case, the forest policy has not enhanced equity. This is consistent with Adger et al's (2002) argument that environmental decisions taken at higher levels are less likely to take into account the variations at the local level. As Ribot's (2002) argues, decentralisation policies do not fully redress many social inequities, including the disenfranchisement of women, poverty and the exclusion of marginal groups. The Nepalese CF policy and legislation must take account of local context to address issues of equity. However, the problem is the universal policy that is not to discriminate between citizens, not to separate the needy and the poor from other citizens and to treat them differently. This means that universal programs are conceptually not targeted to the poor but instead cover the entire population without consideration of their needs and constraints. The problem is essentially about how policy is informed and how equity is perceived in the policy. Therefore, enhancing equity needs to be supported by the transformation of the conceptual basis of the policy.

Equity problems are exacerbated and institutionalised by the state during implementation. Ribot (2002) argues that the government plays key roles in effective decentralisation of natural resource management, despite the fact that most resistance to decentralisation comes from within the government. This resistance is reflected through the transfer of insufficient power to local institutions. The decentralised CF policy in Nepal has a provision to devolve the authority for decision-making over forest resources to communities and to secure communities' tenurial rights over forest products. However, the research indicates that the state has decentralised responsibilities of forest management to the FUGs, but has not devolved sufficient authority to make meaningful decisions (Section 10.4.3 and Figure 7.7). The FUGs are given minor decision making authority within the OP and the FUGC chairman is required to sign the OP, but the final approval must come from the DFO. The DFO has power to amend rules within the OP. All FUGs must send annual auditing and inventory report to the DFO (these require expert forestry and accounting knowledge, which most FUGs do not have) so that the DFO can monitor FUGs' activities. When the FUG does not comply with the rules and conditions, the DFO has power to punish the FUGC members or end CF altogether. Such overriding power of the DFO has essentially emerged from the state ownership of land and key legal authority given by policy and legislation (Sections 7.3.5, 8.3.5 and 9.3.5). This evidence suggests that the power transferred to the FUGs has been insufficient and the DFO persistently controls FUGs' activities through excessive oversight and management planning requirement. Hence, the FUGC members, who execute the OP, focus on meeting DFO's requirements, while the needs and views of the poor and minorities are overlooked.

Inequity also emerges when the state implements CF policy within target-oriented, output maximising approach that tends to employ local elites in a formal organisational setting. Fisher

(2000a) argues that decentralisation and devolution are misapplied when responsibilities and sometimes authorities are devolved to the wrong people, such as an elite group disempowering a wider population of users. Findings indicate that the DFO staff use the elite, who often capture newly created formal organisation, the FUGC, in delivering targets and commitments to donors (Section 10.5.1). The staff provide training and other support mainly to the FUGC members and these members often do not communicate information or transmit support to the grass-root users (Sections 7.3.5 and 9.3.5). The elites are less dependent on forests, but they tend to cooperate with the DFO because they have an increased rapport with the DFO staff and are informed about the overriding power of the DFO. The elites and formal organisation are helpful for the DFO to maximise outputs from limited resources. However, the focus on elites in a formal setting is disturbingly cruel to the poor and minorities because access to, and control over, forest resources in which they heavily depend, have become stricter than before, but they are required to contribute to reinforce such restrictions. Clearly, inequity has been exacerbated because in such situations, the DFO acts as decision shaper, the FUGC as decision maker, and the FUG members as recipients (Section 7.3.4). As Diamond (1999) argued, the decentralised environmental management has entrenched the dominance of local elite, deepened authoritarianism in governance and even increased intolerance towards minorities. The underlying problem is essentially about the output maximising approach of the DFO that encourages the elite within a formal setting.

Inequitable processes have also been encouraged by support provided by the DFO in a situation where the FUGs are working in isolation with wider social, economic and political systems. The research indicates that the DFO support is insufficient, untimely and standardised (Section 7.3.4 and Figures 7.7, 8.5, 8.7, 9.5 and 9.7), while the other actors, such as donors and NGOs that can be helpful for the poor and minorities, are effectively excluded from directly helping to the FUGs. Issues of support are essentially about the ability of the DFO that is overwhelmed by demand for FUG formation and resource constraints. For the sake of efficiency and standardisation, the available support being provided is universal. As Branny and Dev (1993) argue, in many cases, forestry staff are not in a particularly good position to provide the advice which forest users are expecting. On the other hand, isolation may be the interest of the DFO to retain control of CF by excluding other stakeholder who may be seen as threat. However, as Peet and Watts (1993) argue, villagers do not operate in isolation to the wider economy, but their decisions are made in response to various factors. As Batterbury (2001) argues in reference to local political ecology, there is a need for focus on local decision making processes and contextualising these decisions in wider social and political systems. There is a proliferation of stakeholders and support agents, such as NGOs, FUG networks and so on, which can potentially complement the service and support delivery of the DFO. There remains an open challenge as to how the DFO links with other local stakeholders and coordinates activities.

Why has the state resisted decentralisation and devolved limited power to non-representative elites in a formal setting that has exacerbated and institutionalised inequity? First, inequity may largely due to sustaining bureaucratic centralisation supported by controlling bureaucratic structure. Fisher (2003b) argues that the lack of devolution may be due to sustaining control structure at forest bureaucracy that lacks commitment to release their power. More narrowly, as Ribot (2003) argues, the bureaucracy fears losing economic benefit from the control over natural resources and the power that defines and supports its political and administrative role. Institutional reform of the DoF is often called institutional strengthening when much of the problem is that the institutions are already too strong (Fisher 2003b). There is a need for focus on bureaucratic change, rather than simple reorientation and restructuring.

Second, the underlying reasons for inequitable processes are due to bureaucratic norms and ideology. Weber (1958) argues that in a modern bureaucracy, the relationship between bureaucrats and clients are supposed to be functionally specific and impersonal. Further, Herring (1983) argues that South Asian bureaucracy is characterised by inefficiency caused by constant delays, by outdated procedures and rigid formalism. There is an existence of *Hakim* (i.e. bossy) tradition in Nepalese forest bureaucracy in which subordinate staff must follow order that are hierarchically transmitted from top to the bottom. The top level bureaucrats often have vague idea about the role of bureaucracy in maintaining standard and social and environmental well-being. The policy circle of bureaucracy is guided by the knowledge of orthodox forest science. As Forsyth (2003) argues, the policy that has been heavily informed by orthodox science, ignores social and political processes and unfairly penalises the poor and minorities. Therefore, the problem is ideological about how the bureaucracy has been organised and informed. There is a need for ideological shift.

c). Conflicts – different actors, different interests and different perceptions

The politics of CF that leads to inequitable processes is also reflected in the existence of conflicting interests among different stakeholders involved in CF at different levels. The research indicates that perceptions of forest users, the state forestry officials and donors, NGOs and other actors regarding the understanding and issues of CF are conflicting. For instance, forest users, particularly disadvantaged users have vague understanding of CF, while the state officials highlight institutional and legal arrangements (Section 10.2.1). The donors, NGOs and others actors understand CF as giving secure use rights to forest users (Section 10.2.1). On the other hand, forest users highlight forest products as the main benefit of CF, while the state forestry officials emphasise the need for CF to contribute to state revenue (Section 10.4.2). Similarly, forest users believe that the improved condition of forests is due to the interest and commitment of local people, whereas the state forestry officials believe it due to the efforts of foresters (Section 10.4.1). While there is consensus that there is inequity in CF, forest users believe that the presence of

inequity is due mainly to the state employing impractical equality principle for benefit distribution (Section 10.5.2) and encouraging elites and controlling decision making processes (Section 10.5.1). On the other hand, the state forestry officials stress that equality principle has not been properly implemented by the FUGC (Section 10.5.2) and local elites has intercepted the power given to the local people (Section 10.5.1). The donors and other actors believe that distributional inequity is due to inequitable processes (Section 10.5.2) and procedural inequity is the reflection of wider society, but this has not been challenged by the policy (Section 10.5.1). The evidence suggests that, as Mosse (1997) argues in reference to CPR of India, programs do not confront a static consensual situation, but interact with contested domain of meanings.

The above evidence indicates that the DFO staff operate as policy and legal enforcers, attribute the success of CF largely to the efforts of foresters, but blame problems, such as inequity to local people. While inequitable processes and outcomes may occur because disadvantaged groups do not have a clear understanding of CF, there is a possibility that the DFO invades users' rights and users escalate conflict at the level that may undermine the sustainability of CF. Therefore, as Holmes and Scoones (2000) argue in reference to participatory environmental policy, it is crucial to negotiate multiple interests through the use of inclusive decision making processes. The process will only be effective for resolving conflicts when the mechanisms include frequent and regular meetings of the entire group (Sarin 1999). However, this must recognise that, while different actors attribute different meanings and interpretations of CF processes and outcomes, the struggles that arise out of these differential perceptions and expectations must be directed to positively discriminate in favour of the needs and concerns of the poor and minorities. The forest users, the DoF and other actors have an important role to play in facilitating resolution of these conflicts, understanding the sources of these conflicts and working on more equitable power-sharing and resource sharing within the village and beyond.

12.6 Conclusion

The chapter has analysed the evolution of collective action processes and outcomes with a focus on distributional and procedural equity. The analysis shows the effective protection of forests in CF, but the protection systems are different in different places based on their specific local contexts. The comparison of different systems shows that direct efforts from users are more promising because of a sense of ownership of forests among users. Forest management has evolved from basic protection activities to active management. The condition of forests has improved, but all forests have not improved uniformly. Improved forests under CF are not ideal for biodiversity conservation because of the selective retention of species by the FUG members. A

significant finding is that forests are underutilised because of the politics of the DFO, supported by the elites who focus on forest protection and prevent users from harvesting forest products.

Despite livelihood benefits being an important part of the rationale for CF, the benefits from CF are limited simply because forests are underutilised. The reason behind limited benefits is the persistent control over forest management and utilisation decisions by the DFO to meet its conservation interests. Limited benefit flows have frustrated users, but they continue collective action because they have at least received some forest products of economic and subsistent importance and have a high anticipation of future benefits. Users also receive wider social, cultural and economic benefiting by participating in the process of action. CF is simply perceived to be better than other alternatives of forest management. Sometimes, collective action has been forced by powerful actors.

Given an enabling policy and institutional context, improving forest condition and confidence of users, it can be assumed that the benefits are going to increase. The question of what is to be distributed and to whom it is distributed is important because people will remain in collective action as long as they feel that they have received fair outcomes. The analysis shows that there is no equity in benefit distribution because the poor and minorities have yet to receive equal share of products in practice, despite the policy provision for equality principles. Even when users receive equal shares, the poor and minorities do not receive sufficient products and, unlike the wealthy, they are unable to meet the gap. In some cases, CF has actually made the poor and minorities worse off. Inequity exists because equality principle of the policy and implementation is not used equally by the resource constrained poor and minorities because of their lack of capacity to gain equitable share. Inequity is mainly a result of the politics of distribution associated with the pre-existing socio-cultural hierarchy, poor information flow, channelling of the FUGs' resources into communal activities and nepotism in benefit distribution by the elites.

Despite such inequity, people have continued in collective action because the perceived equality principle is progressive in a semi-feudal society with widespread bias and exploitation. People are hesitant to act in a new system based on equity because they are uncertain about the new system being more inequitable than the present one. Discourses against distributive equity have also provided rationales for users to continue cooperation. Further, CF gives secure use rights that is more progressive than the exclusionary one, but it has a rigid framework requiring people to cooperate if they want CF. Despite inequity and sustained collective action in the face of persisting inequity, there are fundamental reason to aim for equity in CF – the poor and minorities have something to offer and gain from CF. Not recognising their valuable efforts may affect the stability and sustainability of CF.

The analysis also shows that there is little procedural equity in the cases studied because equal participation, rights, access and shares that are formally established by the policy, have reinforced inequality and further disadvantaged those who are already in a disadvantaged position. The implementation of equal provisions is not actually equally implemented in practice thereby marginalising the needs and views of the poor and minorities. Inequitable processes are conditioned by economic and socio-cultural factors, such as social interdependence, norms and ties that mean the poor and minorities become dominated in the processes. In order to address these issues, users' participation must be emphasised with an appreciation that collective action is embedded in socio-cultural and economic relations.

Inequitable processes are also conditioned by knowledge and discourses because when the poor and minorities are unaware of CF concept and processes, they cannot participate effectively. The analysis shows that there is limited knowledge of CF with the poor and minorities because of poor information flow and communication and the underlying interest of the DFO to retain key information. Despite limited knowledge, users continue to participate in CF because of various CF orthodoxies that justify collective action. The analysis has explained that CF knowledge is not sufficient to enhance equity. On the other hand, it is not possible for the state to transfer sufficient and correct knowledge to the poor and minorities. Clearly, the issue of knowledge is related to the issue of power.

Inequitable processes are also conditioned by politics and power relations, which are reflected through elite domination, control by the state and conflicting interests of different stakeholders. The analysis explains that elite domination, particularly by the FUGC, is a key problem of CF that has resulted in committee forestry. The centralisation of power has been decentralised at the local level, disempowering the poor and minorities. Committee forestry is essentially promoted by the imposition of a formal system in the informal setting of social relations. Elite domination has also led to participatory exclusions, in which interests of the poor and minorities are excluded despite their attendance in the process. A collaborative effort is needed to address this issue because users and the DFO are unlikely to solve this problem. There are ideological and conceptual problems with CF policy supported by sustaining custodial norms, structures and tradition of forest bureaucracy that exacerbate inequity. Conflicts are obvious among stakeholders because there is little change of the state bureaucracy in terms of helping the forest users. Clearly, there is need for ideological shift both in CF policy and state bureaucracy to enhance equity in CF.