

December 2013 About this project

Name

Impacts of Community Management of Forests and Floodplains (EIRG-2011-175)
<http://www.espa.ac.uk/projects/eirg-2011-175>

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Timeframe

May 2012 to July 2013

Objectives

- 1) Synthesise dispersed evidence on pro-poor impacts of innovations in natural resource management in Nepal and Bangladesh
- 2) Enhance links of community networks with researchers and policy makers
- 3) Present conference papers, policy briefs and a peer-reviewed journal article

Summary

This study combined case studies with synthesis of over 10 years of research on community based floodplain management in Bangladesh and community forestry in Nepal to understand the role of community networks in enhancing ecosystem sustainability and reducing poverty in the context of decentralised community based resource governance.



Strength in numbers

Understanding how community rights and institutions affect poverty reduction and sustainability of ecosystem services.

In Bangladesh and Nepal there have been considerable efforts since the 1990s to establish community institutions to manage commons, notably wetlands and floodplains in Bangladesh and forests in Nepal. New community based organisations (CBOs) and associated institutions have been increasingly recognised as providing more effective management than state control top-down approaches.

Yet, there is still poor understanding of how community rights and institutions affect poverty reduction and sustainability of ecosystem services. The two countries present contrasting situations in relation to ecosystem types, policy environment, the type of CBOs involved, and the forms of tenure over resources.

Nepal

In Nepal, a federation of 18,000 forest user groups was formed from the desire of grassroots organisations formed within a policy and legislative framework to articulate their common interests in retaining their rights to forests.

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh a network of 270 floodplain community organisations arose from an interest to learn from each other's experience, address complex links between agriculture, water and fisheries, and gain mutual support from peers.

Both countries started with relatively narrow objectives - forests in Nepal and fisheries in Bangladesh. However, a broad range of other ecosystem services were incorporated due to their unavoidable linkages to, for example, groundwater recharge and soil conservation.

A strong evidence base

The research was based on a systematic review of documented evidence, and comparative analysis of 32 case studies in Bangladesh and Nepal based on community managed sites, complemented by existing published and unpublished data covering these communities in particular, but also more general evidence from recent work by the partners.

Case Study Goldada CFUG



The Goldada Community Forest User Group (CFUG) in Nepal has been transformed from an isolated, passive and poor governing group to thriving from good forest management, Non-Timber Forest Product enterprises.

It was the support in capacity building from the Federation of Community Forest Users in Nepal (FECOFUN) and its members that has allowed Goldada to evolve into a strong, democratically-led community contributing to a better management of its natural resources.

Research Partners

The **Flood Hazard Research Centre (FHRC)** is an interdisciplinary centre based at Middlesex University. It specialises in the interaction between people and the environment, together with the analysis and appraisal of environmental policies.

ForestAction Nepal is a policy think tank and action research organisation in natural resource management and livelihoods that links research with civil society activism to influence policy and practices.

Five Key Conclusions

1 Community based management has brought improvements in ecosystem health and services beyond the original narrow natural resources focus of individual CBOs, and that this has improved the lives of poor people in a majority of the cases.

2 Supportive tenorial arrangements can be complex and fragile. Active networks among CBOs have an important role in empowering CBOs to defend their rights and with them the benefits of ecosystem services and livelihoods.

3 Adaptive learning networks allow CBOs to share lessons, which results in greater understanding of ecosystem linkages, more diversified and innovative activities in managing their natural resources and better governance.

4 Data management is critical to ensuring a CBO network's effectiveness. There is an opportunity for improving (and sharing) national data sources that would allow CBOs to better monitor the impacts of their activities.

5 A critical mass of CBOs ensures that policy makers cannot ignore their concerns and advocacy efforts. With over 18,000 members nation-wide, FECOFUN in Nepal has embraced this concept and placed pressure on government agencies to help retain their community rights.



New knowledge

- Communities learn more from systematically sharing their experiences among one another than from within.
- Communities need to act together to defend their rights, and as the case of Nepal FECOFUN shows, it is actually the power of communities demonstrated through the nation-wide network that has helped to retain community rights.
- In both countries the poor have benefited, but through different mechanisms:
 - › In **Nepal** a substantial part of the CBO income goes towards local infrastructure, which benefits everyone in the community.
 - › In **Bangladesh** the main purpose is to improve access to enhanced natural resources, in particularly benefits from fisheries management, a resource that the poorest people depend on.

Creating impact

- Enhanced productivity where fishery management was an aim of the CBO in Bangladesh where there was a longer period of management, and where the CBO had secure rights through a lease
- In Nepal, the CFUGs have seen an increase in revenue from the sale of forest products and NTFPs, employment generation, improved community infrastructure and better leadership (including participation of women)

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