

Watershed Resources Conservation and Community Development: An Attempt¹

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Abstract

This paper tries to review a present trend of policies and strategies of Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management (DSCWM) through a model as adopted by the Community Development and Forest/Watershed Conservation Project - II model, which is adopted in Kaski and Parbat districts of Nepal. This also points out the different partners involving in the Soil Conservation and Watershed Management (SCWM) programme. This also highlights the Community Development and Forest/Watershed Conservation Project (CDFWCP) - II, which is also called as SABIHAA. This is derived from Nepali name **Samudayik Bikas tatha Hariyali Aayojana**. This paper also describes in short the key concepts of the project; its working procedure, and sub-project types and cost sharing mechanism. Experience and lessons learnt from the project and constraints are also described in the paper, which is very valuable for future project designs.

Key Words

Watershed, Resources, Conservation, Management, Community, Development

Introduction

Nepal is one of the most beautiful mountainous countries of South Asian Region situated between People's Republic of China to the north and India to the East, the West and the South. Due to its fragile topography, soil conservation and watershed management has always been facing a challenge. Erosion on the mountains and flooding on the plain terai and inner-terai has caused degradation in environment. It has affected directly to the livelihood of the people.

Nepal is rich in its biological as well as social and cultural bio-diversities. About 83% lands of Nepal are located in hills and mountains areas, where such diversities are tremendously high in comparison to other places of the country. Severe land and environmental degradation has created daunting challenges to the conservation and protection of the diversities of the country. Process of such land and environmental degradation has caused mainly by human activities and the forces of nature. Every year Nepal has lost its dedicated people and their properties due to unwanted causes of landslides and floods, and other natural as well as unnatural disasters.

In order to secure community's life and their properties, DSCWM was established in 1974 under Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (MFSC). Then the department has been planning, implementing and monitoring SCWM activities in the frame of the principles of Integrated Watershed Management and other many modalities according to the nature of the projects.

SCWM Policies and Strategies Adopted by the DSCWM

DSCWM has adopted the following policies and strategies for SCWM:

- Ensure proper land use by rational land use planning,
- Implement integrated SCWM package programs to tackle erosion problems taking a sub-watershed as the unit,
- Ensure multiple uses of land and water to fulfil diverse needs of people,
- Operate SCWM programs in line with integrated watershed management approach and on the basis of watershed conditions,

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- Establish linkage and networking with all other related sectors like forestry, agriculture, livestock, water and land resources,
- Ensure people's participation by developing appropriate technologies and through conservation extension, education and demonstration,
- Adopt ways and means of minimum damage to the environment during the construction of development infrastructures,
- Project watershed near hydroelectric dams, irrigations systems and riverbanks through plantation and other conservation technique,
- Expand and institutionalised SCWM services in all districts of Nepal, and
- Focus on conservation activities in the Siwaliks and other marginal lands.

Involvement of Different Partners in the SCWM Programmes Implementation in Nepal

Under the DSCWM many unilateral to multilateral projects/SCWM programmes are implemented in Nepal with the support of many different partners. The major partners are:

DANIDA (Natural Resources Management Sector Assistance Programme), AusAID (Natural and Community Resources Management Programme), GTZ (Chure Soil Conservation and Watershed Management Programme), CARE Nepal (Chure Siwalik Watershed Management Programme), EU (Bagmati Integrated Watershed Management Programme), JICA (CDFWCP) and HMG/N (SCWM Programme).

The partners are adopted their programmes in the basis of the policies and strategies adopted by DSCWM. However, there may be slight modification or some differences according to projects' modality in implementation of SCWM activities.

Unlike other partners, this JICA funded CDFWCP is directly involving in VDC taking ward as a planning unit for watershed resources conservation and community development bringing the local people together.

Highlights of CDFWCP-II (SABIHAA)

The main aim of this programme is to improve the natural environment and alleviate poverty of hill areas in Nepal through active management of community resources by the people (both men and women). This programme is implemented in the western hilly districts Kaski and Parbat of Nepal since July 1999. The project has designed for five years and has given major emphasis to empower & build the capacity of local people in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating of forest/watershed resources in an equitable and sustainable basis.

For the sake of easily familiarized to local people and their best understanding of the project, CDFWCP keeps it own Nepali name SABIHAA (Samudayik Bikas tatha Hariyali Aayojana), which is also called as Community Development & Greenery Project (CDGP).

Key Concepts of the Programme

Like other participatory resources management projects, SABIHAA has also laid down some key concepts based on the guiding principles of Forest/Watershed Conservation through Community Development. They are:

- Participatory approach,
- Integrated watershed resources management,
- Gender and equity,
- Empowerment,
- Field oriented approach,
- Co-ordination with local governance bodies, and
- Collaboration with NGOs/CBOs.

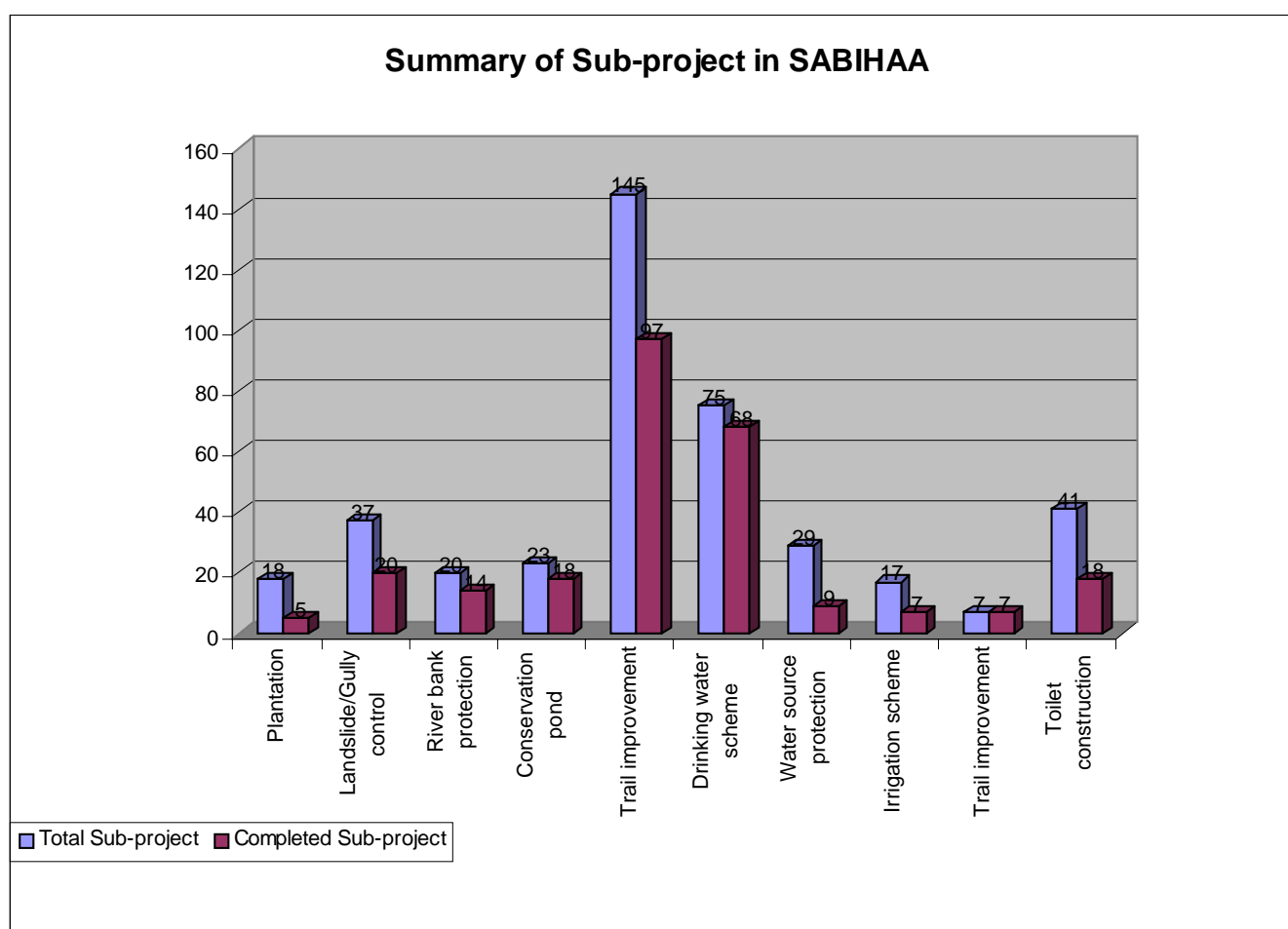
Working Procedure

Ward Conservation Committee (WCC) formation and sub-project planning

Democratically elected ward members of VDC are included in Ward Conservation Committee (WCC) as core members. The DSCO also recommends for including some persons in WCC to implement the planned activities effectively. The DSCO staff co-ordinates the WCC. SABIHAA facilitates the community to form WCC to monitoring and evaluation.

The WCC is at the focal point of project cycle management. It starts from problem identification, planning, and implementation to monitoring and evaluating of all programmes/sub-projects with the due facilitation of Mid Level Technician (MLT) and Community Motivators.

Each WCC mobilizes the people and assesses self-community resources at ward level. The WCC identifies their present conditions, problems and desirable future with due interaction in the community. This process is called 'Community Based Watershed Management Prospects (CBWMP)'. Based on the project support ratio and priority of community needs, each WCC formulates three years' 'Community Resource Management Plan (CRMP) in the programme. Then, based on the CRMP, the WCC prepares their Annual Action Plan (AAP). It also implements sub-projects within the frame of agreement and contract under the rules and regulations mentioned in the Operational Guideline (OG).



Sub-projects Types and Cost Sharing Mechanism

SABIHAA developed cost sharing mechanism based on the experienced gained from the different projects within the department and outside. In participatory and integrated community resource management

approach, people participation and their contribution is indispensable throughout the project cycle. The project support ratio has fixed based on the following considerations.

- Locally available materials versus the materials should purchased by the users or WCC ,
- Unskilled versus skill labour, and
- Nature and types of sub-project.

A simple norm for cost sharing mechanism of project's support to the sub-projects is developed, but which can be adjusted slightly in some sub-projects. The adjustment percentage can vary as per its use for private or community benefits. For example, project support percentage can be reduced in some sub-projects, if it is implement for private benefits. Similarly, the support can be increased in some sub-projects, if it is implement for community benefits. Table 1 shows the cost sharing mechanism of the project.

Table 1. Cost Sharing Mechanism of the Project for its Sub-Projects

Type of sub-project	Project Support Percentage	Adjustment Percentage	
		Private Benefits	Community Benefits
Plantation, Fencing for plantation, etc.	50%		(+10%)
Landslide, Gully control, River bank protection	50%		(+10%)
Conservation pond construction	40%		
Trail improvement	40%		
Drinking water scheme	60%	(-10%)	
Water source protection	50%		
Irrigation scheme	50%		(+10%)
Trail bridge	60%		
Toilet construction	30%	(-10%)	

Experience and Lesson learnt from SABIHAA

Ward as a planning and managing unit watershed resource management

SABIHAA has successfully completed its three years period already. It proves that a ward, which is the basic and minimum representative unit of state and would be an alternative unit for promoting integrated community resource in participatory approach. People of the WCC have the relatively better education, leadership capacity and trust among the local people and able to lead the ward efficiently. Actually, they assess the resources and formulate CRMP on their own initiation. Moreover, they are able to prepare AAP and they can prioritise the problems to implement the sub-projects successfully as per the resource allocation and limitation. It also emphasises the institutionalise planning system at local level.

Ward Conservation Committee and Sustainable local level institution

To mitigate community/natural resource management problem, user groups (or, community based organisations) concept is questionable from the point of institutionally sustainable group at local level. Unlike user group concept, WCC concept is more institutionalise and sustainable in nature since it is composed of democratically elected ward members as the core members. The ward is nationally defined, accepted lowest political unit of the country. Hence, forming WCC seems more permanent in the comparison to other local interest groups.

Co-ordination with local governance body

Under ward-level approach as mentioned above, the concept of coordination with local governance body is closely related to promoting decentralization as mentioned in the project key concept. SABIHAA facilitates

the WCC to strengthen the coordination and collaboration with VDC so as to incorporate ward-level approach into existing local planning system from ward level to district level. In other words, the project will follow the decentralization policy by harmonizing the project framework with a series of existing planning system at local level.

The WCC has an advantage to comparatively easily coordinate with VDC because core members are ward committee members, and ward chairperson is a chairperson or a member of WCC. There is a suitable environment for mutual coordination between the WCC and VDC. Moreover, SABIHAA periodically reports the project progress, in particular a sub-project progress to Kaski and Parbat District Development Committee (DDC) respectively for sharing information and effective program planning.

People's participation in community resource management

To enhance the capacity of the people and to make them more able to understand and solve their own problems by themselves participatory approach is indispensable for sustainable community resource management. When the WCC formulate CBWMP, and make CRMP & AAP, they also prepared cost sharing mechanism and part of people's participation or part of people's contribution. If local users i.e. beneficiaries are fully transparent about project support ratio and details of expensed, it is sure that there is high chance of active people's participation, either of men or women.

Operational Guideline

Like constitutional government, SABIHAA tries to make a 'constitutional project' by developing operational guideline. The operational guideline indicates a right direction in accordance with the project goal and objectives compiling important components for the project operation such as project framework, approach, procedure and practically applied documents or formats. It is unshakable principle among the entire project concerning people that all activities would be conducted under the OG.

Integration of gender and equity

Like other projects, SABIHAA continuously strives to integrate gender and equity into all sub-projects, employing two approaches: one is the WCC composition and the other is POWER program. At present situation 40% the WCC members are from women (1557 women are organized in 87 POWER groups). The equity in the representation of gender as well as considerate caste or ethnic group in the WCC is evoked significantly. They are seen to participate actively in the meeting of the WCC and various other activities too. The major challenge now is that how to increase the participation of those people at decision-making level in community resource management activities.

Constraints

- a. A ward being the sub-division of VDC, it is bounded by geographical area. It not reflects the watershed or catchments area. When the WCC plans their watershed resources at ward level planning, they do not present seriously on the relationship between the upstream and downstream watershed management process. Nevertheless, they mainly focus on their own ward. They do not care much on natural relationship in the natural resources of their sub-watershed.
- b. In Nepal, still there is not much promulgation of law to manage and eternalise the upstream and downstream inhabitants in the watershed management process as well as their involvement for encroachment in the environment degradation process and benefit sharing. To maintain the natural relationships among watershed resources, and to ensure management responsibility and use rights of the local people, government should start a new mechanism soon.

Conclusion

In order to ensure sustainability to maximum extent in accordance with HMG Nepal decentralization policy and DSCWM policy, ward level approach and learning by doing concept and process could greatly contribute to its objectives. SABIHAA is seeking for the best components for participatory community

resource management that is applicable by DSCWM and DSCO of HMG Nepal. As mentioned in this paper, SABIHAA is evolving itself by leaning and absorbing empirical results through working with the community. SABIHAA is seeking for the best model for contributing to sustainable community resource management to be supported by DSCWM and DSCO under learning by doing- concept and process.