

AN OVERVIEW OF FOREST HARVESTING PRACTICES IN NEPAL

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Introduction

Master plan for the forestry sector, declared in 1988 for 21 years, is the main policy guideline of the government of Nepal in managing forest resources. The plan gives top priority to the community forestry rather than government-managed forest, leasehold forest and religious forest as categorized in the forestry sector plan. Community forestry program of Nepal has gained its momentum after the restoration of democracy in 1990. Within a decade, community forestry of Nepal has been recognized as best management practices with regards to participatory forest management. Before community forestry, there were two approaches in forest products harvesting that were practiced by the state. One was through the Timber Corporation of Nepal (TCN), the state owned corporation, and the second through local and national level contractors. Along with the emergence of community forestry, community forest users groups (CFUGs) became one of the most crucial agencies responsible for forest harvesting in Nepal. By June 2003, 997,137 hectares (out of total 4.27 million hectares) of forestland have been handed over to 12,562 CFUGs, which include 1.4 million households and 7 million people of Nepal¹.

This paper aims to discuss the relative strengths, weaknesses and opportunities with regards to the issues of harvesting approaches, practices and their implications to

sustainability, bio-diversity and environmental aspects including its benefit to the users, of forest harvesting practices in Nepal.

Historical Background

During the *Rana* regime², almost all forest areas of Nepal were under the control of *Ranas*, and were utilized by them as personal property. Commercialization of forest products in Nepal was started during this period. *Ranas* sold sal (*Shorea robusta*) timber to East-India Company for the purpose of railway sleepers and hence earned good amount of money and maintained good diplomatic relation with British Colonizers.

After the end of *Rana* regime in 1950, and before 1976, almost all the nation's forest areas were under the government control. Government's forestry professionals largely took the role of policing that resulted number of people arrested, punished and sent to jail under the crime of encroachment and timber smuggling. Despite the government protection, the rate of deforestation increased drastically. In addition, rampant deforestation took place during the political crisis in Nepal (in 1971, 1980, 1985). After the concept of the community participation in forest management was realized through the formation of National Forest Plan 1976, *Panchayat*³ and *Panchayat* Protected Forest Regulation of 1978 was

¹ Source: Department of Forest, Nepal, 2003.

² *Rana* regime ruled from 1846 to 1950 in Nepal

³ Term broadly used for former political system and political units

promulgated. After one decade of experience under the *Panchayat* and *Panchayat* protected forest, forestry professional felt it as a failure in forest management practices as expected by the National Forest Plan 1976. In 1987, a national workshop was held to discuss and review the relative success/failure of *Panchayat* and *Panchayat* protected forest. The conclusion was in favor of traditional forest users for taking the principle responsibilities as the main actors of forest management. This realization and abolition of *Panchayat* system in 1990 helped in eventual emergence of community forestry, with the provision that forest areas to be handed over to its respective and traditional users without consideration of political boundary, which was not the case before. Master Plan for Forestry Sector Nepal declared in 1988 has given top priority to community forestry rather than state-managed forest, leasehold forest and religious forest as categorized in the Forestry Sector Plan. Similarly, Forest Act of 1993 and the Regulation of 1995 were issued as the main law for forestry sector, under the democratic constitution of Nepal - 1991.

Agencies Involved in Forest Harvesting in Nepal:

As mentioned above, there are broadly three major agencies that are involved in forest harvesting in Nepal. They are 1) Timber Corporation of Nepal (TCN) 2) Timber and firewood contractors and 3) Community Forest Users Groups (CFUGs). Except the deforestation that took place under the political support, there is to some extent, restriction to fell green trees legally in Nepal. Almost all agencies involved in the harvesting of forest products have focused on the collection of dead, dying, diseased and deformed trees or timbers. The overall process, approaches and practices of forest harvesting could be observed briefly in the following discussion.

a. Timber Corporation of Nepal (TCN):

The dream of Timber Corporation of Nepal (TCN) was realized by state in 1955 resulted in the establishment of Sawmill project. After six year, TCN was established in 1961 by the state to provide timber and fuel wood at cheap and short process for public by establishing depots as and where required. It collects records of timber and fuel wood volume (from dead, dying, diseased, fallen and deformed trees only) from District Forest Offices (DFOs) and requests Ministry and Department of Forests to get approval for collection. After obtaining approval, DFOs allocate areas and respective amounts/volumes of timber and fuel wood for collection under the close supervision and monitoring of DFOs. Then measurement is conducted jointly by TCN and DFO and final record of volume of fuel wood and timber is prepared. After the final measurement, TCN transports the timbers and fuel wood to its sawmills and depots with legal authority from DFO. TCN bears all the expenses during collection, logging, transportation and sawing. It sells the final product as per its rate adding the expenses during collection, logging, transportation and sawing, and some profits for management cost.

According to TCN, there are 417 staff including 156 admin staff and 261 program staff. During last fiscal year 2002/2003, TCN has collected 552,921 cubic feet of timber and 4,199,310 kilograms of fuel wood.

b. Timber Contractors (both National and Local Level):

Besides giving fuel wood and timber to the TCN, DFOs also collect fuel wood and timber from dead, dying, diseased, fallen and deformed trees through local as well as national level contractors in other part of the district's national forest area. DFO bears all

the expenses during collection, transportation to depot from the government fund. Then it is sold to timber contractors through auction as per the government regulation. Majority of timber contractors have their own sawmills, sell depots and timber or fuel wood based industries. Those timber contractors sell the sawn timber, logs and fuel wood as per their rate. During Fiscal Year 2001/2002, District Forest Offices harvested a total amount of 1,901,671.41 cubic feet timber and 26,222,940 kilogram of fuel wood through local as well as national level contractors (DOF, 2002).

c. Community Forest Users Groups (CFUGs)

Each and every Community Forest Users Groups (CFUGs) have their forest operational plan (FOP) approved by DFO. The group carryout all management activities including forest harvesting as per their approved FOP. During Fiscal Year 2001/2002, a total amount of 476,321.13 cubic feet timber, 2,575,170 kilogram fuel wood, 541,449.69 kilogram of *Khair (Acacia catechu)* and 59,500 kilogram of crude resin were harvested from community forest areas of Nepal by respective CFUGs (DOF, 2002).



CFUG Harvesting their Community Forest Area

All the Forest Operational Plans (FOP) are prepared with detail information of forest inventory, calculation of growing stock, annual

increment and annual allowable harvest. All user group members involve in the harvesting and collection process and the final outcomes are collected in the depot as fixed by the group. After that, demands from its respective users are collected and distributed accordingly. CFUGs have legal authority in fixing the price rate of all forest products from their community forest area. Surplus forest products are sold outside users group as commercial purpose through auctions.

It shows that forest inventory is not done before harvesting except by CFUGs. Without forest inventory it is not possible to calculate perpetual harvesting amounts/volumes on sustainable basis, which is being practiced from government side. On the other hand, community forest areas are now a part of the local community and feeling of ownership has increased greatly over the last decade. Due to this fact, there could be less or no chances of over harvesting in community forest areas. Albeit, chances of over harvesting could be easily estimated in the national forest area where harvesting processes have carried out by TCN, and other local and national level contractors. CFUGs are not adequately harvesting their respective community forest area due to lack of adequate knowledge on forest harvesting and similarly lack of adequate technical support. Sometimes, ad hoc circulations from the Ministry and Department such as banning in felling green trees have also discouraged them in smooth forest harvesting as per their FOP.

Tools and Equipment used for Forest Harvesting in Nepal

It is obvious that all the process of harvesting, sectioning/logging, collecting and piling of timber and fuel wood at depots has been carried out manually. Traditional tools and equipments have been mainly used in forest harvesting in Nepal. All the agencies of Nepal that are being involved in forest harvesting

manually use locally made tools and equipments. Some of common tools that are being used for forest harvesting in Nepal are: axe, hand saw, framed saw and billhook.



Users Distributing Forest Products from their depot

Felling/harvesting, logging by those traditional tools and equipments resulted in severe losses and damages in both harvested timber and existing vegetation also. Similarly, transportation of timber and fuel wood has been carried out manually through trucks and tractors as well as bullock carts. Loading and unloading as well as logging, sawing and managing sawmills have been carried out manually.

Conclusion

It is high time that the national code of practices for forest harvesting in Nepal be developed and implemented. Forest harvesting is the serious and sensitive aspect of overall forestry development. This is because major issues like; sustainability, bio-diversity conservation, environment and soil conservation has to be addressed. Regarding the forest harvesting practices in Nepal, community forest users groups (CFUGs) are somehow following this scientific process systematically as compared with government and private sector agencies: TCN and contractors. They are adopting selection-felling system in their respective community forest area as per their approved operational plan and demand of the users.

Recommendation

Based on the discussions, following recommendations are suggested for the effective implementation of national code of practices for forest harvesting in Nepal.

- District forest management plan should be prepared based on block division, forest inventory with detail information that clearly guides felling method, approaches, tools and equipments, amounts/ volume etc ensuring sustainability, bio-diversity and soil conservation.
- State should assure CFUGs on their rights instead of issuing ad hoc circulations against their sovereign rights in natural resources management.
- Forest harvesting in national forest areas should be carried out through one door policy instead of giving equal opportunity to both TCN and Contractors (local and national level).
- Improved technology, tools and equipments should be made available to minimize the damages and losses during forest product harvesting.

References:

1. Annual Report, Department of Forest, Nepal, 2003
2. Shambhu Prasad Mainali, Chief of TCN, 2003 (Verbal discussion on 07/11/2003 at his office)
3. Annual Report, Department of Forest, Nepal, 2002