

Key Lessons from Nepal Visit

Edward Bbaale, Peter Babyenda, Tom Rukundo and Christine A. Mugenyi

1. Introduction and Background

The study tour to Nepal was one of the activities of EfD Forest Collaborative Peer Learning Project on Community Forestry. The main purpose of this visit was to deepen the understanding on community-based forestry management in addition to sharing ideas and experiences regarding forestry among the participant countries. This study was timely given the current efforts by Ugandan government to increase the forest cover to 24% by 2040. Whereas the people of Nepal have been able through community forest management have been able to increase their forest cover to 45% from 29% in 1992.



A meeting with the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN) executive members.

The study tour involved meetings with the different stakeholders, field visits in some of the community forests and experiencing the Nepalese culture through visiting religious and cultural sites. The 5 days program was under the guidance of the Forest Action – Nepal and coordinated by Professor Randy. The tour started with the visit to Kalopani Community Forestry User Group (CFUG), which is in a mountainous site in Kavre District. We visited a second CFUG on the way to our meeting with the Kavre Divisional Forestry Office, which has jurisdiction over Kalopani CFUG. We also visited Kavre Divisional Forestry Office. We also held discussions with the Dean of the Tribhuvan University Institute of Forestry.

It was noted that Nepal has about 22000 community forest user groups benefiting about 2.9million households. The community manages about 2.2million hectares of forest. Some of the key uses of community forest management that we picked included:

- (i) Contributes to forest restoration. It makes it easy to mobilize the community to ensure that degraded forests are restored. This is evidenced by the increase in the forest cover from 29% in 1992 to the current 45%.
- (ii) Contributes to community infrastructure and livelihood benefits. CFs are used as a vehicle to community development. We were able to see several community development projects due CFs.
- (iii) Contributes to ecosystem functioning and protection.
- (iv) Contributes to mitigation and adaptation to climate change. This is largely due to the maintenance of forests that absorb carbon but also regulates temperature.
- (v) Contributes to household income generation through the sale of forest products in a sustainable way. The households are aware of the consequences of mismanaging forests and thus utilize them in a sustainable way. This is commendable and other countries like ours need to take lessons.
- (vi) Inclusive leadership. We noted that at least half of the leadership of the user groups are female.

However, there are still some key challenges which we noted, and these included:

- (i) Elite capture of the user groups making it hard for the entire community to benefit.
- (ii) Law enforcement. It is still a challenge to leadership of user groups to effectively enforce laws.
- (iii) Private sector interference such as construction of hotels, cable cars in the forests among others.
- (iv) Expansion of national forests that reduces community forests.
- (v) A challenge of tax on user groups that reduces income meant for community developments.
- (vi) Reducing interest in the forests and switching to other activities including migration to other countries for jobs in cities.

2. Activities implemented during the Nepal study Tour

a) Meeting the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN) executive members.

During this meeting, it was noted that FECOFUN was founded and legally recognized in July 1995 as a social movement organized which later became a civil society organization. It was formed after the legal recognition of Community Forestry in Nepal in 1992 and realization for the urgency to advocate for the rights of the people. It is established in all the 77 districts in the country with over 22,000 Community Forest User Groups are affiliated to FECOFUN and managing 2.2m ha that is; 25% of the forest cover which is contributed under community forestry of the overall forest cover of 45% with 2.9million H/Hs benefiting from community forestry. The structure of FECOFUN is both at local level and provincial level. Two virtual positions are occupied by women in the FECOFUN structure. It has a Strategic Plan which is revised and re-established after every 4 years. The key role is advocacy, for instance:

- (i) Advocating for participation of women, marginalized groups in community forestry in that all Community Forestry User Groups should have 50% of women representation.
- (ii) Recognition of the rights of the women.
- (iii) Institutionalizing the concept of federalism within the CFUGs.
- (iv) Making the people realize their roles and responsibilities in relation to community forestry.
- (v) The Current Models implemented by FECOFUN include Restoration activities, promotion of entrepreneur skills for the CFUGs, ecotourism within community forestry, Agro-forestry on private farms.

Some of challenges include the following: -

- Private sector interference in community forestry for instance investors constructing in the forest which leads to clearance to construct and make developments in the forest.
- The Expansion of National Parks has led to strict conservation to the community as they have no access rights.
- There is currently a protest taxation on government on sale of forest products from community forests. FECOFUN advocates for 50% of the revenue to support marginalized groups while 25% should be ploughed back into forest management.
- 50% of the CFUGs operational plans have expired and not renewed yet by the government. Forest division has no capacity and funds to support her activities.
- Compliance to the operational plans in the utilization of the forest resources in different ways – fuel, fodder, and direct relationship with the community forests.

b) Meeting with the departments of Forests and Soil Conservation- Nepal and Department of National Parks and Wildlife conservation.



Summary of the forest management model is indicated below:

- Total area of districts is 140486 ha
- Area covered by forest is 73075.5ha

Nepal has both Government managed forest which cover 37790.14ha and Community Forest which include: -

- Handed over community forest in number 582
- Handed over community forest (Area) 31,032.05ha
- Beneficial Households is 59,773

-Beneficial Population is 347,091

Forests for other use include religious Forests-1.672ha and Private Forest (registered) is 34.989ha

Community Forests are part of the National Forests handed over to the traditional users for its conservation, utilization, and management. This is guided by the Forest Act, 2076(2019AD), Forest Regulation 2079(2023AD) and community guideline 2071.

The department guides the CFUG in the following ways:

- Facilitation is done through formation of forest user groups and implementing biological diversity conservation and climate change adaptation related activities.
- Legal support through identifying, developing, and managing potential forest areas in accordance with the prevailing laws, rules and policies, Community Forest user group registration and Community Forest handover. The department also supports on forest crime control and regulation of community forestry.
- Technical support through forest management operational plan and constitution operation, supporting in forest management activities i.e., silvicultural, and cultural operations.
- Financial support to forest activities, public awareness programs related to conservation and development and community mobilization in various trainings and seminars.
- Monitoring and supervision to ensure CFUGs are working in accordance with the operational plans, prevailing laws and regulations and providing feedback to communities.
- Nepal is rich in medicinal plants. Mapping of medicinal plants was done in 2017 to determine the medicinal plants to be planted on private land.

It should be noted that Nepal government is privatizing community forests to implement ecotourism since there is high potential and share benefit with the state.

Issues and challenges of community Forestry include:

- (i) There is decreasing dependence and interest of local people towards community forest.
- (ii) Small sized and less productive community forest (many CFUGs area is less than 5ha)
- (iii) Migration towards urban area and less settlement in rural areas.
- (iv) High dependence of CFUGs on forest officials in administrative work.

- (v) Passive community forestry user groups and lacking forest management. Community forest user groups are not conducting their mandatory activities (annual general meetings, audit, reporting to the Division Forest officers).
- (vi) Human wildlife conflict is very high and Nepal government is seeking solutions to this since wild animal population has increased in all community forests.

c) Field visit in Kalapani community forest and meeting with the CFUG members.



The forest is 400ha and it's divided into 5 different blocks. It is both natural forest and part of it is planted.

The CFUG has 300 households with 11 committee members of 4 males and 7 females. The Community members mainly utilize forest resources like firewood, fodder, grass, timber, and medicinal plants.

Roles and responsibilities of the CFUG include the following:

- (i) Committee members conduct monthly meetings.
- (ii) Conduct Annual General Assembly with the CFUG members which involves preparing and presenting the financial audit report, performance report and workplan for the next year.
- (iii) Protection of forest resources and water and a key role done by the CFUG.
- (iv) The committee issues harvesting permits to members. Harvesting is conducted in a respective block on a rotation basis.
- (v) The committee identifies, lists and records members. It does wealth raking and categorizes members that require support.
- (vi) The committee conducts trainings and workshops in conjunction with the respective government departments and other stakeholders like Forest Action Nepal and FECOFUN.
- (vii) Expenditures are agreed by the 11 members committee and all report are subjected to auditing.

Benefits attained by the CFUG include:

- (i) Kalapani community forest support both forest related and agricultural activities. The forest provides water sources which enable the people irrigate their crops.
- (ii) Primarily the CFUG members sale timber and fuel wood from the forest and can attain 20-30 million rupees annually.
- (iii) The community members coordinate with Local Government to put up infrastructural development to avoid duplication of activities. The funds are attained from timber sales and firewood.
- (iv) 25% of the income accrued from all CFUG activities in invested in managing the forest, 35% of the revenue goes to income generating activities for the CFUG poor households.

Challenges include the following:

- (i) Human wild conflict is a big challenge since the forest has dense vegetation.
- (ii) Illegal grazing by some people who live close to the forest.
- (iii) There is lack of financial and human resource to conduct biodiversity inventory to enable the CFUG understand the species density.

e) Field Visit in Shiba Community Forest and Meeting with the CFUG members.



Shiba community forest covers 50ha and has 35households with 11 committee members. Between 30-40 years ago, the forest was bare hill and people were faced with floods and numerous earthquakes. Therefore, there was need to restore the forest and protect endangered species. Restoration by planting with variety of species has been conducted over the years as well as strict protection of the forest. However, it was noted that Shiba community forest has fewer benefits compared to Kalapani community forest. Most of the CFUG members are involved in agriculture on private land therefore, they collect fodder and leaves as manure for in their gardens.

The future plans include:

- (i) Introduction of fruit tree species at the periphery of the forest.
- (ii) As a means of making community forestry more appealing to the people adjacent to shiba forest, introduction of tourism and conducting research, setting up picnic sites, camping sites and nature walks is the immediate plan by government and the CFUG.

It was also noted that the Shiba community forest was being used as a pilot site for REDD+ pilot program.

f) Meeting at the Institute of Forestry- Nepal



The meeting was held with the dean of forestry and the college staff. They shared information on Community forestry as indicated below:

- (i) Community forestry has contributed to forest restoration, improved forest cover, increased broadleaved forest and led to an increase in the dense forest.
- (ii) Contribution to community infrastructure and livelihood benefits for instance the average annual income from CFUG equates to 49,103,100 US dollars per year for all the CFUG across Nepal.
- (iii) Contributes to ecosystem functioning through conservation of water sources and regulating discharge, estimated ecosystem value of Nepal's forest was USD19.7 billion in 2017. Community forests provide fresh water supply for household and agriculture uses according to Gautam et al., 2021)
- (iv) Contribution to mitigation and adaptation to climate change since community forestry fosters synergies by increasing carbon stocks and controlling loss of carbon. Improved forest condition helps to mitigate global climate change effects.
- (v) Contribution to generating income at household level. There are initiated income generating activities within the forest. The annual timber harvest in CF generates approximately 21,000 full time equivalent jobs.
- (vi) Community Forest income contributes to reduce poverty and local income inequality.
- (vii) Contributes towards good governance through effective enforcement of forest rules compared to centralized system, empowerment of rural women, encouraging forest user households to participate in all community forest activities.

Challenges of Community Forest management in Nepal include the following: -

- (i) Elite capture is continuously voiced through the CFUG. Economic outcomes are unevenly distributed.
- (ii) Law enforcement in Community Forest is not conducted well and sometimes serves to carry on existing social inequities.
- (iii) High rate of immigration, the livelihood choices of young people between 15-34 years, 91.3% men are different thereby leading to migrating from rural to urban areas.
- (iv) Decreasing dependency on forest due to decreased interest of forest users' households mainly because of low returns, policy issues and migration to city or urban centres as well as low interest in harvesting forest products.

We concluded with a visit to Nepal's cultural and religious sites



Visiting cultural sites

3. Lessons learnt from study tour on Community Forestry in Nepal.

The existence of a legal body, (FECOFUN- Federation for Community Forestry Users, Nepal) has enabled voicing the rights of community adjacent groups. The CSO has played a very important advocacy role on

the rights of women, elders, and marginalized groups. It has also played an important role of influencing forest related policies in Nepal. UNETCOFA a CSO was established in Uganda in 2006, to unite CFMs but lacked legal backing and has not done much work in relation to CFM networks. The lesson learnt is to involve the Ministry of Water and Environment to revive UNETCOFA.

FECOFUN has created a strong network with the CFUGs, and this enables the groups implement their roles and responsibilities which has minimized noncompliance to the operational plans of the community forests.

Commitment by the CFUGs households to protect, restore and conserve forests has largely been informed by previous calamities like earthquakes and floods which is not the case for Uganda.

Value addition on forest products like timber, fodder and herbs has increased the income and created some jobs for the CFUGs.

Community Forestry in Nepal has thrived on many different models for instance knowledge production and knowledge use in forestry and the presence of homogenous society.

Improving livelihoods where forest conservation meets the demands of local communities provides an overall incentive for sustainable conservation including safeguarding essential ecosystem services.

Having a dynamic, diverse, and respected leadership within community groups increases chances of success as is the case for some CFUGs in Nepal.

Involvement of women in use of forest resources recognizes the importance of having women represented in decision- making and giving women a voice has allowed them to actively participate in conservation activities.

Benefit sharing through wealth ranking to target the poor for support is very key and can minimize elite capture. In addition, sharing of benefits/ income accrued from sale of forest products in percentages for instance 25% is invested in forest management was a key lesson to learn.

CFUGs coordination with local government to put up infrastructural development like schools or road construction from the income attained from the sale of forest resources was a key lesson learnt.

Community Forestry has contributed to ecosystem functioning through provision of fresh water supply to the households and for agricultural purposes. Most forest adjacent communities in Nepal access piped water from the forest for both domestic uses including watering animals and irrigation of crops. This has enabled conservation of water sources and regulation of waste discharge.

Alternative energy/ biomass source in Nepal is at 60%. People are increasingly using LPGs, electricity, petroleum gas etc. This has decreased fuelwood usage in Nepal. The lesson is GOU need to reduce costs of gas and electricity to enable less dependency on fuelwood from forests.

4. Conclusion

Nepal provides a practical example of how the community can be empowered to manage forests and significantly contribute to the growth in general forest cover in the country. The leadership of the forest user groups also act as training ground for the national leadership and as a result, the national leadership

also participates in the sustainable utilization of forests. The landscape in Nepal also provides another opportunity to locals to ensure that the green cover is protected. It is thus interesting to see how spoilers of forests in other countries the ones at the forefront are of protecting forests in Nepal. Therefore, the experiences from Nepal should act as the guide to successful forest management in other countries including Uganda. In addition, the study tour was informative with vast knowledge attained from different stakeholders on implementation of community forestry. Sharing of knowledge with colleagues from USA, Nepal, Kenya, and Tanzania was relevant and we look forward to implementing some of the lessons learnt in Uganda. Lastly, we appreciate EfD Global Hub for funding the tour and Professor Randy for coordinating this tour. We than Forest Action Nepal for organizing all the visits in the different offices and CFUGs, community forests and cultural sites. We thank the National forestry Authority Uganda for funding one participant but for also allowing participants to attend this wonderful study.