

## **What's the Use of Community Forest Management Plans in Nepal?**

**Bijendra Basnyat, Thorsten Treue, and Ridish Pokharel**

This paper documents on the use of management plans in the community forests in Nepal. Intensive field observations were carried in six community forests over a period of two years along with a review of their plans and consultations with executive committee members, forest users, and district forest officials. The results revealed that communities did not manage their forests according to the plans. To them, they were mainly bureaucratic documents required for harvesting forest products. In fact, forest bureaucrats are using the plans to regain control over the forests by including provisions that compelled communities to seek their consent before undertaking any actions related to timber harvesting, marketing of products, general forest operations, plan amendments, etc. Accordingly, community forest management plans mainly serve the interests of bureaucratic control or for establishing or gathering resources for personal or organizational benefits, or both. Hence, current procedures of management planning disempower rather than empowers forest user groups. Reforms in the form of simplification of the current management planning in community forestry is therefore highly relevant.

# What's the Use of Community Forest Management Plans in Nepal?

Bijendra Basnyat<sup>1,2</sup>, Thorsten Treue<sup>2</sup> and Ridish K Pokharel<sup>1</sup>

1 Institute of Forestry, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

2 Department of Food and Resource Economics, Copenhagen University, Denmark

1

## Introduction

---

- More than 19,000 community forests are managed through plans
- However, the relevance of these management plans in forest management is still questionable
  - Expensive, time consuming & poor quality (Rutt et al., 2015)
  - Ensuring control/Elite capture (Nightingale, 2005; Ojha et al., 2014)
- So, what's the actual use of CF management plans?

2

## Research questions

### How are community forest management plans used in Nepal?

- Are the plans implemented as prescribed ?
  - If not, why?
- What purposes do the plans serve, if forest user groups don't use them to manage their community forest?

3

## Methods

- **Case study – Six community forests**
  - Commercial CF – 3 (Selling timber outside the group ((market))
  - Subsistence CF – 3 (Not selling timber outside the group)
- **Intensive field observations** – Two years (Dec, 2014 - Dec, 2016)
- **Content analysis of plans** - Proposed interventions/practices
- **Stakeholders interactions** – Formal & informal
  - CFUG leaders, Forest Officials, Forest user group members, project staff
- **Focus group discussions**



## Are Plans Implemented?

- **Plans are poorly followed**
  - *Do you need to refer to a recipe, if you know how to cook good food?*
  - *Our forest is improving, why should we bother with the plan?*
- **Users' decide what to do**
  - Governed by "un-written rules"
  - Generally decided during "meetings of committee members" (semi-collective choice)



***"A plan is like a tiger in a zoo to show others ! We have something important and beautiful" – User leaders***

## .... Implemented?

- **Forest management –**  
***"Simply harvesting of the trees"***
  - Forestry operations as described in the plans are considered as *"ingredients of no use"*
  - Forestry operations like *"festival that comes every year, a cause for celebration"*
- **Funds are used according to communities priority**
  - *"Do we need the plan to tell our priority or what we need?"*

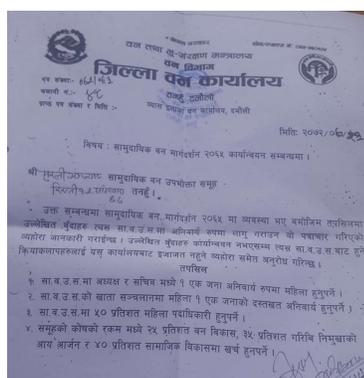


## Why Plans are not Implemented?

- Simply “a bureaucratic document” to access forest resources
  - If we don't have a plan, we cannot harvest green trees
- Detachment from local context – Super imposed
  - We got a cookbook – we agree as we get at free
- Inadequate capacity of forest bureaucracy
  - Limited staff, budget : The number of CFs increase every year but not the budget



## .... not Implemented?



- Superfluous guidelines undermining plans
  - “Never say no to the boss” – Guideline/circular matters
- Disbelief on plan, “procedure matters” – “Stay dormant or play safe”
  - Proper paper documentation “Paper saves us: Not the plan”
  - Avoidance strategy - “Simply listening not acting”

## What purpose then?

- **Exclusion/Illusion/Elite capture**
  - *You need a competent person to implement plan? Don't you think I am?*
- **Justifying own existence/organizational interests**
  - *Can we manage forests without plan?*
  - *Where is forestry in community forest?*
- **Mainstreaming official & un-official rules**
  - *The management plans appear more powerful than Forest Act*
  - *Political reasons – fear of losing official power*



## ... then?



- **Financial incentives for the persons involved**
  - *Personal benefits/incentives to all (Forest officials, users committee)*
- **Garnering funds from donor funded projects**
  - *Plans must be updated but the GoN has insufficient funds)*
- **Ensuring political sustainability of intervention**
  - *We get our development project priorities included in the management plans by covering the costs of plan preparation*

## Conclusion

- Community forest management plans are hardly used in the management decisions
- The plans are used either for establishing or gathering resources for personal or organizational benefits, or both
- The current procedures of management planning disempowers rather than empowers forest user groups
- Reforms in the form of simplification of the current management planning in community forestry is therefore highly relevant

11

Forest Policy and Economics xxx (xxxx) xxx-xxx



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

**Forest Policy and Economics**

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/forpol](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/forpol)



**Legal-sounding bureaucratic re-centralisation of community forestry in Nepal**

Bijendra Basnyat<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Thorsten Treue<sup>b</sup>, Ridish Kumar Pokharel<sup>a</sup>, Lok Nath Lamsal<sup>a</sup>, Santosh Rayamajhi<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Institute of Forestry, Hariyo Kharka, Pokhara 33700, Nepal  
<sup>b</sup> Department of Food and Resource Economics, Faculty of Science, University of Copenhagen, Rolighedsvej 25, DK-1958, Frederiksberg C, Denmark

---

**Acknowledgement**

**Science and Power in Participatory Forestry Project (13-05KU)** funded by  
 Consultative Research Committee for Development Research under the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs



**Thank You**