

RURAL DEVELOPMENT FORESTRY NETWORK

A TALE OF TWO COMMITTEES:
VILLAGER PERSPECTIVES ON LOCAL INSTITUTIONS,
FOREST MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCE USE IN TWO
CENTRAL HIMALAYAN INDIAN VILLAGES

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INTRODUCTION

Spurred by the well-publicised, cataclysmic estimates of Eckholm (1975) and others¹ many early forestry projects in the Himalaya emphasised the technical sides to reforestation at the expense of institutional development through local participation. More recently, however, new approaches to the processes involved in community organisation and local forest management are being explored. Within the framework of community (or social) forestry projects, joint management and/or work with user groups, the acreage of forest officially managed through local institutions is expanding, especially in montane areas of Nepal and India. It is now widely recognised that many variations of forest management approaches exist. However, there remains limited empirical information on factors which influence the development of locally-constituted forest management bodies over time.

In the hills of Kumaun, Uttar Pradesh, India, the history of local control over forest resources goes back many decades. *Van panchayats* were introduced in the 1920s, following a period of agitation against the Colonial government's policy of reserving increasingly larger areas of forest. Over time, a fair number of these committee-community forests have regenerated well, leading some observers to speculate that the quality of forest cover in these forests is often equal to or better than in Forest Department reserved forests that are situated near villages (Saxena, 1987; Ballabh and Singh, 1988). Since the *van panchayat* probably represents one of the largest and most diverse experiments in devolved common property management ever developed in collaboration with the State (Arnold and Stewart, 1991), the possibility of learning from them about conditions which contribute to the success of community forest management, or to its demise, is enhanced.

This paper concentrates on the experiences of two forest committees and community forest users in two villages situated in the Middle Hills of Nainital District, Kumaun, India. After briefly reviewing historical developments leading to the instigation of the *van panchayat* (forest committee),² the paper traces the history of forest management institutions³ in each village, by

¹World-wide concern about deforestation in Nepal and, by association, in other parts of the Himalaya was aroused especially by the dire prediction made by a World Bank report (1978). This oft-quoted report estimated that there would be no accessible forest left in the Nepalese hills by 1993, and in Nepal in general by the year 2000, unless reforestation programs on a massive scale were initiated.

² Literally, *van* means forest and *panchayat* means a committee of five. In effect, the committees have between five to nine members, depending on the size of the village.

The term 'institution' carries multiple connotations and meanings. In this paper, 'institutions' refers to rules that individuals use to order interactions affecting themselves and, possibly, others. A forest management institution is basically the set of working rules formally or informally adhered to by individuals and/or a group of users for long-term (managed) procurement of products from a particular forest (Ostrom, 1992).

comparing present procurement patterns with those of the past. This work draws from research that was conducted over a four month period of residence in the villages. Methods used included semi-structured interviews, participant observation and a village-wide survey questionnaire. Fieldwork was based on the premise that past and present use practices shape users' decision-making and resource-related activities. The emphasis throughout is on villagers' perceptions of their relationship with the forest and, in particular, the role of women – who are the main forest product procurers. By building upon the institutional history of the villages' forest committees and their procurer-users, this paper attempts to provide insights into factors which positively or negatively influence the effectiveness of local resource management bodies.

THE MIDDLE HILLS OF KUMAUN: A BRIEF GEOGRAPHY

At the Western end of the Central Himalaya lie the Middle Hills of Kumaun. Extending up from the Gangetic Plain to around 2,500 metres, this region is heavily populated and agriculture, the socio-economic mainstay of the area, is practised extensively.

Kumaun consists of three districts – Nainital, Pithoragarh and Almora – and covers some 21,035 km². Kumauni society is comprised of distinct cultural groups who came from different parts of Asia. Currently, 77% of the population is Hindu, although there are followers of other religions including Muslims (13%), Sikhs (9%), Christians (0.5%), and a small number of Jains and Buddhists (Das, 1992). Improved transportation and communications, higher rates of literacy, lower mortality rates and higher life expectancies due to improved health care have helped to increase the level of living in Kumaun. However, the area remains poor by almost any criterion of comparison. About half the population lives below the poverty line, and most below the subsistence consumption level (Shah, 1982).

Forests in the Middle Hills of Kumaun make substantial contributions to rural livelihoods. They provide fuelwood, dry leaves and green fodder, timber for local housing, and wood for agricultural implements. Commercially, timber and bamboo is exported for construction, railway ties, sports equipment, furniture and paper. Non-timber forest products include oils and soapberries, nuts and fruits, wax, honey, gum, resin, tanning material and medicinal plants. Agricultural production is closely linked to forests, the fertility of the land being maintained by dung from livestock fed partly on forest fodder, and by leaf compost.

In such a context, determining how forested areas can be collectively and appropriately managed is vitally important.

A HISTORY OF FOREST POLICY AND THE POLITICS OF ACCESS

The history of the Kumaun hills has been well documented by Guha (1989), and will not be elaborated upon here. Suffice it to say in the context of forestry that the State (in the form of the colonial government) acquired considerable control over forests during the nineteenth century.⁴

⁴ The Indian Forest Act of 1878 and subsequent legislation was key to this acquisition.

Over time, practices of customary use were substantially curtailed.⁵ By 1895, the quest for commercially valuable trees even breached conventions of private property, with eight tree species⁶ being reserved as government property, regardless of where the tree stood (Mittal, 1986). These regulations grew out of 'scientific' forestry techniques and were influenced, at least in part, by the Forest Department's for-profit mandate.

The Forest Settlement of 1911-1917 stands out as a watershed in policy and protest. Over this six year period a total area of over 3,000 square miles was reserved as forest department forest. Villager protest over the accrued impact of this and earlier legislation took on various forms. In response to sustained collective violation of forest laws and acts of arson, the British government appointed the Kumaun Grievances Committee in 1921. This committee enquired into the objections of the residents of Kumaun and Garhwal. Based on the story emerging from the over 5,000 interviews conducted a number of recommendations were made, including the establishment of *van panchayat* (Mittal, 1986). Since the passage of the *Van Panchayat Act* in 1931, many sites have been demarcated as *van panchayat* or committee-community forests, with rights to specified forest products placed under the control of elected village committees. Although some of these committees have ceased to function, new forest committees continue to be formed.

Community forests in Kumaun now cover 236,800 hectares, or about 5% of the total geographical area and 6.88% of the legal forest area of the U.P. hills.⁷ In Nainital District, there are only 198 forest committees. However, in other districts of Kumaun they are much more prevalent. Almora District reports 1,719 committees and Pithoragarh District claims 983 (Ballabh and Singh, 1988).

FOREST COMMITTEES

Forest committees are village-elected bodies. Each committee member serves either a three or five year term, but may be re-elected. Elections occur in village meetings, though the real decisions are probably made during informal discussions at social gatherings. All decisions must be made

⁵ Based on land settlements, a distinction was made between private cultivated land (*nap*) and untaxed (*benap*) land. Forests were classified as 'reserved' and 'protected'. Reserved forests consisted of commercially valuable wooded area where local users would have some use 'privileges' – meaning that access was allowed, but without formal rights. In protected (civil) forests customary use was permitted. Later, however, these protected areas were reconstituted into 'open' and 'closed' sections. The latter were closed for the regeneration or production of trees. As far as possible these areas were limited to ridges and summits of hills. In open areas villagers were allowed use practices similar to before.

⁶ These were deodar (*Cedrus deodara*), cypress (*Cypressus torulosa*), chir (*Pinus roxburghii*), boxwood/papri (*Buxus wallichiana*), sal (*Shorea robusta*), shisham (*Dalbergia sisso*), tun (*Cedrela toon*) and khair (*Acacia catechu*).

⁷ Of the total geographical area of Kumaun 53% is classified as legal forest (Swarup, 1991). However, the figures are misleading because they represent administrative categories of land, not actual forest cover. An area can be legally classified as 'forest' even when there is not a tree in sight (Shah 1986). Thus the percentage of community forest in relation to actual forest area (say with a 30% crown cover) is probably greater than 6.88%.

by a two-thirds majority vote. Depending on the number of households in a village, there are usually between five and nine members in a committee, with the *sarpanch* (committee leader) serving as head.

The quality of community forests varies greatly. Most were initially formed on degraded sites, and over time some have improved in condition. A number now command considerable income from resin tapping. However, community forests have not been completely immune to problems of misuse. The condition of community forests essentially ranges from poor to very good, with the quality of the majority falling somewhere between the excellent condition of many reserved forests and the poor condition of most civil/*soyam* forests.

As defined under the *Van Panchayat Act*, community forests are a hybrid of state ownership and community responsibility. Forest committee control over community forest use is tempered by Revenue Department rules and Forest Department technical advice. Unlike other civil/*soyam* forests, community forests are not 'open' forests. Outsider access is controlled and restrictions on forest use are maintained through the vigilance and integrity of forest committee members and community users. Though only nominally 'owned' by communities, community forests are in a very real sense common property. They are a resource with an identifiable user group; they have finite, subtractive benefits and are potentially subject to degradation when used beyond sustainable yield limits. Furthermore, community forests are rarely effectively divisible. Importantly, local users consider them as their collective property and most government involvement an affront.

THE CASE-STUDY VILLAGES

In the north-eastern corner of Ramgarh Block, Nainital District, the two villages are situated in a micro-watershed at between 1400 and 1800 metres. Kilmora and Katuul, the names used to represent the villages studied, are small communities with marginally mixed caste compositions. They contain less than 50 households each, and are entirely Hindu with majority Thakur populations and a small number of scheduled castes and Brahmin households. Both villages are subsistence-oriented, though increasingly incorporated into the cash economy. These links are established through cash crops, especially potato, temperate fruits and soybean, as well as more traditional military service or from paid labour in market centres.

The community forests of Kilmora and Katuul are contiguous in places. They consist of chir pine and mixed broad-leaved species – particularly, **banj** (*Quercus leucotrichophora*), **boorans** (*Rhododendron arboreum*), and **kharsu** (*Quercus semecarpifolia*) – and span an altitude range of 1600 to 1800 metres. The area of Katuul's forest is 92 hectares; for Kilmora, the forest area is 66 hectares. The condition of both forests is relatively good, with crown covers of between 20 and 40%. A leopard is reportedly living in Katuul's community forest, which is a further indication of a well-wooded area.

Private tree planting and small private forests also occur in both villages. The rate of planting on private land has increased markedly in recent years. Though more widespread than previously, the protection of valued fodder or timber trees on private land is not a new activity. Private wooded areas are usually located close to owner-households in uncultivable ravines or around springs. These woods are collectively owned by related groups of people, and demarcated into

small private units with each household being responsible for a different cluster of trees. In this way, although ownership is divided, the forest remains physically whole.

With the exception of private collective woods and the community and civil forest area, practically all cultivable area within village boundaries is used for agriculture. Since land remains a finite resource, uncultivated (often wooded) areas must decrease as cultivated land increases. This reduces the total amount of green cover and causes greater dependence on community forests.

THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF FOREST MANAGEMENT IN KILMORA AND KATUUL

The villagers of Katuul and Kilmora perceive their community forest as integrally related to all aspects of their way of life. Even beyond the more obvious connections to agricultural production, many respondents note how changes in the condition and composition of the forest negatively affects (or has affected) the environment in terms of rainfall, climate, water sources and, relatedly, the quality and quantity of fruit and vegetable production. As one mother of three explained, "Our whole life – air, water, agriculture – is dependent on the forest..."

From interviews, however, it becomes clear that motives for forest management are founded upon expectations of immediate product returns as well as broader, longer-term ecological goals. As will be discussed, the villagers of Kilmora and Katuul have a long history of restricting forest use in order to foster important byproducts. At critical junctures, by creating alternative sources or minimising use of some products, these two villages have demonstrated a willingness to expect and collect less from their community forests. However, they cannot forego community forest use altogether.

Forest protection efforts

Forest committees for Kilmora and Katuul were established for related, though different, reasons – most of them palliative. In both villages, however, the common perception of 'interests' being met through the complete participation of community members, joint ownership and equal (if restricted) access to and distribution of forest products were essential in the early development of protection measures. Only through the nurturing of institutions founded upon these principles could problems, such as encroachment by outsiders and insiders, be effectively deterred.

Forest committees for Kilmora and Katuul officially date back to the mid-1930s and early 1940s, respectively. However, forest protection by and for user groups is traced further back. In the early days the forest committees established strict rules. Different sections of the forests were demarcated for use and the *sarpanch* and *patwari* (government revenue inspector) issued trees. Applications for green felling were processed quickly, with approvals never taking longer than three weeks.

In Katuul, initial forest management activities concentrated on enabling regeneration and protection. First thorny bushes were cut and left to dry. This helped to clear the forest for sapling growth and increase the amount of accessible dry leaves for composting purposes. Shortly after this a rotation system for protecting the forest was developed. A *chabras* (similar to an armband)

and hammer was requested from the forest inspector in Nainital. On the face of the hammer was an imprint – *gram panchayat* (village committee) – and this was used to mark trees for cutting.

The *chabras* was a symbol for forest watchers (*chowkidar*). Under a system of rotation, the *chabras* with its engraved brass plate would be passed from one house to the next in a predetermined order. The *chabras* served a dual purpose: it was a means of notification, designating the receiving household to be responsible for forest surveillance during the following day, and it lent authority and legitimacy to the wearer who could levy fines for illegal activities in the forest.

According to some, the forest committee in Katuul started off as what is known as a *latt panchayat*. Ballabh and Singh (1988) suggest that *latt panchayat* were common in Kumaun, and that they predate the organisation of *van panchayat*. *Latt* literally means 'stick'. The implication behind the name is that protection from encroachers and free-riders was enforced by force (with sticks). Katuul still has this reputation, but village respondents denied any knowledge of this, more physical, approach.

Chabras rotation continued in Katuul for over thirty years (although some estimates are of over forty years.) Regular *chabras* duty meant that every household was involved in forest protection. This practice seems to have achieved more than the deterrence of forest incursions. Areas where the forest had been harmed were reported to the *sarpanch*, forcing watchers to regularly observe changes in the forest. Familiarity with the forest emphasised its importance and increased awareness.

In Kilmora there was never a *chabras*, but a similar system of rotation was employed. While this seems to have worked for a while, the commitment to covering the forest area eventually waned, probably because of low incentive. Large areas in the village were still covered with private woods, and only a small number of families lived in the village throughout the year. Since there were fewer households and most residents could rely on sources closer to home for fuelwood and fodder, there was less pressure on the community forest. This situation, however, has changed. As more families began to permanently reside in Kilmora and the area of cultivated land increased, encroachment and free-riding became a problem. Over the last seven years, outsiders have been deterred by paid forest watchers.

In 1988 a local rural development NGO, the Central Himalayan Rural Action Group (CHIRAG), started working in Kilmora and arranged, in conjunction with the District Rural Development Agency, to subsidise funding for the forest watcher in Kilmora's community forest. There now seems to be an expectation that external sources should fund forest protection, even if (as in the case of Kilmora) the forest watcher's salary had been fully or partially paid for by villager contributions in the not very distant past. As one woman explained,

"It's difficult for villagers to make arrangements for these things...People [outsiders] are now crazy about protecting the environment. It should be possible to get funding for these things through organisations concerned with environmental protection...."

Some villagers of Kilmora are reconsidering the importance of having a forest watcher against the expense. Those households that rely on private sources for the majority of their needs are

especially reticent about complying with committee demands for monthly watcher contributions. The future of the position is uncertain.

In Katuul forest watchers have been employed at intervals, always briefly and unsuccessfully – the rotational community forest watching system being far more effective. Now even the villagers who support the idea in theory wonder whether it could ever work again, since more and more young people are working outside the village.

Despite chequered histories, most respondents from both villages think that hiring a watcher is the best approach to protecting the forest in the present circumstances. While opinions on the duration or sources and means of payment differed, the general opinion was that a well-paid forest watcher, possibly from outside the village, was the best way to guarantee protection, impartiality and the enforcement of committee rules.

Changing patterns of procurement and resource use

Patterns of forest use and rules regulating product procurement have changed in fundamental ways since forest committees were first established in the two villages. In the past there were codified practices which facilitated limited collection, at intervals, in preselected areas. Rules for use were combined with techniques for promoting good growth. Diseased or older, unproductive trees were targeted for cutting. Healthy trees were lopped carefully. Thorny bushes were cleared. The collection of green leaves was allowed, but only for specified periods – usually no longer than two weeks. More recently, however, committee rules have taken on a strictly protectionist bent. While perhaps limiting opportunities for forest product misappropriations, this kind of approach is not always silviculturally efficient.

Kilmora and Katuul both have fair sized forests in relatively good condition. Nevertheless, a tension exists between accommodating villager demands and regulating forest use. Since resources from community forests are limited, the villagers in Kilmora and Katuul are attempting to meet household needs by diversifying collection sources. This is done by meeting demands for products through non-community forest means.

Private forests, privately planted trees and orchards supply some fuelwood and fodder needs. Fruit trees are pruned for increased growth and unproductive trees are felled; from these even the smallest twigs are used for fuel. Green leaves are lopped from small private woods or off trees which grow along agricultural terraces. For families with no private wooded area in particular, there has been an increase in the number of fodder trees protected or planted on private land.

Grass is collected and prepared for *luta*, the hanging and drying on large trees, after the rainy season. This is done to compensate for fodder shortages. Free grazing used to be allowed in the forests. After CHIRAG involvement in plantation activities with Kilmora, however, this was 'officially' restricted⁸ (though some grazing is implicitly allowed in sections of the forest where

⁸ It is worth noting that following these restrictions, CHIRAG also began introducing green leaf or fuelwood consumption-reducing alternatives. These included pressure and solar cookers, biogas plants, fodder grass plantations and silage. Now more than half of all households in Kilmora own (and use) pressure cookers and fodder grass plantations are becoming increasingly common.

no saplings have been recently planted.) To compensate for grazing restrictions, more animals are being stall-fed. This helps to protect young saplings, but it is a labour-intensive activity. Old men and young children used to take the majority of animals out for free grazing. Now there are more households (with fewer animals per household), and more animals stall-fed. Since women are held responsible for supplying the fodder needs of stall-fed animals, these grazing restrictions have had the added effect of increasing women's workloads.

Unless you're a daughter-in-law: The women's dilemma

Women carry the brunt of the workload in hill villages. Comprehensive time-allocation studies of women's workloads in different parts of Nepal calculate work days lasting from nine to almost eleven hours, on average (Acharya and Bennett, 1981; Kumar and Hotchkiss, 1988). Of all ages and categories of women it is often daughters-in-law who are in the worst position for coping with the dual responsibilities of providing fodder and fuelwood for the family and adhering to committee rules. One older woman described an encounter she had had with younger women from her village as follows.

"One day I told the young women who were in the forest, 'Why the hell are you cutting in the forest? Why aren't you saving it for the next generation?' They responded with abuse. They said, 'Don't tell us anything unless you're a daughter-in-law'.."

When daughters-in-law live in a large extended family, they tend to provide the bulk of family forest-product needs. They are younger and therefore considered more able to collect from the forest. They also have low status in the family. These factors limit a daughter-in-law's opportunity to argue about the difficulties of meeting household needs or to effect a solution. Meanwhile, forest product procurement is becoming an increasingly arduous task. As one middle-aged woman recounted,

"The products of the forest are less and more is used. My mother-in-law could put milk in a pan to boil and go to the forest and collect a *jal* [carrying basket] worth before the milk was boiled."

From discussions with older women (most of whom no longer collect from the forest) and men, it seems that younger (collector age) women are unwilling to self-regulate forest use. However, from interviews with women of all ages it becomes apparent that most women in both villages believe that some restrictions on forest use are good and necessary. Clearly, women are in a dilemma. Women are held responsible for making or breaking restrictions on community forest use because it is usually they who go to the forest. But the reality is more complex, as this comment makes clear.

"Very few women talk about forest protection. Mostly the men talk about these things. Men tell their wives not to go to the forest, but women go and do harm to the forest because they have to feed the cattle... Men are the earners... If there is a shortage of fodder it can be compensated by purchasing hay... [Men] can make these arrangements. Women try to solve [the shortage] themselves and this causes great harm to the forest...."

Men make the rules for forest use, while women make do. Hierarchies of procurement are manifested in household demands being met mainly by daughters-in-law. Limited inputs from other (mostly male) household members leave those who go to the forest the most – young women – with limited options for managing available resources and meeting household needs.

Forest committees and the role of women

Both forest committees currently have one female member. It is general knowledge that women and scheduled castes ought to be represented on forest committees. They are therefore effectively conscripted to do so. Two women have served on forest committees in Katuul, one presently and the other for an earlier committee. There is also a woman on the committee in Kilmora. However, despite this formal inclusion, the participation of the women on both committees has been limited.

Forced inclusion has not led to genuine representation. In Kilmora the female member, who has the added advantage of living at the house where meetings are usually held, rarely stayed longer than was necessary to sign the register. When questioned about this, she asked back, "What meaning is there in meetings?" Although Katuul has now had two women as committee members, there is a similar reluctance to become involved in meetings. After the meeting in which she was elected, the current female member had yet to attend another meeting. Instead, she sent her son. The previous female committee member for Katuul attended a few meetings but became discouraged.

"I went to three or four meetings...My suggestions never got implemented. No one ever listened. I marked my signature in the register. I'm illiterate so I couldn't tell what was written in the meeting minutes. I was told that my recommendations would be considered, but first that the register had to be signed. They were uninterested...."

In spite of the obvious connection women have with the forest and rules for product procurement, there are numerous factors which inhibit the role of women in committee activities. The most obvious constraint is workload. Women manage the bulk of childcare, water collection, cooking and other household duties. They also invest a major amount of time in multiple stages of agricultural production. Furthermore, attendance at mostly male meetings is construed by some as culturally inappropriate. The committee member from Kilmora explained her reluctance to speak her mind,

"Only I alone cannot change procedures. If I tried to change the rules, people would think what sort of woman is she, that she has these ideas...."

Men and women generally concur, however, that if more women were to attend meetings, the workings of the forest committee would be improved. Some women offered ideas for changing meeting schedules or committee compositions so that they would be free to attend and able to express themselves. When prompted, the majority of villagers thought that some kind of mechanism necessitating attendance by greater numbers of women, such as a 50% reservation policy, would encourage women to participate in meetings and lead to better understanding and implementation of committee rules. More equal representation and inclusion of women's ideas might also help to develop more realistic and viable rules for forest use – a sort of middle path

approach that would not necessarily close the forest to the extent that the committee demands at present. As one astute woman commented,

"...it would be good if women went [to committee meetings] because it is the women who go to the forest. The men don't seem to realise where fodder and fuelwood come from."

The opinions offered by men in meetings are generally taken as expressions of household interests as a whole. Following this line of argument, some men and women contend that because men participate in committee meetings, it is not necessary for women to attend. It was asserted that men can share information from meeting discussions with the women in their households and offer the ideas of their wives in the meetings. A few women do discuss committee decisions with their husbands – the main concern being the severity of penalties. However, from interviews it was apparent that the number of women who discuss committee decisions or any subject related to forest use with their husbands, was negligible.

In both villages, the main collectors of forest products – women – are effectively excluded from committee meetings and rarely informed about decisions taken or the topics of conversation. The opinions and suggestions of women are notably absent from deliberations on forest management and use, to the detriment of appropriate community, committee and intra-household action.

Changing obligations in the social-forest contract

In both villages it had been common for forest products to be shared between households. By law each family was limited to one tree per year. A single tree, no matter what its size, could rarely meet minimal requirements for house repair or new construction. However, it is not every year that a family decides to construct a new house or repair an older home, so villagers combined resources to sidestep this restriction. One tree would be allotted to each household, and if a family was building a house or required a lot of timber for repairs, then the other households would give their allotted tree to that family in order to make up the deficit. In subsequent years, the favour would be returned. Some reciprocal sharing still occurs among close relatives, but this is no longer common. In Katuul, although government orders (GO) restricting the felling of trees had been given to the former *sarpanch* from the administration in Nainital five years ago, villagers did not consider this as related to the problem of timber procurement or the decline in shared reciprocation. More important was a lack of 'unity'. One respondent explained the situation through an analogy, saying with a shrug, "If one brother goes north, the other brother goes south".

Caste has also played a part in eroding village cohesion, but not in the way most would suspect. Other researchers have suggested that homogeneous communities have a greater chance of having an effective forest committee (Ballabh and Singh, 1988). However, intra-caste factionalism has contributed to the uncooperative nature of some interactions – deleteriously affecting forest protection efforts.

In Kilmora, the GO prohibiting timber procurement is cited as the major cause for mounting dissatisfaction. This GO reached Kilmora in December 1991 and, similar to the Katuul GO, it

limits the authority of forest committees by reinforcing the requirements for formal approval from the sub-divisional magistrate in Nainital and *patwari* for timber procurement.

In the past, *de facto* if not *de jure* forest committees regulated timber procurement and distribution. Thus a strict application of these orders are perceived by villagers as 'new'. At worst, they are seen as a complete usurpation of villager rights; at best, they are considered an affront to villager sensibilities.

"Previously, people felt that the forest was theirs. Now such a feeling does not exist. People think of the forest as belonging to someone else...The rules from the government restrict the cutting of wood in the forest...People are dependent on the forest for fuelwood and timber. When they are unable to get what they need, they will resort to stealing by night and day. It is necessary for them to cook their food and feed their animals."

Many think that these GOs will encourage forest misuse and all agree that it does not motivate villagers to conserve or protect the forest. It is generally held that by undermining the ability of the forest committee to regulate and meet demands for use, the authority and credibility of the committee is threatened. At the very least, villagers argue, the forest committee should have more power to authorise procurement when wood is required for special occasions or essential items.

OUT OF THE WOODS? CONCLUSIONS

This paper has sought to enhance understandings of locally-constituted forest management bodies and the dynamic underlying resource-related activities by focusing on individual perceptions and the history of changing patterns of resource distribution and use. Clearly, there are different conditions under which the emergence and sustenance of local institutions for common resource management are encouraged and/or discouraged. As outlined in the text, early forest policies in Kumaun led to recurrent changes in boundaries and the legalities of forest use. This nurtured a fear that the government would, in time, usurp rights to all forest products. Legislative guarantees in the form of the *Van Panchayat* Act meant that users could rationalise the benefits of prudent use. The formal establishment of forest committees combined with the requisite demarcation of community forest areas provided the basis for institutional growth. This partnership of state policy and local action helped to preserve the integrity of the forest area, deter encroachment by outsiders and insiders, and enable managed product procurement.

Based on field discussions and observations, it is apparent that the communities of Kilmora and Katuul have succeeded in managing their forest. However, it is also clear that effective management is faltering with user consensus under threat.

In Kilmora and Katuul, a variety of factors have combined to cause a shift in users' perceptions of their relationship to the forest and with other members of the community. These include vagaries in government policies, out-migration, market incentives, hierarchies of procurement, demographic pressure and changing village ethics. The social cohesion which was at least nominally present in the past is being eroded. Customary use patterns (including limited lopping and culling techniques) have been replaced by formal unviable restrictions on the collection of 'anything green' from the forest. This has increased the collection burden of women, who

continue to have limited say on formal regulations. The authority of both forest committees has also been undercut by policies which, from a villager's perspective, effectively usurp customary rights to essential products, such as wood for agricultural implements. Above all, the recent decline (in the last ten years) of former practices of sharing timber allotments and group responsibility for forest protection indicate a serious erosion in mutual support strategies and community consensus.

Hardin's (1968) classic argument of the "tragedy of the commons" is now recognised to be ill-founded. Communities in many parts of the world can (and do) cooperate to the benefit of the user group and the natural resource (see, for example, Acharya, 1990; Wade, 1987). Institutionally-ordered commons endure because of the advantages they provide users. The history of managed forest use in Kilmora and Katuul indicates that recent problems stem less from the effect of community forests as common properties, than from ongoing transformations. It is true that some prevailing practices suggest that existing institutions are not coping with current changes. However, given the tradition of cooperation and adaptation in the two villages, it is also quite possible that a kind of equilibrium will emerge between allowing for regeneration and procuring requirements.

Few common property regimes are exemplary extremes of unrestricted access or effective, collective community management. Institution building for resource management is necessarily an exercise in adaptation and negotiation. It is neither automatic nor conflict free. Rules restricting forest procurement require considerable sacrifice on the part of a community, individual households and, in particular, the women who are expected to provide fodder and fuelwood. Compliance with rule-ordered institutions is impossible without a consensus built upon widespread participation in community discussions and decision-making, cogent reasoning, incentives through tenure guarantees, and the equal sharing of information between men and women.

Kilmora and Katuul have good-sized community forests in good condition. Nevertheless, product requirements out-strip forest regenerative capacity. In response, some women attempt to meet household needs for forest products through sources other than the community forests. The use of small private woods, private tree planting on private land, careful pruning and culling of fruit trees, the purchasing or growing of fodder grasses, and more silviculturally efficient approaches to community forest use, could form a composite strategy for managed procurement. However, this is not possible without intra-household as well as intra-community cooperation.

Solutions for managed procurement can be effected through better communication and cooperation among households and between their male and female, younger and older, members. The basis for creating conditions for positive change should, however, grow out of a strategy that realises the causes underlying present procurement patterns and compensates for shortages of forest products, when necessary, through feasible alternatives.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

<i>chabras</i>	similar to an armband
<i>patwari</i>	government revenue inspector
<i>sarpanch</i>	committee head (or leader)
GO	Government Order

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