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Social Structure, Livelihoods and the Management of Common Pool Resources in Nepal

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CF	Community Forestry
CPR	Common Pool Resources
DDC	District Development Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
DFO	District Forest Office
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users in Nepal
HMGN	His Majesty's Government of Nepal
LFP	Livelihoods Forestry Project/Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NORMS	Natural and Organisational Resources Management Services
ODG	Overseas Development Group, University of East Anglia
OFMP	Operational Forest Management Plan
VDC	Village Development Committee
WATCH	Woman Acting Together for Change (NGO)

1 Executive Summary

The aim of this research was to explore the links between new systems of management of common pool resources and the existing social and political relations around natural resource use in selected sites in the Terai in order to understand how these new systems were affecting resource access for different social groups. The research focused on collecting information on the livelihoods of different social groups and their access to forests and forest products and sought to detail the way in which these different groups access the resources they need to build and sustain their livelihoods. While recognising the small scale of this research, the intention was to contribute to the work of programmes and projects, such as the Livelihood Forestry Project, that seek to develop more effective approaches for the livelihood enhancement of poor women and men.

The outputs of the research are:

1. The development of a framework elaborating the linkages between social and economic processes and natural resource access.
2. An increase in understanding of the implications of existing social and economic processes for changes in natural resource management, including benefit sharing.
3. Suggestions for ways to increase the opportunities for vulnerable groups to access benefits from common pool resources to be integrated into specific plans for improved CPR management.
4. Enhanced local capacity to link social, economic and technical concerns in developing and promoting changes in natural resource management.

Within the Western Terai, the management of forest and other resources by communities varies according to the ecology and type of forest, the degree of responsibility handed over to communities and the social composition of the communities. To capture this variation research was undertaken through intensive investigations in five Village Development Committee areas (VDCs) selected so as to represent key social and natural resource management issues in the study districts of Nawalparasi and Rupandehi. The main methods used in the research combined participatory research tools with key informant interviews.

The Project purpose level OVIs focus on the production of the framework, increasing understanding of the social embedded nature of natural resource, management and the building of local capacity. These have been largely achieved.

An analytical framework that draws attention to key factors and their inter-relations in determining potential outcomes from community forestry in the Terai has been produced. Strong evidence that in practice the external environment greatly restricts the room for manoeuvre of FUGs and that there is a major disjuncture between the rhetoric of FUG formation and the reality of FUG operation has been documented. The research has identified a crucial role of forest value in driving perverse outcomes that limit the prospects for establishing effective and equitable FUGs and shown strong evidence of the policies of FUGs (access restriction, price of membership and mechanisms for product allocation) being insensitive to the livelihoods of the poor and causing distributional bias. The uncovering of the hidden economy of FUGs related to transactions and subsidies, driven by forest value and resulting in institutional instability has been a significant finding.

However, there is no evidence at present that the framework in its entirety has been practically deployed but it is too early to judge. However the take-up by the LFP of key aspects of the framework – calculation of forest value, investigation of distributional policies

in their own field sites – is clear evidence of the understanding and its significance being incorporated into practice. In addition ICIMOD is using the findings in relation to its broader regional study on common pool resource management NORMS learnt a substantial amount from the research process and their capability in this area has led to them being commissioned for related work.

The contribution of the project to the attainment of the NRSP purpose of 'delivering new knowledge that enables poor people who are largely dependent on the NR base to improve their livelihoods' has been to provide new understanding of how FUGs actually operate in the Terai provide both new knowledge and an assessment of participatory processes. However within the project period this new knowledge and assessments have not been applied. There is the potential for this to happen but given the current political context of Nepal, and the key role of the Forestry Department in implementing changes, this is not realistic. If this knowledge were to be applied leading to greater authority for FUGs and more effective policy and management instruments (including greater attention to the interaction between human capital, meaningful participation and equitable outcomes) for promoting distributional equity, then the poor who draw livelihood benefits from forest resources would derive greater benefits.

2 Background

A large number of in-depth case studies have highlighted the potential and the actual contributions rural communities can make to natural resource management in developing countries (Ostrom 1990; Baland and Platteau 1996). The likelihood that collective action will be effective is circumscribed by the characteristics of the resources and communities in question and much research effort has been geared towards identifying these characteristics (Baland and Platteau 1996). But, to date, the crucial relations between resource and community characteristics and pivotal outcomes have remained virtually unexplored. A salient example of this neglect, providing an entry point for our research, is the failure to systematically uncover the implications for participatory or decentralised natural resource management of the contrasts between forest resources and communities in the Middle Hills and in the Terai in Nepal. At the moment, community forestry policy in Nepal is based on experiences from the hills and a policy that advocates transfer of managerial responsibility of, in particular, the valuable hardwood forests in the Terai must be informed by reasonable conjectures about the local processes and outcomes such a hand-over is likely to stimulate. Drawing on primary data from forestry user groups in two Districts of West Central Terai, the findings of this research show that neglecting pivotal aspects of these contrasts may lead to serious policy mistakes.

Effective protection of the forest resource through participatory management is no guarantee of an equitable distribution of benefits nor is it evidence of a management system that provides a balanced utilisation of local resources. In a context where about 40 percent of the population live below the poverty line and livelihoods are biomass based, few questions would seem more worthy of research attention than who the winners and losers from community forestry have turned out to be. The research findings suggest that as community forestry in the Terai continues to gain momentum, the present policy may not be viable, as it ignores the often complex challenges associated with establishing effective and equitable user groups in the Terai.

The Terai region is made up of a 26 to 32 kilometre wide belt of fertile plain along the southern part of Nepal. Twelve million people, nearly half of Nepal's population, live in the 17 Districts that make up the Terai. There are a number of problems that face the proponents of community forestry in the Terai, not only the conflict between those who wish to manage

the forest for timber production with local people with more diverse needs, alluded to above, but also the heterogeneity of the Terai population, the product of the massive settlement that has taken place of people from all over Nepal, and parts of India, who have come in search of fertile land on which to settle. This has made defining 'communities' – or groups to which forest might be handed over – a challenging task. Another factor is that the majority of people in the Terai live at some distance from the forest but are forest users. (Baral and Subedi 2000: 20).

The positive impact of community forest management on livelihoods in the Terai has not been widely demonstrated, and there is little real justification for thinking that what has been achieved in terms of the formation of Forest User Groups necessarily has pro-livelihood consequences. While the positive impact of communities' management on the state of the forest have been demonstrated in the hills in Nepal (Gilmour and Fisher 1991, Hobley 1996, FAO 1999), even here evidence of improved livelihoods at the level of individual households is less clear and concern is being expressed that poor and vulnerable groups, including women, are not involved in decision-making and have not benefited from any improved management systems (Springate-Baginski *et al.* 2001). Often local forest managers/management groups have prioritised conservation and paid less attention to management and sustainable pro-livelihood systems of use. This is now the main concern of the Department of Forest, as well as of donors and other agencies involved in forest management in Nepal. Springate-Baginski and colleagues, in their earlier NRSP project (*ibid.*), tried to address this problem and developed a tole-level planning process referred to as Micro-Action-Planning. A whole range of social and economic questions are now being asked about benefit sharing and are under investigation in Nepal and other countries (Mayers and Bass 1999).

Questions also revolve around the sustainability of any livelihood improvements and the overall livelihood security of poorer groups once a change in management for one particular resource is implemented. The Terai in Nepal is, as has been noted above, very mixed socially, in terms of caste, class and ethnicity. We know that individuals and groups use interventions to maintain or improve their own livelihood circumstances (see Long and Long 1992) and unless sufficient attention is given to the needs and interests of different categories of people, it is unlikely that participatory approaches based on the need for consensus will be possible, let alone, sustainable.

This research project was conducted over an 18 month period by the Overseas Development Group of the University of East Anglia and Natural and Organisational Resources Management Services, Kathmandu, with contributions from the Central Department of Geography, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. The Royal Palace massacre in June 2001 and the Declaration of a State of Emergency in November 2001, considerably delayed research. The project period was supposed to be for 24 months, but because the project had to suspend activities for six months because of the political instability in Nepal the research had to be completed in 18 months, this considerably disrupted the timetable for this project. This meant that fieldwork was completed only three months before the project end and that the testing of the framework has not been possible.

3 Project Purpose

The research set out to investigate the linkages between current and proposed new systems of management of common pool resources, linked to the introduction of Community Forestry in the Terai², and prevailing social and political relations around natural resource use. It was based on an understanding that even new systems of resource management are embedded within existing social and political relations and the knowledge of such relations is essential for the design and implementation of effective and equitable institutional arrangements. The research focused on collecting information on the livelihoods of different social groups and their access to forests and forest products.³ The research also sought to detail the way in which institutional structures and relationships among users, and with Department of Forest staff, influence the ways in which forest resources are managed and exploited.

This project sought to understand the management of the forest within wider processes of social exchange. The research explored whether changes in management, brought about by shifts in Government policy, in-migration, or other socio-economic and political events have increased the vulnerability of poorer and marginal groups that depend on others for their livelihood security.

This investigation of the links between social structure, patterns of resource access and use, and poverty in specific social contexts provides information needed to examine more closely the implications of the structure and functioning of new common pool resource management regimes for particular social groups. Since common pool resources are widely seen to be vital for the livelihood building activities of poorer groups, and for women, the investigation contributes to enhancing the poverty focus initiatives already being undertaken in the FAI of Nepal, but also in other locations.

The original purpose of the project located the research in the mid-hills of Nepal. The Project purpose was changed from a mid-hills focus to a *Siwaliks* focus (Oct 2001) and, later (April 2002), to a focus on the forested hills south of the *Siwaliks* as result of security concerns relating to political instability in Nepal. This change was agreed with NRSP PM in the months given. This did not change the project in terms of working at the interface between a natural resource, its management and people and social structures.

² The current and new 'systems of management', through Community Forestry Forest User Groups, are well established in parts of Nepal, particularly in parts of the Mid-Hills. In the Terai the formation of Forest User Groups has been slower, so the systems of management are still quite new. See Paudel and Pokharel (2001).

³ Strictly speaking the forest contains resources which do not become products until something is done to them which creates value. Messerschmidt and Hammett (1998) prefer the generic terms 'resources' and also question the timber / non timber product terminology. For the purposes of this report, the term 'products' and 'resources' are used interchangeably.

4 Outputs

The project outputs were:

- To develop and test a framework elaborating the linkages between social and economic processes and natural resource access and use in specific locations.
- To increase and promote the understanding of the implications of existing social and economic processes for proposed changes in natural resource management including benefit sharing amongst target institutions and more widely.
- To explore ways to increase the opportunities for vulnerable groups to access benefits of common pool resources integrated into specific plans for their improved management.
- To enhance local capacity to link social, economic and technical concerns in developing and promoting changes in natural resource management.

4.1 A framework elaborating the linkages between social and economic processes and natural resource access and use in specific locations developed and tested.

The Process of Developing the Framework.

This output was seen to have three OVIs listed below, with MoVs derived from Project Reports, a Framework document, Workshop reports and Case Study reports.

- (a) By month 5 a draft a framework developed, discussed by the Working Group, distributed widely amongst stakeholders and presented at a seminar.
- (b) Framework used for developing a detailed plan for data collection and analysis to begin in November 2001.
- (c) Framework tested by stakeholders in project workshop by month 18 and case studies documented and circulated by month 24

As explained above in Section 2. the time frame for the project had to be collapsed and this led to a rescheduling of activities and reduced engagement by the ODG team in field work.

An initial checklist which was intended should lead into the elaboration of the framework was prepared in February 2002 (see Annex A, Attachment 3.1). This checklist was basically a detailed list of key points around major headings, each of which had a specified purpose. This checklist was discussed in detail with both NORMS and the LFP, which was also in the process of designing a baseline survey of FUGs in its three districts in the Terai.

This checklist provided the basis for the fieldwork in the first set of sites. A subsequent review of the progress in its use (based on an assessment of the data and understanding that had been generated) led to its modification and refinement and to a focussing down on key issues.

In the first comparative review of the site data undertaken in September 2002, it was clear from the discussions that a number of key issues were emerging that were crucial to an understanding of how FUGs were operating and how the outcomes were being determined. On the basis of this review a completely new framework was drafted to take account of these issues (relating largely to the external institutional context, Annex A, Attachment 3.3).

This draft was discussed extensively with interested parties, and in particular with the LFP project and ICIMOD, leading to further modifications. It was also used to identify key areas in which comparative analysis across the sites was required, leading to further data collection

in the sites and the hunting down of crucial secondary information, particularly in relation to resource values, constitutions and operational plans of FUGs.

The emerging analysis of these secondary data and the further field work contributed to further development of the framework. Additional information relating to FUG hidden economies led to greater attention being given to distributional consequences of FUG decisions and this new element was incorporated. Debate and discussions have led to further modifications in attempts to sharpen and clarify some of the concepts used in the framework. An original framing of outcomes between technical and governance were replaced with a focus on ‘control’ and the extent of control although these relate closely to the issues of governance (or not) identified in the first draft. This draft was presented in the Final Workshop. Key issues that emerged from the discussion were questions of how it related to other frameworks, how it was developed and clarification of terms and ideas. The version in the initial Final Report (Annex A, attachment 3.3) received comment from the Final Report NRSP referees and it has subsequently been refined.

In summary the development of framework informed fieldwork which in turn contributed to its elaboration. Thus rather than a reductionist framework organising field evidence, the framework is firmly evidence based although theoretically informed. In the original sense the framework has not been tested but it is already clear that through its attention to actual processes and causalities it has brought an analytical focus to understanding the conditions that shape FUG performance and outcomes. It is immensely encouraging the Terai forest adviser for the LFP project stated at the final workshop that he would be taking the evidence and analysis back to the field to apply it, something which LFP has since confirmed by email as they follow-up on our findings.

The Framework

By employing the term ‘framework’ we do not suggest, from a deterministic or engineering viewpoint, that this is a rigid structure that mechanically will explain all and can be used as a decision making framework. It focuses more on understanding how things actually are (rather than what needs to be done) and using this for the starting point to consider how change can be brought about. It is particularly concerned with generating understanding of casual mechanisms – the relation between contextual factors, internal community based dynamics and outcomes.

Our framework is schematic and drawing from a ‘drivers of change agenda’ (see Annex A, Chapter 5) is comprised of the key components of structure, institutions and agents. It serves to identify some of the key ways in which livelihood opportunities (which can be seen as outcomes) from common pool resources for the poor are being effectively limited by processes external and internal to a community. A key lesson from the research that starkly contrasts with the emphasis on the rules and practice of governance within FUGs that is found in much research on community forestry (see Blair, 1996; Dahal, 1994; Pokharel, 1997) is that attention must be paid to processes external to the FUG. These processes may restrict the extent to which FUGs are able to become genuine community based organisations that present opportunities and deliver benefits to all their members. At the same time they may offer openings which can be readily captured by a community elite.

Figure 1 summarises the framework. This framework is structured around what are seen to be the key ‘drivers’ operating external to the community and within it and how these condition outcomes. There is an explicit hierarchy in the drivers (particularly in the top row) – we believe for example that questions of resource value or decisions and processes which determine where communities may participate are first order and establish a FUG’s room for

manoeuvre. Once these higher and exogenous drivers have been configured, it may become difficult for drivers lower down the hierarchy, for example effective participatory processes, to substantially alter agendas and outcomes. There is therefore an implicit hierarchy at the vertical (column) level, particularly for the external drivers and outcomes. There are for instance intimate links between resource value, attributes of FUG hidden economies and outcomes such as institutional instability and distributional equity.

Figure 1. Framework for the analysis of linkages between processes external and internal to communities and outcomes, with respect to common pool resource access and use.

‘Drivers’ external to the community	↔	‘Drivers’ internal to the community	↔	Outcomes
↓↑ Resource Market Value		↓↑ Established or dynamic immigrant?		↓↑ Attributes of FUG hidden economy
↓↑ Area for Community Forestry		↓↑ Socio-economic heterogeneity		↓↑ Distributional equity
↓↑ Legal or Encroachment rights		↓↑ Access Restrictions (a) Price of membership (b) Access rules		↓↑ Institutional stability
↓↑ Degree of participation in FUG formation process		↓↑ Other FUG Policies		↓↑ Environmental change
↓↑ Product & Protection or livelihood oriented				

For this reason the external drivers are positioned to the left and before what are seen to be the community level drivers; in tandem these determine outcomes. The framework should not be seen as entirely deterministic. The external environment is not omnipotent, all drivers may not necessarily work in the same direction and communities are far from helpless. It is for instance quite possible for communities (and individuals) to circumvent various aspects of official regulations (see Annex A, Chapters Six and Seven). But it is argued, looking from the perspective of the existing configuration of external drivers, that there are a number of factors that make it extremely challenging for community forest to generate significant pro-poor benefits (Annex A, Chapter Eight).

4.2 Understanding of the implications of existing social and economic processes for proposed changes in natural resource management including benefit sharing increased and promoted amongst target institutions and more widely.

While the public text on community forestry in Nepal is based, largely, on experiences from the Hills, the findings of this research highlight contrasts between communities and resources in the Terai and the Hills, on the one hand and the discrepancy between rhetoric and reality in community forestry in Nepal, on the other.

While the theoretical and empirical literature on decentralised management has identified a vast number of characteristics of resources and communities conducive to effective management of common pool resources, the findings of this research indicate that a policy advocating the transfer of managerial responsibility of, in particular, the valuable hardwood forests in the Terai must be informed by reasonable conjectures about the local processes such a handover is likely to spur.

Drawing on evidence from forestry user groups in two Districts in West Central Terai, this research found that neglecting the implications of high forest value on the prospects for establishing effective and equitable forest user groups may lead to serious policy mistakes. Much caution should therefore accompany attempts to project lessons from community forestry in the Hills onto the Terai.

The research analysis presented in Annex 2, Chapters Five to Seven, evolves around an analytical framework which recognises that the external environment in which FUGs operate determines, to a large extent, a user group's room for manoeuvre, such as the areas set aside for community forestry, the degree of participation in FUG formation processes, and definitions of users and the allowable timber cut. Forest value is an important driver and provides a key to understanding problems of distributional bias and institutional instability within Terai FUGs.

Decentralisation in forest management in the Terai is distinctly incomplete and the Department of Forest continues to play a role as the custodians of the forests rather than as supporters and facilitators of participatory processes with forest dependent communities. The story uncovered by this research varies across the study sites, but often contains elements of serious regulatory failure.

The research brought out the tremendous variation in forest values across the study sites, providing background information that allows policy makers and others to judge the potential for common pool resources in making a difference to the well-being of the poor. While this potential in some sites is considerable, it is very limited elsewhere. The research uncovered that the introduction of community forestry and the autonomous policies adopted by FUGs, such as access restrictions, price of membership and mechanisms for forest product allocation were distinctly insensitive to livelihoods and other needs of poor households. The study observed a distinct discrepancy between actual FUG formation and handover processes, on the one hand, and the formal process requirements spelt out in the guidelines for FUG formation, on the other. Moreover, access restrictions were routinely introduced without any consideration for potentially adverse impacts on poor households with CPR-intensive livelihoods.

A pressing issue, uncovered by the research, is how greater equity in benefit sharing can be accomplished. While the literature on CPR-management provides valuable guidance about institutional mechanisms conducive to sustainable resource management, insights into how more equitable outcomes may be achieved are harder to come by. While protagonists of the CF approach in Nepal might argue that this is a matter of right process, the notion of meaningful participation in complex user groups pose a big challenge to such a view. Conventional training for participation and empowerment in some Terai sites may fall well short of being an effective vehicle for securing *meaningful* participation. The interaction between human capital and more equitable outcomes may be particularly strong in such groups because of the complexity involved in ensuring transparent and accountable management, monitoring and reporting systems.

With timber being by far the most valuable forest product, policies for redistribution need to focus on how a fairer sharing of benefits from this product can be achieved. The identification of potential reforms can use the concept of the FUG hidden economy, (see Annex 2, page 10 for a detailed explanation of this concept), as a useful starting point. The perverse aspects of these hidden economies provide a powerful illustration of persistent FUG-vulnerability to elite capture. This is in spite of a surface impression of complex and organisationally advanced user groups.⁴ We argue that informed efforts to rectify this vulnerability will be crucial for building viable and equitable user groups in the Terai.

The two facets of the hidden economy, transactions and subsidies, require different remedial measures. As the Rajahar site report illustrates (Annex 2, Appendix 5), the current window of opportunity for illegal harvesting is quite limited and should be possible to bring under control. The same example demonstrates the importance of extremely detailed local knowledge for identifying remedies. The same site report also shows that verifying embezzlement may be a hard task even for well-educated and specially selected auditors. This example provides a useful reminder of the complexities associated with ensuring transparency in organisations with substantial annual revenues and costs.

The problem of hidden subsidies must be addressed in other ways and the current mechanism for allocating timber requires a radical rethink. Enhancing awareness of the serious biases in current systems is one way to begin to address this challenge, but alternative mechanisms for allocating the rights to annual timber benefits need to be identified.

As described below in Section 7, these findings have fed into the ongoing work of the Livelihoods Forestry Project (LFP)

4.3 Ways to increase the opportunities for vulnerable groups to access benefits of common pool resources integrated into specific plans for their improved management.

We summarise below the key issues arising from the findings of this research in relation to increasing opportunities for improving benefits from common pool resources for poor people.

1. A fundamental increase in opportunities for vulnerable groups to access common pool resources can only be achieved by recognising that community forestry must be addressed as an issue of the decentralisation of management of CPRs and not simply one of shared access. This would require a fundamental policy change: it is not clear that this is either realistic or

⁴ As noted, the scale of hidden transactions in Dhuseri has become more severe in recent years, undermining ideas of linear progress and evolving institutional maturity.

feasible even in the medium term and broader institutional changes would be required for it to lead to increased access for the poor.

2. The opportunities for CPRs to contribute to the livelihoods of the poor may be considerable in resource rich areas and very limited in resource poor areas.

3. The research findings strongly indicate that the livelihood interests of the vulnerable groups suffer severe access restriction. Potential instruments for addressing this could be found through effective implementation of the guidelines for FUG formation. Reform of the guidelines for operational plans would also be required.

4. While concerns over equity feature prominently in the discourse on community forestry in Nepal there is a serious absence of systematic evaluation of distributional outcomes of FUG policies and this needs to be addressed both in terms of documentation and policy responses.

5. There are limited opportunities to redress the inequalities that have been established between FUGs with respect to the resource values that they now control.

6. The notion of community is highly problematic in the discourse on CF in Nepal. Wishing away the presence of often intense rivalry could undermine the case for social forestry. It is necessary to look beyond the public text.

7. In contexts where organisations are complex and control substantial resources, it is difficult to achieve meaningful participation in communities in which a significant proportion of its members have few assets, particularly of education.

4.4 Local capacity to link social, economic and technical concerns in developing and promoting changes in natural resource management enhanced.

The decision to locate the research in the area in which the DFID-funded Livelihoods and Forestry Project (LFP) enabled us to feed the findings directly into LFP's on-going work. The case studies have contributed significantly to LFP staff's understanding of the complexity of Terai natural resource management and the VDCs and CFs, as well as providing methodologies that can be applied to their research of all the other CFs in our districts. In particular they are attempting to make value estimations per household for all CFs and potential new CFs, something that had not been done in the past.

The LFP Terai Adviser and colleagues have been particularly interested in the material on hidden subsidies within FUGs due to their distorted distribution systems. This issue has since been drawn to the attention of other Projects in Nepal by LFP staff and discussed at other workshops about CF equity, and an awareness is building that current practices are inequitable, and badly so. Again LFP is following our lead to see the full extent of hidden subsidies in all the FUGs in our districts. It is intended that this will then be brought to the attention of all stakeholders, and it is envisaged that changes in FUGs distribution systems will follow.⁵

The LFP has also taken up the finding that the contention that outside factors impact on FUGs is important to determine entry points for improving CFs. The LFP staff agree that

⁵ Personal communication from James Bampton, LFP Terai Forestry Adviser, email 20/6/03.

without tackling these external factors, progress in improving CF functioning will be slow and less effective than it could be.

As originally planned both ODG and NORMS would have jointly carried out the project fieldwork. The suspension of project activities for six months, not only led to a shifting in the scheduling of the project activities but also a major change in the way the project was implemented. DFID/British Government travel restrictions imposed in 2002 meant that it was not possible for the ODG team to spend extensive periods in the field with the NORMS team and the balance of responsibility for undertaking the research shifted from joint implementation to one in which NORMS played the major role.

This shift meant that the ODG team came to play much more of an advisory and support role to NORMS than had been originally envisaged and effectively output 4 became rewritten to relate to team capacity building specifically for some NORMS staff. Key points to note about the research support process were the series of visits by the ODG team at key stages of research – built largely around the completion of field research at a set of sites. Following each field visit and drawing on the materials prepared by NORMS, site reports were drafted by the ODG team, issues and gaps in information identified and circulated for comment and debate. The increasing quality of these site reports and the subsequent comparative analysis carried out by NORMS staff, and the recruitment of key field research staff into the complement of NORMS staff could all be taken as indicators of capacity building processes. The fact that this final report has been written by ODG reflects, of course, language issues.

Subsequent to the final workshop, two separate agencies have advised that they would commission NORMS to undertake further work on the analysis of social forestry regimes. One of these (Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project) has already contacted NORMS and the second, the Terai forestry adviser for the DFID funded LFP project is likely to ask NORMS for assistance in the analysis and interpretation on a broader survey that they have carried out on social forestry in the Terai. These could both be regarded as early (and possibly the strongest) indicators of the extent to which NORMS, as a relatively new NGO has built its capacity as a result of the joint research project. It is also indicative of an interest and relevance of the findings from this research.

5 Research Activities

The research programme can be divided into eight stages:

- Stage 1:* Collection and analysis of secondary data
- Stage 2:* Creation of research frame with data from stage one
- Stage 3:* Selection of field sites
- Stage 4:* Design of main field research
- Stage 5:* Selection and training of field researchers
- Stage 6:* Fieldwork
- Stage 7:* Synthesis, analysis of findings and framework development
- Stage 8:* Dissemination of findings

5.1.1 Stage 1: Collection and analysis of secondary data

A literature review on community forestry and common pool resources in Nepal was compiled during 2001 (Pant 2002).⁶ District statistics and information relating to livelihoods, social indicators, migration, governance and institutions were collated and synthesised (NORMS 2002). Maps of the research districts showing land capability, land use, population distribution and location of community forests were also prepared using GIS data.

5.1.2 Stage 2: Creation of research frame with data from Stage 1

Secondary data on VDCs were collated according to topography, the presence of forest, and the existence of FUGs, both registered and under formation. Data on registered Forest User Groups in the research districts from the existing national data base were also collated. This included information on name, location, date of registration, area controlled, and number of households. A ranking of VDCs in relation to area and households was prepared. Based on district maps (prepared by the Geography Department) which located the VDC and the location of VDCs containing FUGs (Community Forest user groups) and the number of FUGs per VDC, a draft protocol for village selection for the research was prepared (Annex 2 Box 3.1, page 23).

5.1.3 Stage 3: Selection of field sites

Five VDCs were selected as research sites using a combination of the research sample frame, local knowledge, and preliminary field trips. The selection procedure combined systematic and purposive sampling methods so as to select a set of VDCs with a combination of features that would include the main kinds of resources and situations in the two districts.⁷ The most important of these were:

Community forestry: presence of functioning Forest User Groups (FUGs), at different stages of development and formalisation; differences in the value of forest resource and potential for commercialisation, in accessibility, and in size of user groups.

Buffer zone: 1 site (Rajahar) was selected in the buffer zone of the Royal Chitwan National Park in Nawalparasi district.

Southern Terai: one site (Harpur) was selected to illustrate the very different resource regimes and constraints in the southern parts of the district.

Wetlands: 2 sites were selected to include wetlands: a relatively small pond in Harpur, and a larger water body in Suryapura.

All potential sites were visited at least once to gauge their suitability and the feasibility of undertaking research there. Factors considered included the representativeness of the site and the willingness of the community to accept a research team. Table 1 lists the sites finally selected, as well as the main research issues that presented themselves in each.

⁶ This review focuses on Nepal in general and does not look specifically at the Terai because the bulk of this work was done when we still hoped to work in the mid-hills of Nepal.

⁷ See maps in Annex 2, Appendix 1, pp. 1-139 to 1-147.

Table 1: Study sites

No	Distr	Village Development Committee (VDC)	Situation	Key community resources examined	Issues
1	N-p	Makar, Jahada	Main road, market town	Unregistered Community Forests (CF)	CF boundaries, ward & ethnic inclusiveness; complex settlement
2	N-p	Harpur	Southern Terai, no forest	Wetlands, canal-side tree planting	Political conflict in committee
3	N-p	Rajahar	Buffer zone for conservation area; high value forests	Community forests	Diversity; complexity in CF management; institutional instability, rent-seeking
4	R-d	Suryapura	Southern Terai, interior	Wetlands; handed over forest, 'under process' forest	VDC politics, community-contractor conflict
5	R-d	Devdaha	Main Road, Market town	Handed over CF	High value forest, though heavily cleared, involvement of NGOs; participatory processes

N-p = Nawalparasi; R-d = Rupandehi

5.1.4 Stage 4: Design of field research

The project data collection methods were predominantly qualitative. They included individual, household and group interviews and discussions, and participant observation, including attendance at meetings.

An extended checklist (see attachment 3.1, page 33) was developed to guide the investigators. Brief forest resources inventories (species, age, density, etc.) of community forests were also undertaken.

A wide range of stakeholders, including HMGN Department of Forest and other natural resource management agencies, NGOs, district administrators and politicians, LFP and other projects working in the Terai and DFID advisers in Kathmandu were consulted. A consultative workshop for potential research users was held before the start of the research to discuss objectives, approach, and methods. Meetings were held regularly with potential research users particularly at the debriefing stage from each research phase.⁸

5.1.5 Stage 5: Selection and orientation of field researchers

The selection and training of field researchers was vital to the success of the research. A team of eight graduates was selected, four women and four men. They were trained through an intensive eight day course which covered the objectives of the research, the areas of investigation, and participatory methodologies. The field investigators were provided with

⁸ The summary record of these consultations is contained in the Project internal reports (see Final Technical Report, Part 8 for a list of these reports). NORMS documented District level meetings in the form of internal memos in Nepali, translating salient points into English for ODG team members.

guidelines that listed the main areas of investigation. In addition the team worked together ('learning by doing') in the first two sites, Makar and Harpur, in order to strengthen teamwork and gain field experience.

5.1.6 Stage 6: Fieldwork

Field research took place in three phases between April and December 2002.

5.1.7 Stage 7: Synthesis, analysis and development of the framework

Field researchers and NORMS/ODG researchers met for three to eight days after each phase of field research to debrief and synthesise findings, prepare a draft report, and draw out lessons for the subsequent phase of field research. Each of the synthesis stages was supported by a member of the ODG team and combined with a field visit to the site.

The analytical framework was developed over the duration of the project (as explained about in 4.1). The RDI proposed that by month 5 of the project a draft framework would have been developed and discussed and then used for developing a detailed plan of data collection and analysis. The framework would then be tested by stakeholders and case studies prepared. The process did not proceed exactly as planned. Firstly the conditions of political instability both delayed the start of the project and because an extension of the project was not allowed beyond its original completion date, time periods for activities had to be collapsed and re-sequenced. In addition because of the DFID/British Government travel restrictions which affected ODG researchers, NORMS came to play a much greater role in the fieldwork than had been anticipated and this meant a rethink on the role of ODG and less of an involvement in the fieldwork. Secondly the emerging lessons from the fieldwork led to a radical rethink on the nature of the issues that were emerging, and a broader framework had to be elaborated to take account of the external context of the FUGs, if the internal processes were to be properly situated.

5.1.8 Stage 8: Dissemination of findings

Regular discussions were held with interested parties during the course of the fieldwork. The project gave a presentation on the research to a two-day workshop on 'Learning from Community Forestry' organised by CIFOR and the Department of Forestry on September 10-11 2001. NORMS held a debriefing workshop at the district level on completion of the fieldwork in November 2002.⁹ A final workshop was held in Kathmandu in April 2003 to present the findings and representatives from a wide range of interest groups (projects, NGOs and donors) were invited. The discussions from that workshop were fed into the analysis of the findings, presented in Annex 2.

A list of planned publications appears in section 8 of this report. In addition, NORMS is currently producing a Nepali summary of the findings to be used by the LFP. They are also writing a short piece in Nepali on hidden subsidies. There was detailed discussion on Nepali outputs with NORMS, LFP, ICIMOD and Forest Action (a Nepali NGO) during a follow-up visit to Kathmandu in May 2003.¹⁰ There was general agreement that lengthy Nepali publications would not be valuable. Most value was said to come from feeding findings into the ongoing work of projects such as LFP and ICIMOD's Regional Project on 'Equity and Poverty in CPRs.' During the May visit ICIMOD confirmed that the findings of this research had been used in a report on regional findings and NORMS had been contracted to carry out

⁹ See internal project document, Ghanendra Kafle (2002) 'Report on District level Debriefing Workshop 20th November 2002'

¹⁰ This visit was carried out by Janet Seeley, documented in an internal memo 29/5/03.

further case studies for ICIMOD. The use of the findings by LFP is documented above in 4.4.

6 Environmental assessment

6.1 What significant environmental impacts resulted from the research activities (both positive and negative)?

No significant environmental impacts resulted from the research activities

6.2 What will be the potentially significant environmental impacts (both positive and negative) of widespread dissemination and application of research findings?

The research findings suggest that as community forestry in the Terai continues to gain momentum, the present community forest policy may not be viable, as it ignores the often complex challenges associated with establishing effective and equitable user groups in the Terai. The LFP has taken up the findings of the study and is looking into ways to test the findings more widely, which in the longer term could influence forest management practices.

6.3 Has there been evidence during the project's life of what is described in Section 6.2 and how were these impacts detected and monitored?

The project period was too short to comment on this.

6.4 What follow up action, if any, is recommended?

N/A

7 Contribution of Outputs

The key research outputs can be summarised as followed:

- (a) An analytical framework that draws attention to key factors and their inter-relations in determining potential outcomes from community forestry in the Terai;
- (b) Strong evidence that in practice the external environment greatly restricts the room for manoeuvre of FUGs and that there is a major disjuncture between the rhetoric of FUG formation and the reality of FUG operation.
- (c) The identification of a crucial role of forest value in driving perverse outcomes that limit the prospects for establishing effective and equitable FUGs and relate to the future of CF in the Terai.
- (d) Strong evidence of the policies of FUGs (access restriction, price of membership and mechanisms for product allocation) being insensitive to the livelihoods of the poor and causing distributional bias.
- (e) The uncovering of the hidden economy of FUGs related to transactions and subsidies, driven by forest value, accentuating inequality and resulting in institutional instability.

What have they contributed to the NRSP purpose of 'delivering new knowledge that enables poor people who are largely dependent on the NR base to improve their livelihoods and the Production system output of 'Participatory approaches to managing common pool resources (CPR) and bio-diversity for sustaining the livelihoods of poor people developed and assessed'?

The research outputs in contributing new understanding of how FUGs actually operate in the Terai provide both new knowledge and an assessment of participatory processes. However within the project period this new knowledge and assessments have not been applied. There

is the potential for this to happen but given the current political context of Nepal, and the key role of the Forestry Department in implementing changes, this is not realistic. If this knowledge were to be applied leading to greater authority for FUGs and more effective policy and management instruments (including greater attention to the interaction between human capital, meaningful participation and equitable outcomes) for promoting distributional equity, then the poor who draw livelihood benefits from forest resources would derive greater benefits.

What are the impacts of these outputs? With respect to the OVI's of the project purpose there is no evidence at present that the framework in its entirety has been practically deployed but it is too early to judge. However the take-up by the LFP of key aspects of the framework – calculation of forest value, investigation of distributional policies in their own field sites – is clear evidence of the understanding and its significance being incorporated into practice. In addition ICIMOD is using the findings in relation to its broader regional study on common pool resource management (see 5.1.8 above). By their own admission, NORMS learnt a substantial amount from the research process and their capability in this area has led to them being commissioned for related work by LFP and ICIMOD (Annex A, Appendix 7, p. 255ff).

On the question of less obvious influences on thinking, policy practice and fieldwork methods in relation to project impact, the same evidence is appropriate. The concepts behind the framework and the methods used (in relation to computations of Forest Value, Distributional Analysis, Textual analysis of policies, Operational Plans etc) have all been picked up by the DFID funded LFP project. On policy approaches there is no direct evidence of influence except in that the advisers to the LFP project are also influential in the Forestry Department.

The publications of papers (see below Section 8) – particularly of the planned Framework paper in the Nepal-based Journal of Forest and Livelihoods should bring it to the attention of a wider audience that we have not yet reached. One opportunity that could be further explored is bringing the LFP experience of working with the framework back to a discussion forum for a wider audience.

8 Publications and other communication materials

8.1 Books and book chapters

Chhetry, Birkha., Paul Francis, Madhu Gurung, Vegard Iversen, Ghanendra Kafle, Adam Pain and Janet Seeley (in press)

'Challenges to increasing the opportunities for the poor to access benefits of common pool resources: the case of community forestry in the Terai of Nepal' forthcoming in Proceedings of a symposium for Renewable Natural Resource Management for Mountain Communities, Kathmandu, 24-25 February 2003, ICIMOD

8.2 Journal articles

8.2.1 Peer reviewed and published

Nil to date

8.2.2 Pending publication (in press)

Nil to date

8.2.3 Drafted

Chhetry, Birkha., Paul Francis, Madhu Gurung, Vegard Iversen, Ghanendra Kafle, Adam Pain and Janet Seeley 'Resource Values, Hidden Economies and the intensity of distributional conflict in forestry user groups in Nepal's Terai' (to be submitted to *World Development*)

Chhetry, Birkha., Paul Francis, Madhu Gurung, Vegard Iversen, Ghanendra Kafle, Adam Pain and Janet Seeley 'Community forest in the Terai of Nepal: conflict, control and commercialisation in a common property regime' (to be submitted to *Development and Change*)

Chhetry, Birkha., Paul Francis, Madhu Gurung, Vegard Iversen, Ghanendra Kafle, Adam Pain and Janet Seeley 'A Framework for the Analysis of Community Forestry Performance in the Terai' (to be submitted to *Forest and Livelihoods*, a Nepal-based English language journal)

8.3 Symposium, conference and workshop papers and posters

Birkha Chhetry, Paul Francis, Madhu Gurung, Vegard Iversen, Ghanendra Kafle, Adam Pain and Janet Seeley 2003. "Ways to increase the opportunities for the poor to access benefits of common pool resources," Paper presented at the symposium for Renewable Natural Resource Management for Mountain Communities, Kathmandu, 24-25 February 2003.

8.4 Extension leaflets, brochures, policy briefs and posters

Nepali summary of study findings (being produced by NORMS)

8.5 Reports and data records

8.5.1 Project technical reports including project internal workshop papers and proceedings

(this list does not include brief trip memos from ODG members and draft site descriptions produced by NORMS which have been incorporated into Annex 2)

Paul Francis, Adam Pain, Ghanendra Kafle 2001. 'Report on a visit to Nepal for the research project on Social Structure, Livelihoods and Common Natural Resource Management 15 - 26 December 2001'

Adam Pain, Janet Seeley, Ghanendra Kafle 2002. 'Report on a visit to Nepal for the research project Social Structure, Livelihoods and Common Natural Resource Management 20 February to March 3rd 2002'

NORMS 2002 'Training materials for the field teams' March 2002 (Nepali)

Paul Francis 2002. 'Report on a visit to Nepal for the research project on Social Structure, Livelihoods and Common Natural Resource Management 8 May – 18 May 2002'

Vegard Iversen 2002 'Social Structure, Livelihoods and Common Natural Resource Management in Nepal. Interim report, sample points 3 and 4. Suryapura VDC in Rupandehi and Rajahar VDC in Nawalparasi District. 5th August 2002'.

Adam Pain 2002. 'Back to Office Report for periods September 8 – 20th; November 21 – 27 and December 5-7, 2002 Social Structure, Livelihoods and Common Natural Resource Management Project, Nepal'

Ghanendra Kafle 2002 'Report on District level Debriefing Workshop 20th November 2002'

Janet Seeley 2003 'Two and a half days in Kathmandu. A brief note on my final visit for the research project on Social Structure, Livelihoods and Common Natural Resource Management 24th-27th May 2003'

8.5.2 Literature reviews

Pant, Mahesh 2002. *Experience of Community Forestry in Nepal, Background Paper Prepared for the Project on "Social Structure, Livelihoods and the Management of CPRs in Nepal"* Norwich, UK: Overseas Development Group (unpublished)

8.5.3 Scoping studies

NORMS 2002. *The Situation of Common Pool Resources and Existing Social and Political Relations around Natural Resource Use in Rupandehi, Nawalparasi and Kapilbastu District* Kathmandu, Nepal: NORMS (unpublished)

8.5.4 Datasets

GIS maps of the two study Districts

8.5.5 Project web site, and/or other project related web addresses

Nil

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10 Project logframe

(modified at pre-FTR to reflect the change from the mid-hills to the Terai)

Narrative summary	Objectively Verifiable Indicators	Means of Verifications	Important Assumptions
Goal Planning Strategies to sustain livelihoods of poor people dependent on forests adjacent to croplands developed and promoted	By 2002 new approaches to the management of common pool resources and forest biodiversity validated in two targeted areas	Reviews by Programme Manager Reports of research teams & collaborating/ target institutions	Enabling environment (policies & institutions) exist.

	By 2003 these approaches incorporated into participatory management strategies to maintain forest integrity and adopted by target institutions in two targeted areas	Reviews by programme manager	
Purpose Participatory approaches to managing common pool resources (CPR) for sustaining the livelihoods of poor people in the Terai of Nepal assessed, strengthened and new understanding widely promoted	Framework for assessing new approaches developed and used by the project and at least one target institution for integrating into their participatory approaches for managing CPRs by project end. Understanding of the socially embedded nature of natural resource activities discussed and widely promoted within at least one target organisation by project end. Local capacity to research the link between social, economic and technical concerns enhanced in at least one organisation by the end of the project.	Project and target institution documentation Project reports Information provided by target institutions Research outputs of collaborating institutions	Continued Nepalese institutional commitment to supporting new planning strategies for increasing the livelihood security of poor people dependent on natural resources Political situation enables field research in the Middle Hills

Outputs			
1. A framework elaborating the linkages between social and economic processes and natural resource access and use in specific locations developed and tested.	<p>By month 5 draft framework developed, discussed by Working Group, distributed widely amongst stakeholders and presented at a seminar. Framework used for developing a detailed plan for data collection and analysis to begin in November 2001.</p> <p>Framework tested by stakeholders in project workshop by month 18 and case studies documented and circulated by month 24.</p>	<p>Project quarterly reports</p> <p>Framework document</p> <p>Workshop report</p> <p>Case reports</p>	<p>Existing institutional arrangements provide a basis for more participatory and sustainable approaches to CPR management</p>
2. Understanding of the implications of existing social and economic processes for proposed changes in natural resource management including benefit sharing increased and promoted amongst target institutions and more widely.	<p>By month 5, first consultation with two stakeholder groups held, initial field visit undertaken and first seminar held and documented. By project end, at least 8 consultations with different stakeholder groups documented, 6 seminars held and papers distributed, and 1 paper submitted for publication</p>	<p>Consultation meeting papers</p> <p>Quarterly report</p> <p>Paper prepared for publication</p>	<p>New institutions and management regimes can be designed and implemented for the creation of additional individual and group room for manoeuvre in terms of livelihoods</p>
3. Ways to increase the opportunities for vulnerable groups to access benefits of common pool resources integrated into specific plans for their improved management.	<p>By month 18, at a workshop, target institutions use the framework and the research results to plan changes in resource management that enhance access to CPR benefits by vulnerable groups and increase their livelihood security overall.</p>	<p>Workshop report</p>	
4. Local capacity to link social, economic and technical concerns in developing and promoting changes in	<p>Major field research planned and undertaken by joint local and international research team by end of February 2002</p>		

natural resource management enhanced.	and first outcomes presented and discussed in a seminar by May 2002. Joint publication submitted for publication by month 24. Final outputs disseminated widely in booklet form by month 24.	Project reports and papers Paper submitted for publication Booklet	
Project Activities 1. Finalise collaborative arrangements, establish Working Group and initiate first consultation meetings to discuss expected project outputs, possible research sites and interests of different target institutions. 2. Review literature, discuss with colleagues and undertake brief field visit to develop framework for distribution and discussion with Working Group and in seminar. 3. With collaborators, develop research approach using framework and design tools for data collection on social structure and local processes for resource access and use by different groups. 4. Collaborators and Working Group members engage in consultation meetings with targeted institutions to discuss sites, research approach and data to be collected. 5. Data collection undertaken in at least two locations.	Milestones 1. End of Inception period August 2001 2. Draft framework developed, distributed and discussed by August 2001 3. Field research plan completed by November 2001 5. Main field data collection completed by March 2002 6. Data analysis completed by July 2002 7. Workshop to apply framework and understanding. September 2002 8. Case studies and booklet prepared and distributed. March 2003 9. Final report. March 2003	Project reports	Political instability does not prevent meetings and field work

<p>6. Data analysis completed and understanding applied to participative management initiatives designed to increase livelihood security of poorer groups by research teams.</p> <p>7. Understanding discussed and promoted through seminars and consultations. Paper prepared and submitted for publication.</p> <p>8. Workshop to use research results along with framework to assess possible outcomes from specific management models and to plan required changes for meeting poverty considerations.</p> <p>9. Workshop case studies (management models) documented and distributed widely and final project report prepared.</p>			
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11 Keywords

Social structure. Livelihoods, Natural Resource Management, Institutional Processes, Nepal, Poor people