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SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMONS WITH A CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM IN NEPAL

Bidur Khadka
PhD Student, Yokohama National University, Japan
Email: bidurkhadka2005@gmail.com

Abstract: *Sustainability of commons is one of the major challenges in developing countries. There are two distinct theories to manage the commons. The one is with the theory of Hardin where centrally enforce with strong governmental regulations and other theory is from Ostrom where local people can manage their own commons by policy of decentralization, self-governance and from own institution. The community forestry of Nepal is managing under the Ostrom theory based on several principles. This paper is analyzing the history of forest system in Nepal, evolution of community forestry, benefit of community forestry.*

Key words: Sustainability, Community Forestry, Policy, Governance

Introduction

Commons are the publicly owned natural resources specifically featuring two distinct characters such as non-excludability and sub-tractability. In the system of common resources everybody has rights to use and use by one reduces the amount available to another users. The common resources are everywhere in the world in different forms such as oceanic ecosystem, forest ecosystem, big rivers and lakes, global atmosphere etc. The rule for common pool resources is very simple. Those common resources are open to everybody. If everybody uses it, it can collapse and if all users restrain themselves then the resources can be sustained. But according to Hardin there is a dilemma "if you limit your use of the resource and your neighbors do not, then the resource still collapse and you have lost the benefit" thus he proposed two solutions for governing the commons 'centrally enforce solution with strong regulations' and 'enclose or privatize the commons' (Hardin, 1968). However, Ostrom come up with completely different ideas to govern the commons. Her fundamental principles to govern the commons are "people are able to govern the commons on sustainable way by appropriate governance and institution with no or little enforce from government. More specifically Ostrom postulate eight principles to manage the commons such as 1. Clearly defined boundaries 2. Congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions 3. Collective choice arrangements 4. Monitoring 5. Graduated sanctions 6. Conflict resolution mechanism 7. Minimal recognition of rights to organize 8. Nested enterprise (Ostrom, 1990). Those eight principles are more focus on decentralization, self-governance and low interference from government body. Currently, several countries are managing the commons in different nature such as community forestry in Nepal, social forestry in India, Satoyama concept in Japan. Those commons have different challenges, opportunities and attributes.

Discussion

Historical background of forest management in Nepal

Generally, Nepal has three different eras in forest management. First one is before the 1950's where most of the forest resources were controlled from the elite group with limited people's hand (Gilmour and Fisher 1991). Second era is during 1950's to 1970's government of Nepal brings a policy to nationalize forest and bring in centrally control. In that period also Nepal was facing high deforestation, degradation and soil erosion, landslide, mountain desertification (Eckholm, 1975; World Bank 1978). The nationalized policy also became failure due to high control from government, unavailability of government staff, and lack of proper distribution of forest resources to the local people. During the 1960's government also bring new policy for resettlement in southernmost part of Nepal where sharp deforestation and degradation was occurred. According to FAO, the rate of deforestation was 3.68% (FAO/UNEP, 1982). The third era is after 1970's where government of Nepal come up with decentralization and devolution of power to the local people for managing the forest resources.

Evolution of Community Forestry

After the failure of nationalization government of Nepal brings new policy to manage the forest from 1970's. In the international arena also decentralization issues were beginning in different sector in different forms. A National Community Forestry Conference, held in 1987 in Kathmandu was the official beginning of community forestry in Nepal (Gilmours and Fisher 1991; Pokharel 1997). The government also bring new plan for managing resources 'Forest Sector Master Plan of 1988' specifically states the principles of decentralization policy in forest sector by providing rights to poorer communities (Granner, 1997). This aims to manage of forests in a way that will alleviate the poverty and fulfill basic requirements of people by promoting active participation of local people and promote equitable benefit sharing (Bhatta, 1998). The Forest Act (1993), Forest Regulations (1995) and Community Forestry Guideline (2001) are the major regulations to encourage people to manage forest by communities.

According to community forestry system, a patch of national forests are handed over to the local communities known as "community forest user group (CFUG)" for the purpose of protection, management and utilization, according to Forest Act (1993) and Forest Regulations (1995). There are altogether 17,685 community forest user groups in Nepal, which are managing 1.6 million ha of forest (DoF, 2011). Community forestry aims primarily to fulfill the basic needs for local people such as firewood, timber, fodder and leaf litter for compost-making (MPFS, 1989). Currently community forestry of Nepal is recognized that it provide more than such basic needs of local communities but also other ecosystem services such as regulating services, cultural services and supporting services (e.g. Biodiversity conservation, water purification and regulation, soil erosion protection, forest recreation and carbon storage).The government of Nepal has played a crucial role in the effective implementation of the community forestry program. The government gives full rights to user groups to access, use, and manage. The government, however, does not give user groups ownership of the land so that community forest lands cannot be sold or transferred to another group or people (Forest Act, 1993; Forest Regulations 1995). The main attractions towards the community forestry program to the local people are "rights", "rules" and "benefits". These three interdependent factors in community forestry give ownership of forest. Community forest user

groups makes their *"own rules of forest management".* They have *"rights to access"*, "*use their forests*" and they have "*equitable benefit sharing mechanisms"* (Shrestha and Neupane, 2012). These community forestry user groups are identified according to criteria such as households that are traditional users of the forest; households that are close to the forest; households that are interested to get involved in the user group; households that depend on the forest for forest products; households that can contribute to the protection and management of forest; households that are distinct users of forest and have no other alternatives for forest products but can contribute to forest management (Community Forestry Guideline, 2001).For each of the community forest, the user group committee is formed based on the general consensus. Each committee is formed by proportionate representation of dalit, indigenous people, women, poor and other user groups. For the user group committee, it is mandatory provision of 50% representation from women and remaining 50% should be from the proportionate representation from poor, dalit, indigenous people and ethnic group. The one woman will take the post of either president or secretary. The District Forest Officer has full responsibility not to handover community forest to user groups without fulfilling these mandatory regulations. These selected members will express their commitment at the general assembly. The committee can form various sub-committees as necessary such as Tole[1], income generation, monitoring, fund mobilization etc and assign duties, responsibilities and rights to sub committees (Community Forestry Guideline, 2001).

Community forestry handover process
Community forest is hand over to the local user group according to the Forest Act, 1993 and Forest Regulation, 1995. Basically there are two steps of community forestry hand over to the user groups (1) the district Forest Officer take into account the distance between the forest and the village and the wishes as well as the management capacity of the local users who have to manage the forest, while handing over any part of a national forest to a user's group as a community forest(2) In case of the local users desire to plant trees or take ownership of forest the approval of the agency owning the land on the condition that the concerned agency itself retains the ownership of the land, the district forest officer may grant recognition to such forest area as a community forest (Forest Act 199; Forest Regulation 1995). The community forest user group needs to prepare the operational plan and constitution with the help of forest technician which need to be approved from the district forest office and general assembly of user group.

Benefits provided by Community Forestry
Community forestry has provided several benefits to the local community. This program is more suitable in the context of Nepal due to customary regulations for forest resources, human dependency on forest and failure of the government top down policies (Malla, 1992; Chetteri & Jackson, 1995). In the rural areas where poverty is extremely high forests plays a crucial role for the economic development as more than 95% of the people are directly dependent upon forest resources for timber and non-timber forest products (Gautam, 2006). According to the research by Pokheral et al u.d.; Chapagain & Banjade (2009) community forest provides several benefits such as livelihood improvement, creating jobs at the local level, more

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[1] Smallest unit of village

greenery, development of infrastructure and governance, biodiversity conservation, social unity and improved literacy. Yadav et al (2003) conducted intensive research on the 11 community forest user groups in terai and mountain, and concluded that forest user groups are very much responsible for protecting their forest and regulating resources extraction and that the communities are benefited from improved forest products and infrastructure development. Prior to the formation of forest user groups, forest which covered 75% of the research area was deteriorated. However, now it is improving to a greater or lesser extent through the control and regulation of open grazing, extraction and illicit activities.

Baginski-Springate et al (2003) mentioned that community forest of Nepal are in the crossroads most of them have become firmly institutionalized and represent an effective local development institution increasingly involved in wider community development activities, often networking with a range of government and non-government groups. Community forests can help with local development activities and minimize the burden of the government on development activities (Chhetri & Jackson, 1995). Community forestry is having a successful enterprise development based on the public and private partnership model (Paudel, 2005). For example, in the Tamakoshi Bel Juice Processing Company, 10 community forest user groups, private sector and 60 pro-poor households are working together, sharing different profit percentage. 10 community forest user groups receives 30%, while 6 private enterprises receive 40% and pro-poor household of 10 community forest user groups receive 30% (Paudel, 2005).

Conclusion
It has seen that community forestry in Nepal is one of the successful programs. It has contributed to different ecosystem services, livelihood improvement activities and empowerment to women, dalit and indigenous people. This community forestry in Nepal also provides one of the successful examples on how strict government regulation can be fail and how decentralization, devolution and deregulation can helpful. It has also gained international attention in governance and local people participation in case.

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