

Name: Improved Community Forestry Governance and livelihoods through Participatory Action Research in Nepal

Overview of the proposed activities

The Nepalese Community Forestry Programme was initiated 1978 and has gradually been expanded to cover 1,647,700 households organised in 14,337 Forest User Groups (FUGs) managing in total 1.2 million ha of forest (Pokharel & Byrne 2009). The programme has been deemed a success as it has enabled grass roots organisations to emerge and take responsibility for forest management (Acharya 2002), often resulting in forest conservation (Gautam et al. 2004). Community forestry has also allowed forest dependent households to cover their basic needs in terms of firewood and fodder, thereby providing more secure livelihoods. At present the potentials of community forests for providing local users with benefits from carbon storage (through REDD) payments is being discussed (e.g. Adhikari 2009). But critical voices have for long been calling attention to a pressing challenge in relation to community forestry and livelihood improvement: that marginalized people (especially women and the poor) often receive disproportionately small shares of benefits from the community forest (Gilmour 2003; Malla et al. 2003). This includes contributions to FUGs from carbon sequestration and biodiversity protection (ICIMOD, 2008). Faced with the present challenge of turning community forest management more pro-poor a participatory **adaptive collaborative management approach** is suggested for improving the accountability and inclusiveness of community based forest management (Pandit et al. 2009). This research is targeted to implement in three Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs), one each of the three ecological regions, one in Terai- plain below 1000 m, one in Middle hills (1000 m to 2000m) and one in high hills (above 2000m altitude) of Nepal.

2. Objectives

Through participatory action research to promote equitable benefit sharing by providing research based knowledge to the forest user groups in KAFCOL research site communities. Specifically:

- 1e-1 To conduct Participatory Action Research focusing on pro-poor, gender balanced and equitable intervention design and actions in relation to community based forest management
- 1e-2 To carry out evaluation of ex-post action research situation and suggest recommendations for pro-poor community forestry governance and policy improvements.

Hypotheses

A social learning process informed by research output can contribute to pro-poor community forest management and benefit distribution through local level deliberation.

Research Methods and Activities

A series of steps are involved in the Participatory Action Research approach that go from identification of participants through to evaluation of the outcomes.

Firstly, the researchers identify relevant information, in this case partly by synthesising existing research results from the ComForM long-term sites. Then multi-stakeholder meetings are conducted in the long-term research site communities to identify stakeholder groups and identify starting point for the PAR study. An inception workshop is organised for researchers and community members to agree on the research plan. Formats for collection of baseline information (on the degree of social inclusion, poverty, the environment and the level of equity in forest management) are developed.

Secondly, a participatory baseline assessment is conducted among long-term research community households based on stratified random selection; stratification by wealth, livelihood strategy, household head gender). Key informant and focus group interviews are conducted for assessing social, natural, and financial outcomes of forest management, the heterogeneity of the stakeholders, the existing governance structure (resource and power use), and resulting implications for various stakeholder groups, including the dependence on forest benefits. An important part of this process is to make explicit the governance mechanisms and power structures in CFUG processes (information flow and services to the poor). Multi-stakeholder meetings are organised for discussing outcomes of the activities.

Thirdly, an evaluation of changes in consequence of the PAR process is conducted and compared with the baseline information. The evaluation is discussed with stakeholders.

Clusters to be allocated

This collaborative proposal basically uses three cluster areas that include: (i) Cluster 1- Knowledge facilitation; (ii) cluster 2-Policy research and (iii) Cluster 5- On-the- Ground activities.

IPSI member organisations to be involved

The Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MoFSC), Nepal will be the collaborative partner for implementation of collaborative activities. In addition, we invite any of the agencies of Japan including the Ministry of Environment of Japan (MoEJ) to be the collaborative partner. This proposal has been already shared with Nepal partner.

Time Frame

2011 Multi-stakeholder meetings, entry points identification (possible entry points- Climate change and ecotourism, community based NTFP enterprise development and others as per need

2012 Inception workshop, baseline assessments, key informant and focus group discussion

2013 Present governance analysis results and assess changes, evaluate the study. publishing

Expected outputs and impacts

The research communities trained in the PAR process implement the principles to improve governance practices to the benefit of marginalised forest users. The project's learning on application of the pro-poor PAR approach with special emphasis on environment, poverty, gender and governance is analysed and documented as a contribution to the development of the PAR methodology.

References

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