

Why aren't Poor People Benefiting More from Community Forestry?

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Abstract

This paper summarizes the findings of a socio-economic baseline study undertaken amongst four Forest User Groups (FUGs) in Nepal focusing on levels of participation, understanding of, and benefit from, community forestry activities. Poorer households were found to benefit significantly less than wealthier households, and in some cases may even be directly disadvantaged by the advent of community forestry in their villages. A major cause of this inequity is that FUG committees are dominated by wealthier households. In addition, awareness levels of a range of community forestry and FUG institutional issues is low, particularly amongst the poorest groups. Forests are being managed below their productive potential and only a limited proportion of members' forest product needs come from community forests.

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes the findings of a study which was undertaken as part of the Forest User Groups Forest Management Project (FFMP) – a collaborative research project involving DIRD¹ (University of Reading) and LFP² (Kathmandu). FFMP worked with Forest User Groups (FUGs) in two Middle hills districts (Myagdi and Parbat) during the period September 1997 – January 2001 and was funded through the Forestry Research Programme of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) (Branney *et al.* 2000, Malla 2000 and Neupane 2000).

Since the late 1980s, the Government of Nepal has had a policy of transferring the management responsibility for areas of forest (known as community forests) from the Forest Department to FUGs. Although it has been shown that transfer of forest areas to FUGs does lead to improved forest condition as a result of better forest protection, the forests are often not being fully utilized to meet their productive potential. This means that pressure for forest products may therefore simply be transferred elsewhere e.g. to non-community forest areas. In addition, where forest products do become available from community forests, they may not necessarily be those products which are most needed by the poor, or may not be equitably distributed within the FUG (Timsina 2002 and Neupane 2003). FFMP has been working with FUGs to develop information and support processes that will lead to more sustainable forest management by FUGs to the benefit of all FUG members.

METHODOLOGY

Detailed information on the existing socio-economic situation of member households in four FUGs (two in Parbat and two in Myagdi) was collected from a household survey carried out early in 1998. This included information on forest product use patterns; understanding of and involvement in FUG activities; and knowledge of policy on community forestry. A short validation survey was carried out immediately

¹ Department for International and Rural Development (DIRD). This is the new name for AERDD at the University of Reading, UK

² Livelihoods and Forestry Programme (formerly Nepal-UK Community Forestry Project)

afterwards to check the information, and a follow-up survey was conducted early in 2000 after the project had been working with these FUGs for two years.

At FUG level, wealth ranks were used as the sampling strata. For each FUG, committee members and some other key members such as teachers, ward chairmen, and social workers were first given a list of member households and asked to categorize the households using their own criteria. They grouped the households in three to five different wealth categories depending on the FUG. Subsequently, all FUG households were placed in one of four agreed wealth categories (Table 1). The final list was then cross-checked with key informants for accuracy.

Table 1. Criteria used by FUG members to group households into wealth categories

Category	Criteria
<p>Category 1 (WR 1) 18.4% households</p>	<p>Sufficient to eat for twelve months Sufficient food for 12 months with surplus for Sale; large house with slates or tin roof and separate animal shed; 15-30 <i>ropanis</i> of land (all good quality of <i>Khet</i>, <i>Bari</i> and <i>Kharbari</i>); hire labor to work on the farm and give some land to tenants to cultivate on a share-cropping basis; use improved varieties of seed and chemical fertilizers; have agricultural land or a house or a plot of land in the town or <i>Terai</i>; many livestock plus an additional 1-2 animals through tenants; have buffalo milk supplies all the year round; at least one family member engaged in a government job, business or other secure off-farm job with a good cash income; children attend schools and colleges in towns or in Kathmandu; most family members (except women) are literate; lend money to other people; lot of trees on private lands; get some forest products from community forests, but no need to go to a government (non FUG) forest; have a radio/cassette player.</p>
<p>Category 2 (WR 2) 29% households</p>	<p>Sufficient to eat for nine months Enough food for nine months, some of it used to buy other household needs; medium size house, some with slates or tin roof and a separate animal shed; 10-15 <i>ropani</i> land; family labor exchanged for agricultural work; use improved varieties of seed and chemical fertilizers; some households have agricultural land or a house in the town or <i>Terai</i>; do not lend or borrow money to/from other people; 3-4 livestock; about one-third of households with access to off-farm income; send children to schools and colleges in nearby villages; have several trees on private land, but also rely on community and government (non-FUG) forests for forest products; have a radio.</p>

<p>Category 3 (WR 3)</p> <p>25.1% households</p>	<p>Sufficient to eat for six months</p> <p>Shortage of food for 3-6 months; family size is usually bigger than the first two categories and mostly illiterate; medium-sized house with thatch roof and a separate animal shed; 5-10 <i>ropani</i> usually poor quality land (called <i>sim</i> or <i>chahar</i>); cultivate other people's land on share-cropping basis; use improved varieties of seed and chemical fertilizers; have no land or house in the <i>Terai</i>; 1-3 livestock (mostly other people's); mostly engaged in wage labor in surrounding villages; only a few households have off-farm jobs (usually temporary); send children to schools in the village or a nearby village; relatively small number of private trees; depend on community and government (non-FUG) forests for forest products; have a radio.</p>
<p>Category 4 (WR 4)</p> <p>27.5% households</p>	<p>Work on daily wages for twelve months to survive</p> <p>Shortage of food for more than months; mostly lower caste people although some high caste people also fall in this category; very few (mostly children) are literate; small house roofed with a mixture of thatch grass and forest tree leaves also used as animal shed; less than 5 <i>ropanis</i> of land (mostly of poor quality <i>Bari</i> land); keep few livestock almost all belonging to rich people on tenancy (insufficient land and livestock to meet their needs); very limited share-cropping as wealthier households do not want to rent out their land to this group as they cannot maintain the fertility of the farmland; no other source of income; household members must work for others as daily wage labor throughout the year; cannot send children to school; very few trees on private land; depend on community and government (non-FUG) forests for forest products; no radio.</p>

Within each wealth category individual households were selected randomly for detailed interviews. 128 households were interviewed in the four FUG sites representing about 32% of the 403 households. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way with inputs from all the members of a household present at the time. Results were recorded at the time of interview on household information sheets and later analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. The findings of the study were presented back to each FUG as part of a participatory planning process in which an action plan was prepared to tackle identified and prioritized issues. This paper focuses on the issues arising from this process rather than the impact of the resulting action plan.

RESULTS

Land Holding

There are three major types of agricultural land owned by households in these FUGs. *Khet* consists of leveled terraces (with bunds to hold water) on which rice and wheat are grown. It is the most valuable land in the village because it yields two crops per year. *Bari* land consists of out-sloped, rain-fed terraces, which yield one crop of maize or millet per year. *Kharbari* land is set aside for grass production (for roofing thatch and livestock feed). In addition, some households may have gullies, creeks and stream banks where they grow trees.

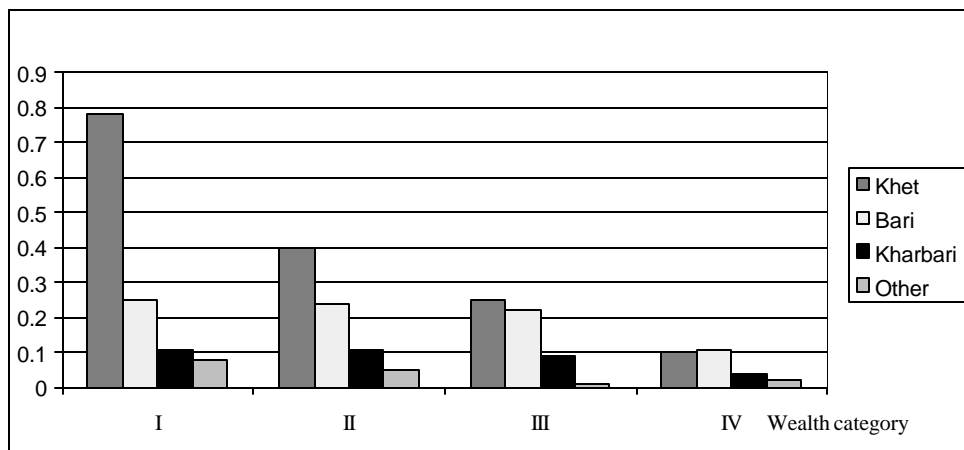
Table 2. Livelihood assets by wealth category

	Wealth category				All categories combined
	1	2	3	4	

Mean land holding per household (ha)	1.22	0.79	0.57	0.28	0.68
Mean number of livestock units per household	4.9	4.5	3.7	3.0	4.0
Number of private trees owned per household	108	87	111	43	86

Table 2 shows the average landholding by wealth category across the four FUGs surveyed. There is a large and significant difference ($p < 0.001$) between the area of land owned by households in different wealth categories, with the wealthiest households owning more than four times as much land on average as the poorest ones. The inequality is exacerbated because wealthier households possess a greater proportion of the better quality *khet* land as well as other types of land, whilst poorer households have less *khet* and similar quantities of *bari*. Poorer households do not have as much *kharbari* as the richer households (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Average land holding size (ha) by type and wealth category



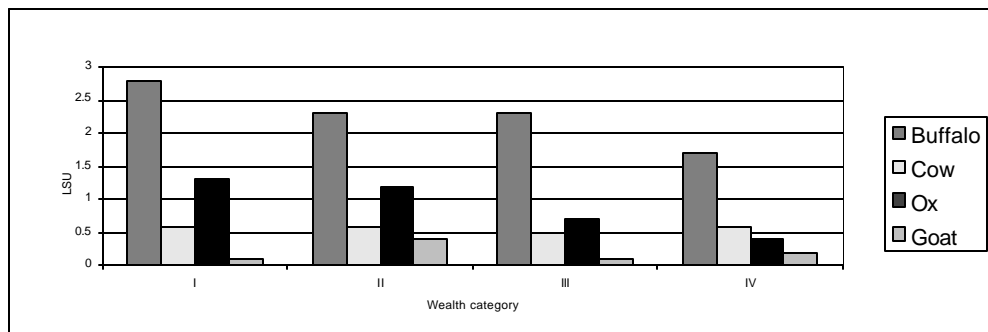
Livestock Ownership

Livestock is a major capital asset in the study sites. Buffaloes are kept mainly for milk and manure production; cattle and oxen for draught power and manure; and goats for meat. Livestock plays a critical role in maintaining the fertility of agricultural land and for some households livestock is the only source of cash income. Table 2 shows that the average livestock holding for all FUGs is four livestock units (where 1 LSU = 0.8 buffalo = 1.0 cattle = 5.0 goats³). As with land holding, there is a significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between numbers of livestock owned by households of different wealth categories.

There are also qualitative differences between rich and poor households. Wealthier households tend to own proportionately more buffaloes than poorer ones (Figure 2). This is because the price of a buffalo is too high for poorer people to afford. Buffaloes also require more fodder and, since rich households have more access to fodder sources on their own land (trees, grass and crop residues), they can maintain them more easily. Wealthier households also own more oxen because they have more land and need oxen for ploughing. Poorer households have proportionately more goats because they are cheaper to buy and easier to maintain. In practice, many animals (buffaloes and goats) kept by poorer households actually belong to richer households with the profit from Sales being shared.

Figure 2. Average number of livestock holding by type and wealth category

³ Following the standard FAO system for quantifying livestock numbers into units.



Private Tree Ownership

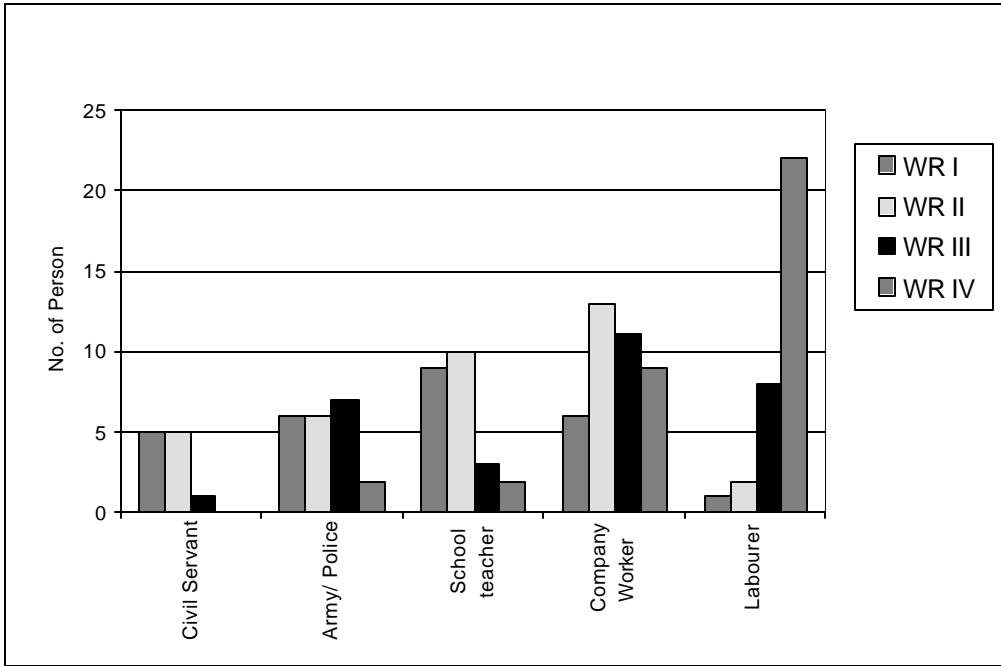
Trees on private land play an important role in the livelihoods of the rural households because they provide fodder, firewood, timber and fruit. Increased restrictions on the use of public (common) forests, including community forest, have led to increases in numbers of trees on private land. A significant proportion of an average household’s needs for forest products is met from their own private sources. Wealthier households have more trees (Table 2) because they own more land. However, the density of trees per ha is greater for poor households because these own more unirrigated *bari* land, with plantable terrace risers, compared to irrigated *khet* land where trees are not usually planted.

Off-farm Employment

Increasingly, rural households in Nepal have off-farm income. About 32% of households in this study reported income from off-farm employment, often involving several household members. The study identified various kinds of cash earning activities including employment (and pensions) in the army, police, other government departments, schools and colleges, and private companies. Others work as daily wage labor in building and construction work in their locality. Although agriculture and livestock production activities are still the main source of livelihoods, off-farm employment is increasingly important in the household economy.

Figure 3 shows the extent to which the household members are engaged in off-farm employment or have income from other sources. Most well paid, secure off-farm jobs have been taken by people from the wealthier categories whilst poorer people are involved mostly in daily wage labor. In the poorest category there are no civil servants and very few people are employed as school teachers or in the army and police.

Figure 3. Off-farm employment in all FUGs by wealth category



Forest Product Use

Fuel

Fuel includes all plant biomass used as energy for domestic cooking and heating purposes including: firewood – usually split firewood (the best fuel), small branches and twigs; and crop residues, especially maize stalks and cobs. Household members provided information on the numbers of *bhari* (headloads, 30kg weight) used of each of these fuel types. In separate meetings with men and women these figures were discussed and converted into an equivalent amount of woody material.

Table 3. Fuel use by wealth category

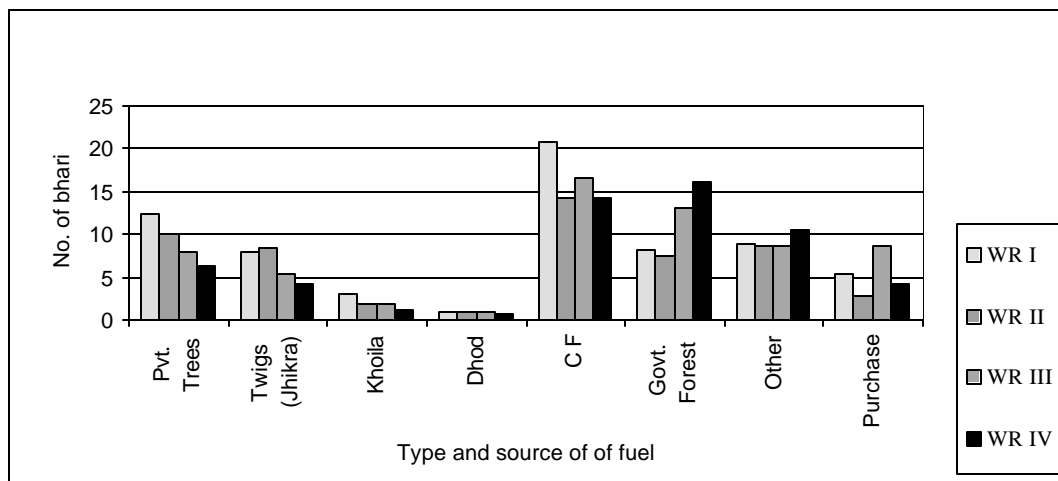
Fuel consumption and source (<i>bhari</i> per household per year)	Wealth categories				All categories combined
	1	2	3	4	
Total fuel consumption	68	54	63	57	60
Fuel obtained from private sources	25	21	16	12	18
Fuel obtained from community forests - distributed by committee	10	10	10	10	10
Fuel obtained from community forests - additional amount obtained	20	12	15	15	15
Additional amount collected from govt. forest	8	8	13	16	11
Amount purchased	5	3	9	4	5

Table 3 shows the amount of fuel used by different wealth categories. There is no significant difference in total consumption between households in different wealth categories, but there are significant differences in the type of fuel being used and its source. The proportion of fuel obtained from private sources as opposed to communal or open access resources decreases from the wealthiest to the poorest households suggesting that richer households are better able to meet their fuel needs from their own sources. By contrast, the proportion obtained from common land (including community and government forests) increases from wealthier to poorer households reflecting the latter's greater dependence on common forests. None of the households' fuel needs are met solely from community or private resources and all households (particularly poorer ones) still have to use adjacent government forests with many households also having to purchase additional amounts to meet their needs (Figure 4).

Although the distributed quantity of firewood from community forests differs little between wealth categories, the total amount of firewood obtained from community forests by wealthier households is greater because these households fell more timber trees and therefore often get twigs and branches additional to those formally distributed by the committee from organized harvesting. It also appears that some dry and damaged trees are only available to richer households on application to the committee.

Approximately 5-15 % of the total firewood used is reported to be purchased by households. Poorer households also reported receiving firewood in return for working for wealthier households.

Figure 4. Annual fuel consumption by type and source according to wealth category



Fodder

All kinds of plant biomass are used by households to feed their livestock. Fodder includes grass, tree leaves and branches, and crop residues such as rice and millet straw, maize stalks and sheaths. Although some households reported the use of grain to feed their livestock, the quantities were insignificant. Table 4 summarizes the amount of fodder, excluding grain, used by households in different wealth categories. The amount of fodder used decreases from the richer to the poorer households in all FUGs mainly because richer households have more livestock and agricultural land than poorer households. Richer households use nearly 60 % more fodder than the poorest ones.

Table 4. Fodder use by wealth category

Fodder use and source (<i>bhari</i> per household per year)	Wealth categories				All categories combined
	1	2	3	4	
Total fodder used	588	568	477	375	499
Quantity from private sources	569	531	435	327	461
Quantity from community forest	11	10	11	11	11
Quantity from government forest	0	3	8	15	7
Quantity purchased	8	24	23	22	20

Grass/*khar* is by far the most dominant fodder type for all wealth categories, but wealthier households use a greater quantity of fodder from crop residues (straw, etc.) and fodder trees. Wealthier households have more livestock and therefore need more fodder. They are able to obtain most of this from their own lands while poorer households also obtain fodder from common land. However, the proportion of total fodder requirement obtained from community forests and government forests (which are yet to be handed over as community forests) is relatively small (about 4%). As with fuel, some of the fodder is purchased. This amount increases from the richest to the poorest category with most of the fodder purchased by the poorer household members being received in lieu of wages for labor.

Leaf-litter

Leaf-litter is used for livestock bedding and as compost (fertilizer) by mixing it with animal manure. Wealthier households collect significantly more leaf litter than poorer households with poorer households collecting about 50 % less leaf litter from community forests than wealthier households (Table 5). Almost all leaf-litter collected comes from common (community or government) forests.

Table 5. Leaf-litter collection by wealth category

Leaf-litter use and source (<i>bhari</i> per household per year)	Wealth categories				All categories combined
	1	2	3	4	
Total amount used	23	20	13	10	16
Amount collected from community forest	10	10	7	5	8
Amount collected from govt. forest	13	10	7	5	8

Timber

Wood is required for construction timber, poles and agricultural implements. Table 6 summarizes information on numbers of timber trees felled and distributed from community forests in each of the FUGs included in the study. Until 1997, Khotegairo Sattale FUG had not harvested any timber trees whilst the other FUGs had harvested only limited numbers of timber trees. Most timber trees are taken by households in the richest category in all FUGs, except Bhirpani which has a larger number of trees distributed to poorer households.

Table 6. Number of timber trees distributed to households in different wealth categories in 1996 & 1997

Forest User Group	Wealth categories				All categories combined
	1	2	3	4	
Bhirpani	4	5	10	1	20
Jamale Chisapani	3	2	1	0	6
Jyamire Satbise	6	4	1	2	13
Khotegairo Sattale	0	0	0	0	0

Supply of forest products from community forest

The proportion of each of the main forest products (fuel, fodder, timber and leaf-litter) obtained from community forests compared with total requirement is shown in Table 7. This shows that for all these products, the actual amount being obtained from the community forest is small or insignificant when compared with other sources such as private lands, and government forest.

Table 7. Percentage of various forest products supplied from community forest in four FUGs

Products	FUG			
	Bhirpani	Jamale Chisapani	Jyamire Satbise	Khotegairo Sattale
Firewood	10.8	31.4	20.5	0.4
Fodder	2.7	1.0	6.5	1.0
Timber	15.6	9.9	29.3	0
Leaf-litter	28.6	30.8	73.0	33.3

Composition of FUG and FUG committees

Table 8 shows the composition of the FUGs by caste/ethnic groups and wealth categories. Brahmins and Chhetris form the majority in all categories, except the poorest which is dominated by the occupational caste households. However, this composition of the FUGs is not reflected in the composition of the FUG committee which makes many of the important decisions concerning FUG function, including distribution of forest products.

Table 8. Percentage of household in different caste/ethnic groups and wealth categories across four FUGs

Caste/ethnic group	Wealth categories				All categories combined
	1	2	3	4	
Brahmin/Chhetri	14.1	24.8	17.9	11.7	71.0
Occupational caste	1.0	1.2	2.2	12.2	16.6
Magar	3.0	2.2	1.0	1.0	7.2
Newar	0.2	0.7	1.5	2.7	5.2
All households	18.4	29.0	22.6	27.5	100

Table 9 shows the composition of FUG committees according to caste/ethnic group, wealth category, and gender. This shows that Brahmin/Chhetris in wealth categories 1 and 2 comprise 56% of committee members whilst representing only 39% in the FUGs as a whole. Of the 46 committee members in the four FUGs, only 13% are women. Also significantly under-represented are the poorest households (9% of committee members representing 27.5 % of the population). There is no woman member from the Newar or occupational castes on any committee. Thus FUG committees are dominated by wealthier households with poor representation of minority groups.

Table 9. Percentage of committee members by gender, caste/ethnicity & wealth categories across four FUGs

Caste/ethnic group	Wealth categories				All categories combined
	1	2	3	4	
Brahmin/Chhetri	26	30	13	4	74
Occupational caste	0	2	2	4	9
Magar	9	2	0	2	13
Newar	2	0	2	0	4
All households	37	35	17	9	100
Male	33	28	15	11	87
Female	4	37	2	0	13

Awareness of Community Forestry Activities

The survey included questions to assess awareness levels by FUG members of the activities of their FUG. The study showed that even five years after FUG formation and handover of a forest to a group, many FUG members do not seem to know the objectives of the government community forestry policy and very

few household members are aware of the existence of an ‘operational plan’ in their village, let alone having actually seen the plan. As shown in Table 10, less than 50 % of FUG members are aware of even basic aspects of community forestry, such as the number of FUG committee members, decisions of committee meetings, and rules and regulations for the use and protection of community forests. Wealthier households tend to have greater levels of awareness of most of the aspects except for knowledge of rules and sanctions where there is little difference between wealth categories. Although it is uncertain how information and awareness flows operate within the FUG, it appears that limited participation in meetings and assemblies (possibly due to time constraints) restricts the extent to which poorer households can get new information implying the need for a more pro-active and inclusive approach to information sharing.

Table 10. FUG members’ awareness of some forestry activities

Activities	% of all h/holds with awareness of activities by wealth categories				All categories combined
	1	2	3	4	
Decisions of last FUG assembly	48	39	57	34	45
Decisions of last FUG Committee meeting	52	37	34	13	33
Rules for forest products use	39	35	36	37	38
Sanction/fines for breaching rules	26	26	26	26	26
Number of FUG Committee members	48	34	20	19	29
Existence of ‘Operational Plan’	39	37	34	34	36

DISCUSSION

This analysis of forest product use by different wealth categories shows that FUGs are very heterogeneous in their make-up, and that this is reflected in their forest product use patterns. There are clear differences between households in terms of the quantities of different products required, and the sources from which these products are obtained. Wealthier households have more and better quality agricultural land, with more livestock and private trees and greater access to secure, well-paid jobs than poorer households. Under current systems of forest product distribution by FUGs, wealthier households tend to benefit more in terms of the quantity of products they obtain from the community forest. For example, fuelwood is distributed equally between FUG households regardless of the fact that wealthier households already have significant quantities of fuelwood available from their own land and get additional quantities as a result of trees they are given for use as timber. Leaf litter is normally available free of charge, and with little restriction on the quantity that can be collected – this again benefits wealthier households who have a greater requirement for leaf litter due to their larger land holdings. Timber trees are available normally on a payment basis – this clearly favors wealthier households who have cash to pay. In general, privileged households obtain a greater share of benefits from community forests. Distribution systems which assume that FUGs are homogenous therefore discriminate against the needs of the poorest households.

Another important consideration is that the amount of forest products currently supplied from community forests is well below the FUG’s overall demand for these products. At present, a substantial proportion of the household’s needs for forest products, especially fire wood and timber, is met from private sources, including private trees, grass and crop residues. Again, this favors wealthier households which have more of these private resources available to them.

Furthermore, FUG committees do not adequately represent the interests of all the FUG members – frequently the voices of poorer households are not heard. Field observations of general assemblies and committees indicate that committee members are able to reinforce their already powerful status in the village. For example, FUG committee officials fix the time for harvesting when it is most convenient for them. Changes in assembly dates or harvesting times may be made with little consideration for the users who are affected by this, or without adequately making them aware of any changes. In one village, the committee brought forward the date for forest product harvesting at a time when the whole group of an occupational caste (*damai*) had gone to a town near Kathmandu to attend a wedding ceremony so that, on their return, the *damai* group found they had missed the harvest and hence their share of the products. In another case, a household was headed by a woman who could not go to the forest because she was sick during the harvesting period. Her children were too young to go to the forest and carry firewood. Committee officials, although aware of her situation, made no arrangements to reach any compromise with her.

Committee officials even seem to be able to overturn decisions made at the FUG assembly. For example, in the harvesting season of 1997, committee officials of Khotegairo Sattale FUG stopped harvesting activities after two days and consequently each household only obtained two loads of firewood. If the harvesting work had been carried out throughout the whole block and as specified in the operational plan, the users would have received at least twice as much firewood.

Access rights to some forest products, such as timber, poles and grass, are sold to users through a bidding process. However, committee officials arrange the bidding in such a way that the price is lower than the market price, but high enough so that only a few households can afford it.

Compounding this inequitable situation is that District Forest Officer (DFO) staff seem to have little concern or understanding of the ways in which the committee members distribute forest products and control access to forest products. By taking this attitude, they indirectly support the current system. It is possible that the DFO staff, especially the District Forest Officer, may be unaware of the situation, or, if staff are aware of the facts, they may be simply ignoring them. In general, DFO staff are more concerned about forest protection than utilization because their job depends on the existence of the forest. They are satisfied as long as the forest is protected and utilized in a manner that does not threaten the existence of the resource and therefore their own jobs.

Apparently the level of awareness of the various community forestry activities in villages with FUGs is low (Table 10). New information tends to originate either with the FUG committee or DFO staff, and dissemination to the wider FUG members is weak. This monopoly on information seems to have been strengthened by DFO staff exposure to information and knowledge. A range of training and extension activities have been organized for DFO staff including training, workshops, seminars and study tours. Senior staff get most opportunity to participate in training and extension programs and Forest Guards themselves have very little exposure to new information and knowledge even though they have the closest contact with FUGs and are in the best position to facilitate information sharing with all FUG members. Trickle-down of information from senior to more junior staff does not seem to happen in practice (Table 11).

Table 11. Involvement with training, workshops and study tour programs by forestry field staff 1994-97

Types of Training	District Forest Office Staff			
	DFO	A/Forest Officer	Forest Ranger	Forest Guard

Abroad				
• Training/workshops	+++	+	-	-
• Study tours	+++	++	+	-
In Kathmandu				
• Training/workshops	+++	+	-	-
• Seminars	+++	+	-	-
• Planning meetings in Dept./project office	+++	+	-	-
In Pokhara and Baglung				
• Workshop/training	++	++	+	-
• Seminars	++	++	+	-
• Planning meetings	+++	++	-	-
Training by outside consultants in the field	++	++	+	-
In country study tours	+	++	+++	+
In the district				
• Training/workshops	-	-	+++	+
• Planning meetings	++	+++	+	-

Highest = +++ Lowest = + Nil = -

Table 12 gives a break-down of attendance at participation in training, workshop and study tours by wealth category. This shows that about 80 % of participants came from the first two wealth categories and most of the better paid and out-of-district programs are attended by committee officials. When an FUG receives a letter from the range post concerning such an event, if time is short the chairperson is most likely to attend. If this is not possible, they are most likely to send a relative of their own choice or a friend or fellow committee member. In some cases they may consult informally with other committee officials but rarely will a decision be made in an assembly. A woman is only likely to be selected if this has been specifically requested by the *Range-Post*.

Table 12. Participants in DFO training and extension programs by wealth categories and committee membership (since FUG formation)

Participant category		Total number of participants in training/workshops/study tours in four FUGs				
		Bhirpani	Jyamire-Satbise	Jamale Chisapani	Khotegairo Sattale	Total
Committee members		11	7	8	12	38
FUG general members		0	2	3	7	12
Wealth categories	1	4	7	4	7	22
	2	3	-	5	9	17
	3	2	2	1	2	7
	4	2	-	1	1	4

The performance of DFO staff and FUG committee members tends to be judged on the basis of whether or not the forest is well protected rather than whether it is well managed or utilized. The DFO is unlikely to query field staff about why a forest is not being actively managed, although if there is any doubt about

protection, action is likely to be taken. Field staff see that their credibility lies in forest protection not in its utilization by FUGs, and this has become reflected also in the attitude of the FUG committees. Forest product harvesting places an additional workload on the committee to manage and record the harvesting operation. Because committee members are usually wealthier than the majority of the FUG members they do not rely so much on community forests for forest products, and therefore the issue of limited utilization or lack of forest management is likely to have little direct impact on them.

CONCLUSIONS

The heterogeneity of households within FUGs is rarely if ever reflected in the way FUGs manage their community forest resources and distribute forest products. Wealthier households tend to benefit most from the *status quo*, and since it is these same households who dominate the decision-making processes and assimilate most information about community forestry through organized events, they have very little incentive to alter anything or to change any of the rules governing the way the FUG operates. Therefore, although certain actions are required to make sure that poorer households benefit more from community forestry, it seems unlikely that these actions will be initiated by the elites who dominate FUG committees. External support is therefore required to resolve this situation. This paper does not attempt to identify the actions which need to be taken, but it is suggested that the following are critical considerations.

- A recognition that social processes continue and become more complex following the hand over of a forest to a FUG (compared with FUG formation);
- Emphasis on reaching poor and disadvantaged FUG households beyond the committee;
- A greater level of discussion and action on the distribution of forest products to households within the FUG – again with a greater focus on how to benefit poorer households;
- Concerted efforts to focus on productive management of community forests rather than a passive and protection-oriented approach;
- Greater emphasis on sustainable community forest utilization by FUGs as an objective rather than forest protection.
- Greater focus on altered attitudes and information flows within the district Forest Department staff structures emphasizing a greater role for forest guards as facilitators and change agents working with FUGs.

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