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Common Property Forest Resource Management in Nepal: Developing Monitoring Systems for Use at the Local Level

A Report Prepared by
IRDD, University of Reading, UK
in collaboration with
ForestAction, Nepal
and ECI, University of Oxford, UK

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Acronyms

AFO	Assistant Forest Officer
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CF	Community Forest
CNRD	Centre for Natural Resources and Development (University of Oxford)
CPFD	Community and Private Forestry Division
dbh	Tree trunk diameter at breast height
DFID	Department for International Development
DFO	District Forest Office(r)
DoF	Department of Forest
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users, Nepal
FFMP	Forest User Groups Forest Management Project
ForestAction	Forest Resources Studies and Action
FRP	Forest Research Programme
FUG	Forest User Group
FUGC	Forest User Group Committee
HIMAWANTI	Himalayan Women's Associations Network International
HMGN	His Majesty's Government, Nepal
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
IoF	Institute of Forestry, Pokhara
IRDD	International and Rural Development Department (University of Reading)
LFP	Livelihood and Forestry Programme (previously NUKCFP)
MoSFC	Ministry of Soil and Forest Conservation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NANSAP	Natural Resources Management Sector Assistance Programme
NACRMP	Nepal Australia Community Resource Management Project
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NPC	National Planning Commission
NRs	Nepali Rupees
NRSP	Natural Resource System Programme
NSCFP	Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project
NUKCFP	Nepal UK Community Forestry Project (now LFP)
OP	Operation Plan
PAL	Participatory Action and Learning
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PM&E	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
REDP	Rural Energy Development Project
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
RP	Range Post
VDC	Village Development Committee (local administrative unit composed of 9 wad representatives)
WATCH	Women Acting Together for Change

Executive Summary

The purpose of the 'Development of Monitoring Process and Indicators for Forest Management, Nepal' project[1] was to develop and assess current approaches to managing common property forest resources and biodiversity for sustaining livelihoods in the middle hills region of Nepal, and develop monitoring systems that will enable various stakeholders to plan for forest management activities (see the revised logframe). Chiefly the project has addressed communication between stakeholders and group level knowledge generation in common property forest management institutions in relation to this purpose. These are areas in which critical constraints to the achievement of sustainable common property forest management for the improvement of livelihoods have been identified.

The main outputs of the project are:

1. An understanding of the ways in which stakeholders manage common property forest resources, including approaches to monitoring.
2. A process for improving forest users' monitoring systems for common property forest management for use at the forest users level, which pays particular attention to livelihoods aspects and biological diversity, and is tailored to specific local characteristics.
3. Recommendations of the ways in which stakeholders at the Range Post level can effectively monitor each other and themselves.
4. Increased awareness amongst local institutions of the options for monitoring common property forest resource management.

The project adopted participatory action research (PAR) approaches to research, especially for detailed field investigations. Initial project activities included consultations in the UK and Nepal, and the writing of a scoping study, primarily in order to gain an extensive understanding of the management, and specifically monitoring, practices of the various stakeholders in Nepal community forestry (as relates to output 1). In the next stage of the project, field investigations were undertaken with members of five selected communities in a western hill district (Baglung) of Nepal. A case study approach was used to examine local level monitoring practices within the forest management-planning framework (as relates to output 1).

Field investigations then focused on developing approaches to assisting forest users in forest management planning, using methods that are inclusive of different people's needs and interests, and that enable the users to learn from new experiences through monitoring (as relates to output 2). The Range Post staff were involved throughout the investigations in order to develop their capacity to continue and adapt the process in future. A framework was also developed for comparing local stakeholders' values for biological diversity and for determining how these will influence management decisions. This methodology was tested in one of the sites and then integrated and adapted in other sites.

Research processes (case study and PAR approaches) were documented, and from this recommendations were drawn up for a generic process, with variations related to the characteristics of the forest management institution. This will enable local institutions to facilitate the development of forest users' planning and monitoring systems.

A workshop was held at the district level, with representatives from the DFO, Range Post, LFP, FECOFUN and the local forest management institutions in order to exchange ideas on the initial findings of the field investigations, and to discuss their monitoring requirements (as relates to output 3). Placing the field investigation findings in the overall monitoring framework at the district level, the perceptions of different stakeholders were compared and recommendations were formulated for improving monitoring systems at the Range Post and District level.

[1] The outside research team members include Dr. Yam Malla (IRDD, University of Reading, UK), Dr. Anna Lawrence (ECI, University of Oxford, UK), Richard Barnes (IRDD, University of Reading, UK), Krishna Paudel (ForestAction, Nepal) and Hemant Ojha (ForestAction, Nepal).

A final workshop was held with central level stakeholders (in Kathmandu) to disseminate findings (as relates to output 4). However, further dissemination through journal papers will continue in 2002.

It was concluded that the current planning practices in common property forest management (and more specifically in community forestry) are too rigid and unrealistic, and thus do not encourage the full participation of forest users. The project has developed a planning and monitoring process that is more gradual in approach, allowing for inclusion of the interests of a broader range of forest users, and encouraging the users to learn through action how they can meet their livelihood needs and interests from the common property forest resource.

There is evidence to suggest that biodiversity provides a useful framework to stimulate local thinking about ecological, as well as utilitarian, aspects of forest management. Management of biological diversity should improve if planning processes reflect the multiple priorities of the forest users. In future the framework developed in the project should enable a wide range of stakeholders to identify areas of collaboration and potential conflict in biological diversity management.

1. General introduction

This report describes the objectives, methodology and results of the research project originally entitled 'Development of monitoring process and indicators for forest management in Nepal'. The project, which was managed by the International and Rural Development Department of the University of Reading, was executed in collaboration with the Nepal UK Community Forestry Project (NUKCFP), now Livelihood and Forestry programme (LFP) and ForestAction - a national NGO. It was funded by the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID), through its Natural Resources System Programme (NRSP) (R7514).

The project proposal for research on forest management monitoring indicators and process developed out of the increasing interest in community forestry processes and indicators, as well as participatory monitoring and evaluation practices, is based on the experiences of previous DFID and funded projects in Nepal, especially 'Community Forestry in Nepal: Sustainability and Impacts on Common and Private Property Resource Management' (R6778), 'Forest User Groups Forest Management Project (FFMP) (R6918) and Livelihood and Forestry Programme (LFP), and other projects in Nepal, particularly Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project (NSCFP), the Nepal Australia Community Resource Management Project (NACRMP) and Adaptive Collaborative Management Project (ACM). The ACM project is supported by the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR).

The eighteen months project has the following objectives:

- To develop an understanding of the ways in which stakeholders manage common property forest resources, including approaches to monitoring, and constraints to developing an effective monitoring system for use at the local level.
- To develop a generic methodology, or process, for improving forest users' monitoring systems for common property forests, which pays particular attention to livelihood aspects and biological diversity, and which is tailored to specific local characteristics.
- To provide suggestions for the ways in which stakeholders at the Range Post level can effectively monitor each other and themselves.
- To increase awareness amongst local institutions of the options for monitoring the planning and management of common property forest resources.

This report presents findings relating to the first three objectives of the project. The last objective relates to the communication of the research results to the concerned stakeholders, which will take place upon the finalisation of the research report.

The report is structured with nine main sections, including this general introduction. The next section provides a context and background information, which leads onto an explanation of the project's objectives and expected outcomes (of both the original and the subsequently revised logical frameworks) in Section 3.

The next two sections describe research methodology developed for the project (Section 4) and the area where the field research was conducted (Section 5). The research methodology provides insights on the intricacies of participatory action research in reality, explains why it is so important to adapt the methods, and how this can be done as the research work progresses. The detailed information on the case study sites reflects the variations and hence the need for different options and opportunities, rather than a uniform solution to all the sites.

The main findings of the research are provided in the next three sections. Section 6 describes the current practices of forest management and constraints to developing effective monitoring systems, and section 7 describes the process or methodology for developing monitoring systems for use by the forest users. Section 8 provides some suggestions for ways in which monitoring at the Range Post level monitoring systems might be improved.

Finally, Section 9 provides the main conclusions from the research undertaken as well as recommendations for developing planning and monitoring systems with forest users.

A literature review has already been undertaken for this project (Hurst et al., 2000), and thus there is no need to cover the relevant literature again in this report. However, a summary of the literature relating to community forestry in Nepal and Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation is found in Appendix 3.

2. The context

2.1 Introduction

This section presents the contextual information that provides the basis on which the 'Development of monitoring processes for forest management, Nepal' project was developed. It describes: the context of community forestry in Nepal; the issue of biological diversity as this relates to forests and rural livelihoods; the nature of participatory monitoring and evaluation, and participatory action research; and the relevant experiences of previous related projects. Together this information provides the rationale of the 'Development of monitoring processes for forest management in Nepal' project, whose objectives and expected outcomes are described in the next section.

2.2 Community forestry in Nepal

Forest and tree resources are critical in supporting the livelihoods of a large proportion of the population of Nepal. Forests provide firewood that constitutes approximately 85 percent of the domestic sector energy supply in Nepal (CBS, 2000), as well as vital inputs to agriculture, which forms the main part of the livelihoods of four-fifths of Nepal's population. Forests provide an enormous variety of food and medicinal products, as well as products of cultural value. They also provide many opportunities for contributing to rural monetary economies, through income generated from the sale of wood and non-wood forest products. Thus there is considerable scope for contribution by the forestry sector in Nepal to the promotion of sustainable livelihoods in rural areas.

Indigenous knowledge systems relating to *de facto* communal forest management in Nepal have long been affected by instability in access rights, through political and power relations at the local level as well as through national legislation. For much of the latter half of the twentieth century increasing rural populations, particularly in the hills, was singled out as the cause of deforestation in Nepal. In 1957 all common property forests in Nepal were nationalised, partly with the aim of preventing rapid deforestation. To date, much of this forest land still remains under government control, and people in rural areas have, as far as possible, been meeting their needs for forest products, through, for example, growing more trees on private land, purchasing forest products or clandestine harvesting from nearby government owned forests.

Over the last 20 years the government has been handing over patches of forest, under the community forestry programme, to local communities who take responsibility for the management of the forests and subsequently are entitled to the benefits. The community forestry programme emerged partly in response to clear signals that the government itself was unable to manage and protect the forests systematically and effectively - a role that could only be undertaken by those living next to the forests. It also arose in recognition of the vital role of forests in ensuring livelihood security.

In this respect, the historical context of communal forest management in Nepal differs from that of many other countries. Where forests had not been reserved for nation building by successive monarchs and Rana rulers, they had been placed under feudal arrangements, such as *birta* and *jagir* land grants, or other management systems such as those controlled by a local government functionary, generally called as *mukhiya* or *talukdar* (Hobley, 1996; Malla, 2001)[2]. Rulers granted land as *birta* and *jagir* to officials and nobles who served the state, and for which the land owners did not have to pay tax. The *birta* land grant was inheritable, but the land under the *jagir* system could only be retained as long as the concerned individual was in the government position. In any case, the decision-making power had remained with the few, whilst the majority of the local people simply implemented their decisions, in return for a fixed quota of forest products (unless they made the decision to steal). Successive policies such as *birta* abolition and forest nationalisation had intentionally or otherwise led to the erosion of these systems. However, the sense of alienation of

[2] See Hobley (1996) for a comprehensive study of major issues in community forestry in Nepal (and India) as they relate to the historical context of forest sector policy, and see Malla (2001) for a close examination of the impact of power relations (in particular, patron-client relations) in forestry policy and its implementation in Nepal.

local people in decision-making in forest management has persisted in their psychology, particularly as decision-making and research into forestry became the reserve of top-level Nepali and foreign foresters.

The Forest Act (1993), Forest Rules (1995) and Community Forestry guidelines (drawing on both the above), provided an enabling environment for acceleration of this process. As a result community forestry has become one of the most prominent features of forest sector policy and budgets, for assisting local communities in forming Forest User Groups (FUGs) as well as supporting the FUGs already formed, the number of which had reached 11,000 in 2001 (according to CPFD data base).

Crucially, legislation stipulates that membership of an FUG should be on the basis of physical accessibility to forest and a willingness and ability to contribute to community forestry (CF) development activities (not necessarily according to traditional rights). After the FUG is formed the members are required to draw up an operational plan, with the *stated* purpose of enabling the FUG to systematically, and sustainably, manage the forest. This Operational Plan must then be approved by the District Forest Officer (DFO) before the FUG can become legally functional.

The community forestry process seeks to provide the necessary stability in access rights for livelihood security and sustainable forest management. It does not, however, necessarily build entirely upon existing patterns of forest resource usage and social interaction, but rather, for better or for worse, may superimpose a new one. Although there is an emphasis on democratic decision-making in community forest management, the problem still remains as to how to address power relations within the FUG and between local people and outside agencies. These act as barriers to the forest users drawing on their own knowledge in collective discourse, starting from the identification of issues to the development of proposals and management options, through to the final decision and implementation (Malla, 2001).

As for the impact of community forestry on forest condition and local people's livelihoods, reports from the field have varied. Some reports have indicated that there has been improvement in forest condition in study sites (though illicit felling has continued to be a problem in some) (Springate-Beginski et al., 1999). Others have shown that forest condition (particularly ecosystem *vitality*) has deteriorated due to over stocking, and suppressed regeneration, pointing to the fact that FUGs have tended to focus on forest protection, without any harvesting and active management activities taking place (Branney and Yadav, 1998).

There is little evidence that community forestry is achieving the desired outcomes for rural livelihoods, and many field experiences have demonstrated that poorer groups within communities have been worse off (see Malla, 2000 for an overview and analysis of some of these experiences). Whilst it is difficult to isolate cause and effect linkages in identifying the roots of this problem, many studies often point to the fact that those who are most dependent on the forest resources are rarely involved in decision-making on FUG activities. Decisions are made by a minority of dominant members of the community, who are very often the least dependent on common property forest resources. The result is that forests are not being managed systematically according to the needs of the FUG members. Other studies have highlighted difficulties faced by other organisations involved in community forestry in identifying support services and policies that are appropriate and responsive to the needs of FUGs and particular groups within them.

Many in the forest sector have identified poor communication, and particularly monitoring, within FUGs, and between FUGs and other stakeholder organisations as a constraint to effective and adaptive forest management, service delivery and policy formulation (Pokhrel and Grosen, 2000). Indeed, forestry sector professionals in many other countries have also identified communication between stakeholders as a researchable constraint to promoting accountability in participatory forest management (Lawrence et al., 1999).

There are many stakeholder organisations in the forestry sector in Nepal. Within the community forestry programme the stakeholders include the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MFSC), the Department of Forests (DoF), donor field projects, NGO’s and CBOs (in technical assistance and

advocacy capacities) and forest users themselves (with a variety of different interests in forests). Many of these organisations, involved in one way or another with the community forestry programme, have been attempting to develop their own monitoring systems, and many are indeed monitoring a wide range of forest and livelihoods aspects, to reflect the potential areas of contribution by community forestry.

However, there are major imbalances in the current communication structure. Forest users, in particular, have been marginalised in this respect, and, whilst monitoring may be taking place at the individual or even small group level, power structures within communities, and between them and other agencies prevent access of those most dependent on the resource to decision-making. Forest users may take action (or inaction) in response to these power relations - but they do not have the chance to respond to lessons made as relates to theirs and others actions and respective outcomes - what is often termed as 'action-learning'.

It is clear that the only way to develop a responsive planning and policy system is for the forest users themselves, who are the ones who can best understand livelihoods impacts from CF, to become a driving force in shaping service delivery and policy. This requires that changes are made in the structures for information analysis, decision-making and planning, such that they are undertaken by those that can most readily respond to the information and implement the decisions, and that are most likely to be affected by the outcomes.

2.3 Biological diversity

Biological diversity has emerged as a major international concern in forestry, as in other habitat types. This issue, however, may involve very complex interactions of different values. While professional foresters at the national and international levels may use quantitative data to discuss biological diversity, which reflect their interests in conservation, the perceptions of local people may be very different. This 'language' barrier has meant there has been very little understanding of how local livelihoods interact with biological diversity. And yet it is the local people themselves who can best analyse these interactions.

Time and again it has been suggested that the livelihoods of the rural poor are closely tied up with biodiversity. The hypotheses take one of the following forms:

- The poorest are most dependent on natural resources, in particular wild foods, which are diverse and provided by systems that are close to natural.
- The rural poor manage natural resources in such a way that they modify and *enhance* the diversity of semi-natural forest systems (this is a common claim by anthropologists working in Africa and, in particular, in South America).
- The rural poor domesticate natural resources, selecting and cultivating new varieties in such a way that they create new diversity.
- Rural resource users exploit natural resources until they are gone, thereby destroying biodiversity.

The situation is usually a complex mixture of the above, and depends on social, political, economical and ecological factors. Perhaps more important is to note that conservation as an *activity* is different from conservation as a *goal* (Groosman et al., 2000) - i.e. while rural people's activities may or may not contribute to conservation (of biodiversity or some component of biodiversity) this result is not necessarily deliberate – they do not necessarily set out to enhance the diversity of the forest, but that happens as a result of their livelihood interests. Work in the Philippines also showed that while farmers cultivate a surprisingly large number of tree species (more than 135 in six communities), they are not concerned whether they have many or few, but are rather responding opportunistically to the resources available, their knowledge of the properties of the species and markets: because diversity is a coincidental result of their activities, they do not notice when it is lost. Furthermore policy-makers and foresters are not aware of the diversity that is created as a consequence of farmers' activities, and consequently make and implement decisions which undermine farmers' use of a wide range of species (Lawrence, 1999).

This relates to the definition and meaning of biodiversity. It is important to remember that it is a term coined by scientists as recently as the late 1980's, to refer to 'the whole diversity of animal and plant life, together with the systems that contain that life and the functional relationships that relate them' (Given and Harris, 1994). It is in the interpretation of this definition that different values for biodiversity are revealed; even scientists can not agree on how to measure and monitor diversity, and which species to attach most importance to. Furthermore there is a divide between those who value the *components* of biodiversity, and those who value its *function*. The latter argue that species numbers can decline without affecting the value of natural systems in protecting soil and water, providing nutrition and medicine etc.

It is generally recognised that local people do not share the scientific concept of biodiversity and therefore that direct questions about it are not helpful. Much work has focused on finding out which species people value most, and how these species values can be summed for particular areas or at particular points in time to show changing values for different kinds of vegetation. Most of this work has been based on the assumption that local values are *functional* or *utilitarian* i.e. that the only aspects worth asking about in a species are its *uses* (Prance et al., 1987; Philips et al. 1994). Current work in Cameroon (Lawrence et al., 2000) shows that spiritual and cultural values, and a sense of the importance of habitat diversity in traditional livelihoods, may also contribute to a consciousness of biodiversity value.

Thus rural people's actions may enhance or detract from biodiversity, and the resource users may value different components of it in different ways. A participatory monitoring and evaluation exercise has the opportunity to explore ways in which livelihoods and biodiversity are linked, and how those links are perceived.

It was not possible for this project to facilitate a full-scale participatory evaluation of biodiversity, as this would have been a complex exercise (requiring a biological inventory). Instead the project explore the place of biodiversity indicators within a multi-stakeholder evaluation system. Of primary interest was to note whether any biodiversity related indicators were proposed by the forest users. Such indicators might include: presence or absence of particular species available; range of species used; change of species preference; range of types or varieties within a given species; habitat diversity (presence, absence or disappearance of different kinds of forest); any ecological observations (e.g. declining rainfall etc.). It would be useful to explore the participants' perceptions of the usefulness of such indicators in their monitoring systems.

2.4 Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E)

Several major forces have lead to the development of PM&E approaches: debates on the value-laden nature of data; practical constraints due to the limited availability of human and financial resources; and a realisation by project, programme or ministerial staff that conventional approaches to monitoring yield often inaccurate or even irrelevant information as relates to the impacts of interventions on people's livelihoods (Abbot and Guijt, 1998). The challenges of developing more accurate and relevant monitoring systems has obliged professionals at the project, planning and policy levels to attempt more participatory approaches to information collection and analysis. These enable local people to input their values and perceptions of reality into wider information systems. Participatory approaches to monitoring may have a spin-off effect that local communities consciously develop their own internal action and learning processes. It should be noted, however, that this has not necessarily been the primary objective of outsider organisations.

It is helpful to have some of the common terms in monitoring and evaluation defined.
Criteria "are usually expressed as a state or condition in which an aspect of the forest or country should be or a process that needs to be in place" (Ritchie et al, 2000:14). Criteria help to define the state/condition of a forest or a community that people want to see. **Indicators** "are usually stated as something specific" (Ritchie et al, 2000:14), they indicate the state or condition required by the criteria. They are often a single meaningful message about a part of the system being assessed.

Indicators have been used for many years by biologists to assess ecosystem health, and more recently they are being applied to social systems (Bell and Morse, 1999).

2.5 Experiences from previous related research

2.5.1 Community forestry processes, process indicators and micro-action planning

The research project 'Community Forestry in Nepal: Sustainability and Impacts on Common and Private Property Resource Management'[3] has attempted to develop a set of process indicators to help forest user groups' self-monitoring and to provide a basis for a shared understanding of community forestry processes within a FUG and between a FUG and outside agencies (Springate-Beginski, 2001).

The project team worked with a number of selected FUGs in the eastern Hill districts of Nepal and used two ways to identify processes and process indicators. One was by discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each FUG, first in small group meetings at the Tole (hamlets) level and later in a larger group meeting, usually at the FUG general assembly. The other was by asking the forest users at the tole level meeting to determine the main indicators of a good FUG. Responses were then edited and grouped by the project team based on the frequency with which points were made. The processes most frequently cited were: user organisation and cohesion; forest management; decision-making and implementation; communication and awareness; gender and equity consideration; economic development; livelihood and community development; conflict management; and linkage and network development. Each of these have their own (between 2-6) indicators. For example, the process indicators for user organisation and cohesion are legitimate users included in the group, sense of ownership of the forest amongst the users, and a united users group with common purpose and trust.

The project also proposed micro-action planning, primarily at the tole level meetings and discussions, in addition to the planning at the FUG level, in order to improve the FUG decision-making process. Springate-Baginski et al (2001) seem to imply that a 'tole', not a FUG, actually represents a 'true community', and that planning for the management of a community forest will be more effective if the process of planning begins at the tole level. The project micro-planning process works as follows:

- The representatives of each tole call meetings and discuss their needs and aspirations regarding the forest, FUG and community, and prepare a plan of action points.
- The representatives of all the toles within the concerned FUG then meet in one place, compile all the action plans and present them to the FUG committee.
- An assembly of FUG is called in which the FUG committee presents the compilation of action plans and each tole representatives present their plan for general discussion and consideration.
- A FUG micro action plan is prepared with allocation of responsibilities for implementation. The plan is shared with the District Forest Office / Range Post and other concerned agencies. The process is repeated as and when the FUG is required to review the progress and develop a new micro-action plan.

Oliver et al. (2001) do not explain how the 'indicators' and 'process indicators', which their project has developed, are integrated with the micro action planning. It would also be useful to know the 'process' that used to arrive at these 'indicators' and 'process indicators'. It would also be useful to know the role of the research project team members and the FUG members and the Forest Department field staff in developing the indicators. This project will attempt to test some of the indicators that Oliver et al have developed in the field and also try to document the process of developing monitoring systems with the selected FUG members.

2.5.2 FUG planning and self-evaluation

The DFID funded Livelihood and Forestry Programme (LFP) has been experimenting with a number of participatory methods with selected FUGs for developing PM&E systems, such as the 'FUG health

[3] The project was managed by the University of Leeds' Environment Centre, and funded by DFID/NRSP (R6778)

check', 'the user generated pictorial decision-making PM&E' that builds on a literacy methodology, 'the PM&E information and management tool' that uses participatory learning and action (PLA) techniques to situate the PM&E in a planning cycle, and the FUG planning and self evaluation system.

This section, which draws on Hamilton et al., (2000), describes the 'FUG planning and self evaluation system', which is the most recent system developed within the project area, based on the health check with user-generated indicators and pictures. In this process, joint discussion and planning conducted by the project staff and concerned FUG members. The discussions are held at the tole (hamlet) level to ensure that various perspectives are fully incorporated in developing the monitoring and evaluation system. Each tole member initially develops their own goals and indicators and assesses their current status and identifies priority areas for action in the future. Each tole member then defines goals by considering what their 'ideal' FUG would be like in ten years' time. These goals form the basis for developing indicators. The indicators are then coded as pictures and arranged in a matrix to be scored by users. Scoring is based on a four-point scale, represented by phases of the moon, with each tole assessing what stage their FUG is at. The toles then identify and prioritise three goals they think should be addressed first.

The indicators from different toles are then compiled and categorised by the facilitators, with exact repetition removed and gaps identified. The categories identified usually are: forest management and condition, forest products, group management, communication, community development activities, and income generating activities.

The tole assessments are then compiled for each category and presented to a forum of the FUG committee, and to either tole representatives or the general assembly (all users), who review the indicators, tole assessments and priorities, and agree on a strategy for addressing the issues raised and for conducting future PM&E.

One of the major benefits of the process is the high level of ownership gained through planning with the FUG and developing the whole PM&E system in small groups. Further, by contrasting the tole assessments, the perspectives of different interest groups within the FUG become apparent. Due to the simplicity of the process, it takes little time for facilitation and user groups to gain confidence in using the method.

However, their approach is an evaluation rather than a monitoring system. The FUG do not consider the detailed progress of activities, but rather evaluate their overall performance against their goals. In areas of weak understanding – for example, in institutional analysis and timber yield regulation – the suggested indicators are also weak, i.e. broad and less specific, thus making them more difficult to evaluate. Thus outside facilitators themselves need to have a strong understanding of institutional and forest management issues to guide the FUG in the development of sufficiently detailed indicators.

The other limitation relates to the assessment process. The use of four phases of the moon as a scoring criteria is not likely to be very sensitive to changes from one year to the next, and may not provide sufficient information for forest management decision-making.

2.5.3 Participatory Action and Learning (PAL)

Together with selected FUGs in two middle hill districts the Forest User Groups Forest Management Project (FFMP)[4] has developed a process or methodology, participatory action and learning (PAL), for supporting villagers in their community forest management planning. Monitoring is an integral part of the PAL methodology.

The PAL process aims to address the problem of a 'passive' approach to forest management which emphasises the protection and limited utilisation of forest resources. Regeneration is fundamental to long-term sustainable forest management, and for this some systematic cutting and the application of

[4] The project was managed by IRDD, University of Reading, and funded by DFID/FRP (R6918).

appropriate silvicultural techniques is desirable. The present practice of forest management by protection only may lead to further degradation of the resource.

In the PAL approach, both FUG members and forestry field staff work and learn together. They jointly identify forest management issues, initiate actions to address those issues, monitor the results of the actions, and the process used, and then reflect upon the results to determine further actions.

The PAL process is divided into four main stages: information collection, information analysis and action plan preparation, implementation of the action plan, and monitoring and reflection. Each of these major stages (components) is further sub-divided into a number of critical 'steps' – with nine 'steps' altogether, involving a series of activities at a range of different levels.

There are several major constraints to effective (active) community forest management planning in the middle hill districts. These are: the lack of systematic, effective communication systems within the FUG and between FUG and forestry field staff; the lack of mechanisms to reach beyond the FUG committee officials; the lack of understanding of ways to reach women and disadvantaged members of the community; the use of poor, inappropriate extension methods and materials; poor understanding of the technical knowledge and skills required for community forest management; and the lack of baseline information on FUGs and forests to measure and compare progress.

The PAL methodology aims to address these constraints. Furthermore, rather than a separate activity, the PAL methodology views monitoring as a part of the forest management planning process. Monitoring and reflection is considered here from the perspective of whether or not we are moving towards the overall goals of forest management and whether the above constraints are taken into account. It is too early to judge its wider applicability in the rest of the middle hills region and other parts of Nepal. IRDD is in the process of negotiating with LFP and a national NGO for testing the methodology more widely in the rest of the middle hills region and in different parts of Nepal, representing different ecological and socio-economic regions.

Summarising the experiences of the three projects, it seems that tole level meetings can provide much better insights of the real issues facing the forest user groups and developing strategies that are more useful in addressing the forest management issues. It has implications in terms of the overall time-frame that a FUG and field staff may be required, especially given the limited capacity of the government Forest Department's field offices.

There is a need to understand the ways in which a monitoring system could be integrated with the overall forest management planning process at the local level, mainly for use by Range Post staff and forest users. Most 'indicators' or 'process indicators', although developed after consultations with the selected local communities, seem to have been defined by the outsiders, and these may or may not be used by the villagers. For these 'indicators' and 'process indicators' to be used by the local forest users, it is important that they are determined by the actual forest users, rather than by the outsiders. Therefore, the ways in which the outside facilitators help local forest users to determine their own monitoring systems and indicators are crucial. This project attempts to address these issues.

3. Project purpose, expected outputs, and general research questions

3.1 Project purpose

The original purpose of the project was to assess the perceptions or expectations of various stakeholders on common property forests and accordingly to identify indicators that would enable these stakeholders to effectively plan for and monitor common property forest management. This purpose had two underlying assumptions. Firstly, that local communities are firmly in control of their community forest resources, following the identification of forests and their users and preparation of operational (management) plans, as specified in the community forestry guidelines. Secondly, that community forest users are aware of the government community forestry policy objectives, and that all the aspects of forest management are considered in the forest user group's operational plan. Following on from these assumptions, the project originally proposed that a set of criteria and indicators could be developed that would help to assess whether or not community forest is managed as specified in the operational plan and that process used to arrive at such criteria and indicators could be documented.

However, once the field research began, it became evident that the majority of the members, including those belonging to the most active or strongest FUG, were not aware of the government community forestry policy objectives. Apart from a few FUG committee officials, mainly the chairmen and secretaries, very few people knew about the existence of operational plans. Some people did not even know that they had a community forest. Under such a situation, it would have made little sense to talk about monitoring indicators.

Also, the use of terms such as 'monitoring', 'criteria' and 'indicators' with the different stakeholders, especially the forest users and field staff, presented problems. A more detailed description of this and the ways in which the project team learned to address the problem is provided in Section 5.

The project purpose was consequently revised "to develop and assess participatory approaches to managing common pool resources (CPR) and biodiversity for sustaining livelihoods, including monitoring systems that enable various stakeholders to plan forest management". Explicit monitoring systems at the level of local forest management are necessary for two reasons: to enhance the internal action and learning processes in local forest management institutions (in particular FUGs) in pursuit of livelihood security and sustainable resource usage; and to raise the profile of local people's interests in stakeholder interaction, through a mutually active monitoring interface, in order to improve the relevance of and accountability of interventions, service delivery and policy formulation.

Hence, the purpose of the 'Development of monitoring processes for forest management in Nepal' project is to build on experiences to date in developing participatory monitoring processes and indicators at the grass roots level (i.e. forest users/managers and their forests) and to focus on experiences in developing group *action* and *learning* processes in community forest management as part of the group inquiry and planning processes.

3.2 Expected outputs

It is valuable to use the initial expected outputs of the project (stipulated in the original project memorandum) to form a context or even baseline that will enable the reader to better understand the lessons learnt throughout the research project. The two major original expected outputs were as follows:

- A set of quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess both biophysical and socio-economic outcomes of community forestry intervention prepared, tested and incorporated into management plans.
- Methods for devising and adapting indicators for use at the local level documented. This is the more generic of the two outputs, and will be appropriate for adaptation into different social and political contexts.

Following the revision of the project's purpose the expected outputs changed to the following:

- Develop an understanding of the ways in which stakeholders manage common property forest resources and the ways in which they monitor the resource and the management regime, and identify the constraints to developing more effective monitoring systems.
- Develop a process for improving forest users' monitoring systems at the forest users level, which pays attention to livelihood aspects and biological diversity (including the exploration of local values for the latter), and identify recommendations linked to specific local characteristics.
- Define recommendations of ways in which stakeholders at Range Post level can effectively monitor each other and themselves.
- Disseminate the information amongst local institutions of the options for monitoring common property forest resources.

There are two points to make in order to clarify the particular context of this field research. Firstly, the field research has emphasised the development of group level internal monitoring (or *self*-monitoring) processes that reflect the priorities of the forest users themselves. This must be seen as distinct from developing a participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) system tailored to a particular project/ programme intervention. If there is already an 'ambient' internal monitoring system in place at the local level, this can *promote* the development of more realistic monitoring interfaces (particularly considering the expectations of the forest users) with other organisations. In this context, forest users should be better able to relate the planned interventions, or available services, to their own group situation and trends.

Secondly, monitoring can act as a key link in the overall forest management planning and the process of action and learning by a FUG, it cannot be treated as a separate activity of the group. Although this issue was not fully recognised at the beginning of the research, this became apparent early in the process. The findings of the research therefore relate to monitoring as it fits into forest management planning and, crucially, on-going experimentation relevant to the issues and research questions prioritised by the forest users.

3.3 General research questions

With the change of the project purpose and expected outputs, the project team had to reconsider the whole approach to the research and the kind of questions that the team should ask the different stakeholders. Rather than starting with questions of criteria and indicators for forest management, the project team had to begin with such basic questions as whether or not the people knew what community forestry was about; whether they knew about the existence of the operational plan; how the FUG was formed; how the operational plan was prepared; whether they participated in the activities; how the forest resource is protected and managed; whether they have received products from the forest after the forest was handed over to the community as a community forest; if so how, when and how much; if no, why not, etc. Often these questions would lead to an extended discussion about the rationale of community forestry policy and the role and responsibilities of the government Forest Department and local communities – an aspect which might have been expected to be explained clearly at the time of forming forest user groups, preparation of operational plans and handing over forests to the groups.

As the level of understanding of community forestry objectives varied from FUG to FUG and between different individuals and groups within each group, it was important that some time was devoted to developing a degree of common understanding amongst the concerned FUG members.

In general, the research questions that were asked can be grouped into the following three categories:

- Factors affecting the overall forest management planning and monitoring
- Factors affecting the community forestry process at the District Forest Office/Range Post level
- Factors affecting community forest management at the forest user group level.

It should be noted that these sets of questions are only indicative of the overall direction of field investigations. The nature of specific questions, especially at the individual forest user group sites, varied considerably.

3.3.1 Overall policy for forest management planning and monitoring.

The focus of the project was on identifying routes to improving the overall forest management planning and monitoring processes at the local level. The most critical researchable constraint, in this regard, was the need for forest users themselves to become active managers of their forests. There was a need to develop processes whereby forest users could collectively generate and learn from management experiences, as well as actively demand services from other organisations, whilst understanding the resource and capacity constraints of these organisations.

Local level processes cannot be dealt with in isolation from the variety of interactions between forest users and other institutions at the district and national level. The way in which any new process emerging from this research will fit into current planning and policy structures, as well as the constraints within these existing structures, all impact on the relevance, cost effectiveness and institutional viability of the process. Hence this project not only aimed to identify and put into practice a process within the case study sites, but also to single out the contextual issues that will affect the sustainability of the process in future. It was beyond the scope of this research project to actively address these issues, but rather it sought to make recommendations, which are as practical and conceptually clear as possible.

3.3.2 The community forestry process at the DFO/RP level

The Forest Act (1993) and Forest Rules (1995) have devolved powers to district forest officers in an unprecedented way. As legislation has given rural people greater power to make decisions regarding the management of their forest resources under the community forestry programme, so the district forest office was seen as a crucial actor in the regulatory mechanism for this.

Theoretically speaking, the role of the DFO has changed from principal decision-maker in the management of non-community forests to that of regulator and service provider in the community forestry context, and this equates to a major shift in power. However, there are many processes in this transition period, or to be more specific the formation of a FUG, that are crucial to the way in which an autonomous FUG can function, and continue to develop and fine-tune their management systems. This relates to how the demand is generated for community forestry, which actors make the demand, and how the communities are identified and the forest areas that they are permitted to manage. It is necessary to examine:

- The role of the DFO and Range Post in this process by comparing their impact on the functioning of FUGs after the hand-over;
- How far this regulatory mechanism affects the more detailed aspects of forest users' management planning

3.3.3 Community forestry at the forest users level.

In principle, the community forestry legislation has given rural people greater power to make decisions regarding the management of their forest resources. It gives them the authority over the local forests as well as the re4sponsibility for managing and utilising the resource in a sustainable manner. The government’s Forest Department, especially the DFO/Range Post offices, are supposed to facilitate the process for local communities to take control of forest resources in their villages and responsibility to manage them. There is a need therefore to assess the ways in which local forest users are managing and utilising the local forest resources. Whether they FUGs are managing their community forests according to the community forestry guidelines and as described in the Operational Plans. The aspects that forest users consider important for forest management and utilisation and the reasons for this. Finally, the constraints to effective forest management and utilisation, and the ways in which these constraints may be overcome.

4. Overall approach to research and selection of research sites

4.1 Introduction

The main objective of this section is to describe the overall approach used by the project for research and for the selection of research sites for a detailed field investigation. It first describes the concept of participatory action research (PAR) process and the rationale for adopting this for the field research. It then describes the overall research methodology, principle stages involved in the research process and the activities undertaken for the preparation of the field research, including the selection of field research sites and the development of research questions.

4.2 Participatory Action Research.

The project adopted a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to the research process. PAR is 'a process through which members of a … community identify a problem, collect and analyse information, and act upon the problem in order to find solutions and to promote social and political transformation (Selener, 1997). PAR combines three principal activities: research, education and action. It is a research method in which people are actively involved in conducting a systematic assessment of a social phenomenon by identifying a specific problem for the purpose of solving it. It is an educational process because researcher and participants together analyse and learn about the causes of and possible solutions to the problem addressed. It is an action-oriented activity since findings are implemented in the form of practical solutions. All three processes are conducted in a participatory way between outside researchers and participants (SPRA, 1982, cited in Selener, 1997).

Participatory (action) research methodologies in forestry and agriculture have grown out of the need for research findings to be more relevant to peoples' needs. Its principles are based on active involvement of people who are likely to benefit from, or be affected by, research outcomes. There is an urgent need for research support to community forestry, based on some ideas of action research, which are characterised as 'actions primarily designed to influence subsequent events … in which the physical and social setting of the research is that in which the problems actually arose' (Griffin, 1991). If the aim of research is to serve the implementation of community forestry, it is not enough simply to continue with conventional research and try and feed it into community forestry. The practice of community forestry must take central place in research (Fisher and Gilmour, 1990). Nepal has been one of the main places for some of the development of action research, although not usually regarded as within the remit of forestry researchers, but rather as part of the function of staff within field based projects (Stewart et al., n.d.).

The project followed a PAR approach for two reasons. Firstly, there is a need to initiate monitoring at the level of the forest manager and the forest resource:

- Action and learning cycles are crucial as it is implausible that conventional research methods in natural and social sciences can predict the future outcomes of yesterday's and today's actions in the human and environment interface. "Action" in PAR is seen as treatment and this helps capture its effects, which is not possible in the conventional / extractive research.
- To initiate or enhance a sustained monitoring process at the local level, the research must reflect the priorities and values of the local people, which, in turn, constantly get modified as the new information and knowledge is generated and as the relationships among the users changed/improve through "education" processes of the PAR.
- Research must be done in collaboration between the project team and the local people so that in addition to developing realistic lessons for wider dissemination, they can continue to experiment on their own and adapt the research process to suit their variety of situations.

Secondly, the context of this particular research project requires a PAR approach:

- Within the forest sector as well as within academic establishments, there are many different interests and expectations relating to any research into monitoring systems. There are also different preconceptions as to what the overall monitoring process should be like, and what purpose it should fulfil. The project, through the PAR process, could attempt to address these preconceptions;

- Although concepts such as *criteria* and *indicators* have been developed as the core elements of participatory monitoring (through intensive and extensive practical experience, reflection and analysis), any assumptions that may arise from these concepts must still be challenged during the research process;
- Unlike with the conventional research, expected outcomes of the research cannot be defined in detail in advance (it may be difficult in some instances to reconcile this with the identification of indicators);
- Indicators can only be developed locally – it is meaningless to import indicators from another site;
- Indicators, or even M and E as a whole, cannot be separated from the entire research process. By looking for indicators, one stimulates a lot of questions which in turn can only be answered by research.

The adoption of a PAR approach forced the project team to consider the following issues as they relate to the development of monitoring process and indicators for forest management at the local level:

- While the need for a monitoring process and indicators has been a concern of professional foresters, especially Forest Department, it has not been an explicit concern of the local forest users themselves. Therefore, how can a monitoring process and indicators be developed so that they will be an integral part of group inquiry, rather than simply a disruptive external intervention?
- What are the respective roles of outsider facilitators and local people in collaborative research? In particular, the inputs of different knowledge systems need to be examined. The facilitator's experience of wide ranging issues in community forestry (and other socio-economic and environmental issues) must be used in such a way that they provide the local people with an opportunity to reflect on issues specific to their locality.
- Active involvement of group members in the monitoring process depends on how their multiple interests are raised in group discussions and final decision-making. It is, however, not possible for the facilitators to ensure that all these interests are brought forward during the collaborative research process, and so a structure must be in place that encourages increasing involvement in the future.
- How then can the transition be made from participatory monitoring (involving both facilitators and forest users) to an on-going self-monitoring process that is fully integrated in overall group functioning?

This project (or report) attempts to answer these questions.

4.3 Overall research methodology - major stages involved

The overall research process used by the project can be divided into five stages as follows:

Stage 1:	Preparatory;
Stage 2:	Formation of research group for inquiry; decision-making, and action plan preparation,
Stage 3:	Determining monitoring criteria and indicators and the process to do so;
Stage 4:	Implementation of the action plan and monitoring.
Stage 5:	Analysis of the research process and reflection for future monitoring and evaluation

Stages 1 and 5 were solely for the benefit of the project's external team members, including the Range Post staff whereas Stages 2 through to 4 involved the members of the individual selected communities, especially the committee officials and tole representatives. Stages 3 and 4, which are described in detail in Section s, are critical as these involve the actual process of developing monitoring and evaluation systems which would be carried out by a FUG.

The preparatory phase was essentially for developing understanding between the project team and the forest users as to the objectives of the research project, through meeting with key representatives or

officials, the committee and then meetings in toles[5] to ensure that as many households as possible are reached. Subsequently, in each tole, the tole members select representatives for detailed investigations in the next phase.

In the second stage the representatives, who formed the research group[6] were facilitated in group inquiry, discussing the issues brought together from the tole meetings, with a view to developing a set of proposals for both short-term and long-term solutions and objectives. These were then discussed between the tole representatives and the other households in their respective toles.

In the third stage all the household members came together in an assembly meeting and made decisions on the priority issues, and developed a work plan for each decision and the means for monitoring both implementation and impact. Where there was no consensus on particular issues, or where there was a clear need for further research, information requirements and methods for researching them were discussed.

In the fourth stage, decisions were implemented, and monitored, and the planned data collection undertaken. This was only partially covered in this project, with some preliminary observations. A follow-up to the project is currently underway (September 2001-September 2002) in order to gain some understanding of the sustainability of the process, and the constraints encountered by both the forest users and Range Post staff.

The last stage involved the analysis of the research process and reflection and planning for the subsequent activities of the project. This involved reflection on the research methods, tools and techniques used, the sequence in which these were used, the role of the facilitators and the ways in which the methods, tools and techniques could be adapted in the future activities.

4.4 Activities in the preparatory stage

4.4.1 Consultations

Prior to the main field research, two major consultation activities were carried out. Firstly, a consultation workshop was held at the University of Reading, UK, in May 2000, with various interested individuals and institutions. The chief activities of the workshop were to disseminate the project objectives and issues arising out of the desk study underway, and to discuss the current practices and gaps in monitoring of forest sector management in Nepal. Secondly, consultations were held with various institutions in Nepal in June 2000 with Community and Private Forestry Division, WATCH, CIFOR Action Aid Nepal, ICIMOD, NACRMP, NSCFP, ForestAction and LFP to discuss possible sites for research and find, and make an agreement with, a collaborator organisation.

It was decided that the project would collaborate with NUKCFP, now called Livelihood and Forestry Programme (LFP) under the new phase. A national NGO with research capacity was also sought for partnership in research activities and agreement was signed with ForestAction. Baglung district was subsequently selected as the main site, as this is one of the districts supported by LFP west area.

The other purpose of the consultations with institutions in Nepal was to gather information on different interests in community forestry monitoring, and accordingly some indication of the kinds of interests there may be in the outcomes of the project. The information gathered was arranged according to the purposes of monitoring in the organisation (as outlined by Estrella and Gaventa, 1998), as well as by the involvement of other stakeholders in the monitoring processes and the overall strengths and weaknesses of these processes. This is summarised in Appendix 3.

[5] Tole is a Nepali word for a hamlet or small settlement within a larger one. It is not always easy to identify toles in a large village, though most people will understand it to be cluster of about 10-20 houses. It is also recognised as the level at which most informal communication takes place.

[6] The research group differs from the executive committee in that, firstly, it is a larger group of people, secondly, the representation in the research group should change annually in future, and thirdly, the research group is also there to discuss the committee and its relation to the rest of the group, and accordingly the committee is also regarded as a stakeholder group within the FUG (the institution).

4.4.2 Selection of district and Range Post

In a brief meeting to discuss methodology at the University of Reading it had been tentatively decided to focus the field research within one Range Post area for the following reasons:

- Intensive field research work within a range post would provide greater insight into the interface between Range Post staff and FUGs and would provide an understanding of the practical constraints facing Range Post staff.
- Focusing on one Range Post area would enable the research project to examine relations between FUGs and how they can learn from each other.
- Owing to the short time-scale of the field research it was desirable to reduce the logistical complications associated with long periods of travel between sites.

Meetings were held with the staff of LFP (West area) and Baglung District Forest Office to discuss the potential Range Post sites within Baglung district for the research. Following consultations with the Range Post staff a final decision was made to undertake the research in Kushmisera Range Post area (see map). The main criteria for selecting this Range Post was that it covered a large area (encompassing ten VDCs) and so provided greater scope for incorporating a diversity of FUG and non-FUG situations.

4.4.3 Outside research team formation

The outside research team consisted of staff from IRDD, ForestAction, Kushmisera Range Post[7] and two local facilitators[8]. In Kathmandu, a one day orientation meeting was held to develop a broad idea of research and for a common understanding among the IRDD and ForestAction members of the project objectives and research methodology. In Kushmisera Range Post, a two-day orientation workshop was held with the Ranger and Forest Guards, in which the overall process and some ideas for tools and techniques were discussed. The local facilitators only became available for work by the time the main research had begun. Range Post and District level FECOFUN committee members[9] later joined the team for particular events.

4.5 Selection of field sites for detailed research

4.5.1 Selection of forest user group (FUG) sites

Potential sites were identified in Baglung using the FUG database for Baglung District (compiled by the District Forest Office). Further criteria for selection then drawn up in consultation with the Ranger and forest guards in Kushmisera, to reflect their interests and experience. These criteria were weighted (see Table 4.1). It was important to ensure that, as far as possible, a set of sites was found that represents a wide range of contexts throughout the middle hills of Nepal.

One criterion that was not recognised at this time, but which later turned out to be quite crucial, is the ratio of forest area to FUG households. Nevertheless, this could be analysed retrospectively across the five research sites – Jana Chetana having a high ratio and Sirupata having the lowest. This factor affect6s the nature of participation in the process, and also the kinds of issues that would be researched.

A one-day workshop was organised with representatives from potential sites to discuss research objectives, and to select provisional research sites from those expressing interest in participating in the research. There were no representatives from non-FUG sites, and it was decided that further discussions would be needed.

[7] Madhav Baral (Ranger), Jaya Bahadur Karki (Head Forest Guard), Yajendra Paudel, Ganga Rijal, Daya Ram Paudel, Krishna Prasad Paudel and Kaladhar Jaishi (Forest guards)
[8] Hem Raj Acharya and Lila Thapa
[9] Dilli Prasad Sharma (Member, FECOFUN's District Level Advisory Committee), Sabitri Devi Sharma (Vice-Chairperson, Kushmisera RP FECOFUN Committee) and Devi Kala Rana (Member, Kushmisera RP FECOFUN Committee)

Agreements were made with three FUGs to collaborate in the research and also three provisional FUGs were selected. An agreement was later made with one of the provisional FUGs (Sirupata). The final list of sites selected for a detailed investigation includes: Pallo Pakho, Jana Chetana, Bhane, Sirupata as representatives of FUGs, and are written in italics in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Criteria used for the selection of potential FUGs for detailed investigations

Weight	Criteria of weighting		FUG Site
5	Altitude	Besi (Lower altitude)	*Bhane, Pallo Pakho, Sirupata*
		Lek (Higher altitude)	Gaja Deurali, *Jana Chetana*
4	Forest Type	Sal	*Pallo Pakho*
		Katus-Chilaune	Narayan Dihi, *Bhane*
		Sallo	Kot Bhairab, *Sirupata*
		Khasru	Gaja Deurali,
		Mixed	*Jana Chetana*
3	Time since OP approved	Long-established	Kot Bhairab*, Pallo Pakho, Bhane*, Narayan Dihi
		Newly formed	*Jana Chetana*, Gaja Deurali
3	Caste/ ethnicity	Homogenous	*Pallo Pakho*, Gaja Deurali, Narayan Dihi
		Heterogeneous	Kot Bhairab, *Bhane, Jana Chetana, Sirupata*
2	Access to market	Near	*Pallo Pakho*, Narayan Dihi, *Bhane*
		Remote	Gaja Deurali, Kot Bhairab, *Jana Chetana*
1	Resource utilisation	Low	Kot Bhairab, *Bhane, Sirupata*
		High	*Pallo Pakho, Jana Chetana*

5 = Most important, 1 = Least important

4.5.2 Selection of non-FUG site

In addition to the FUGs, the project also aimed to undertake a study in at least one site where local people have yet to formally become involved in the community forestry programme. However, this was not so easy, mainly because the Range Post staff only keep information on the forests that have been handed-over to local communities as community forests. Although forest guards have knowledge of some communities forming their own forest protection (conservation) committees, there is no record of these in the Range Post.

After discussions with the Ranger, Forest Guards and some FUG representatives during the selection workshop at the Range Post, a potential site, Kamere Pakho, was provisionally selected as a representative of the non-FUG sites. However, we had to drop this later on, mainly because of the large number of user households (approximately 200 households) and a huge and wide reaching conflict, involving complex political alliances.

Another non-FUG site, Jyamire, was selected very late on in the process, after discussions with the vice-chairman of Painyu-Thanthap VDC, during the research workshop with Bhane FUG of the same VDC. The vice-chairman recommended some of the neighbouring wards (all of which had formed conservation committees) for the research. After discussions with some of the committee members in these wards, Jyamire, which in fact neighbours Bhane FUG was selected.

4.5 Development of site specific research questions

During the site selection workshop at the Range Post, representatives provided background information on their own FUGs. In the following sections we highlight key factors characterising each site, which formed the basis for identifying specific questions that would be investigated in each site.

Pallo Pakho is regarded as a very active FUG, and on the basis of a FUG categorisation process, had won the district prize. The FUG is managing a comparatively small area of forest, and yet has raised considerable revenue, as well as achieving a high degree of participation in community development activities.

Jana Chetana has by far the highest forest area to household ratio in addition to high market value for some of the species (particularly medicinal plant species) within the forest. This site was used to gain an idea of how group investigations into resource potential, as well as how their interests in more market-oriented activities, may fit into the overall process.

Bhane was described by the Forest Guards as one of the less active of the FUGs in Kushmisera, and indeed the chairman himself commented, in the initial selection workshop, that they had experienced considerable problems in mobilising the members to manage the forest. In this situation, the project team wished to examine how monitoring processes may contribute to building mutual trust within the group.

It was difficult to outline specific research questions for Sirupata given the limited scope of the project. This site could provide insights into how an FUG with a very small forest resource, where many of the users are dependent on other forest areas, could research the potentials not only of their own community forest but also of other forest areas.

Despite the formation of a FUG in a neighbouring ward (Bhane FUG), the users of Jyamire forest have shown no response to the government community forestry policy. Community forestry can be subject to conflict, as elite groups perform stealthy political manoeuvres to ensure that the forest eventually falls into their hands. Although community forestry guidelines highlight the importance of conflict resolution and consensus (with the implied pivotal role of Range Post staff), in reality there is very little opportunity for the majority of villagers to reflect on the implications of community forestry for their own livelihoods.

With these thoughts in mind, the specific issues to address in Jyamire were:

- How do the residents of Jyamire view their rights to use the forest, how do they perceive their position within the legal framework and; more particularly, how do they perceive community forestry?
- Crucially, how well informed are these views?
- How does access to decision-making by women and different social and caste groupings differ from FUG scenarios?
- Following on from these, how can a group monitoring process be developed that will enable the residents of Jyamire to inquire as to how they can get maximum benefits for their livelihoods from forest resources? In particular, there is a need for a transparent process through which all members can make informed decisions as to whether or not it will be cost effective to form a FUG for the management of the forest within their ward boundary.

It is important to recognise that there are many key issues that relate to the FUG formation process that were beyond the limits of this research owing to time constraints. Such issues relate to the identification of users and forest area, which is indeed crucial, and relevant to the development of a monitoring process.

4.6 Field research approaches and methods

The detailed field investigations in the selected research sites were carried out during November 2000 to May 2001. This includes the preliminary work with the Range Post staff and the various tools and techniques used in different stages of the process.

4.6.1 Working with the Range Post staff

As the research work involved the Range Post staff and forest user groups with large numbers of people, it was important that all the concerned people had a general understanding of the project objectives and approaches. The project team members were fully conscious of the need to discuss, at all levels, the project objectives and approach to be used. This included discussions with the Range Post staff, forest users committee and the relevant ordinary forest users – men and women.

At the Range Post level, discussions over three days on project objectives and approaches to working with villagers, led to the Ranger committing himself and his staff (five forest guards) to work in the

project. He asked one Forest Guard, with approval from the District Forest Officer, to work full-time in the project in all of the five sites, and arranged for other Forest Guards to be involved in at least one site. This way, all the Forest Guards would have the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills of participatory techniques and actually use them in practice. This would also provide an opportunity for at least one of the Forest Guards to go through a full cycle of planning, implementing and evaluating the field programmes. Importantly, it would mean that this Forest Guard would be able to contribute to the reflections and lessons learnt throughout the project.

4.6.2 Working with local forest users – the process

In initiating project activities in the communities, the research team took into consideration of issues relating to the understanding of how to work with villagers in each site vis-à-vis how to enter the village, where exactly to go first and who to talk to, how to ensure that all the concerned forest users know about the project objectives, not just a few local leaders or the committee officials, while at the same time recognising the authority of these officials and not bypassing them, which would mean undermining the formal institutional structures of the FUG. After intensive discussions, the Range Post staff and outside project members agreed and developed a tentative methodology to initiate work in each research site, to be adapted to suit specific site situations (see Table 4.2).

In each of the five research sites, a systematic process of research was used for detailed investigations. Table 4.2 provides information on the general approach (in terms of sequential steps) and activities undertaken. We began with open minds about the kinds of questions that needed to be raised with the villagers. Therefore, it was agreed to use one or two sites as 'pilots' to explore and 'test' the various ideas, tools and techniques. These were Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana.

A range of methods, tools, techniques and games were used including resource and social mapping, village and forest walks, situation analysis (web diagram), visioning, wealth rankings, focused group discussions, forest resource assessment, sample plots etc.

The research methodology was adapted to the needs and situation, and methods, tools and techniques were chosen by the research team to fit the particular circumstances of each site.

Table 4.2: General process agreed initially for use in each site for a detailed field investigation

Step	Activity
Step 1: Preparation **Meeting with FUG Committee Officials**	• Enter the village • Meet with key members of the village and discuss informally the project objectives • Develop a time-table (schedule of activities) with the FUG committee members and fix dates, time and place for tole meetings and inform the tole members
Step 2: Preparation **Tole Meetings**	• Organise the tole meetings on the date, time and place agreed • Discuss the project objective • Select tole representatives, at least 1 man & 1 woman, to participate in the workshop
Step 3 Detail investigations **Workshop with Tole Reps.**	• Organise workshop with tole representatives • Develop a set of indicators for forest management • Document the process to develop criteria and indicators • Prepare to present the outcome of the workshops to rest of the FUG members

As the research work progressed, the project team constantly assessed and reflected on the usefulness of the methods and tools used, and accordingly adapted the research methodology. The actual methodology that emerged after a constant adaptation is presented in Section 7 (see Figure 7.1 and Table 7.1). For example, in Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana, tole meetings were used basically to inform people about the project purpose and to select the tole representatives for the detailed investigations of the forest management issues facing the FUG. However, these representatives in the subsequent workshops were unable to reflect on the major issues faced by the FUG members. Consequently, it was recognised that the first set of tole meetings could also be facilitated in such a way that the tole members are able to raise their concerns and interests relating to community forest management. These issues were noted down and used as the agenda for discussion at the tole

representative workshop. This also enabled the tole members to select the right people to be representatives in the workshop, making the discussion much more focused and relevant to the real issues facing the FUGs.

4.6.3 Key features of the field investigation process

There are several features of the process that should be highlighted here.

- The basic communication structure within the overall process was developed building on the previous experiences of the Forest User Group Forest Management Project (FFMP). In particular, the research process aimed to build as much as possible on existing communication systems at the level of toles (or similar divisions within the group), and then link these into the central group decision-making processes.
- The workshop with tole representatives was designed to develop a constructive interface between people with differing interests and values. Instead of creating separate focus (or interest) group discussions, the aim was to bring together wide-ranging issues from within the group. Through the use of tools to describe basic issues, such as equity, it initiates a process of inquiry into and analysis of the condition of the group as a whole, and determine how this affects community forest management.
- The process enables the facilitators to involve most FUG members, not just the FUG committee officials through tole meetings. While it was not always possible to get full participation of users in the tole level meetings, the project team were able to communicate with approximately 90 percent of the total households within the forest users groups. Furthermore, having the tole representatives, including poor people and women, in the workshop meant that discussion would cut across the various interest groups, rather than being dominated by a few elite members.

4.6.4 Nominations of tole representatives

Tole representatives were involved in the workshop to encourage representation of different interest groups, men and women, wealthy and poor, high castes and low castes. It was discovered that most of the poorer people tend to avoid their involvement in community forestry activities, as they have to forego wage earnings for that day. It was agreed with the LFP Co-ordinators (Kathmandu and Baglung Area) and Baglung District Forest Officer to pay a research allowance, equivalent to the daily wage rate, to those who attended the workshop. It could not be assumed that in all cases the process would benefit the group as a whole, and as this was principally an action research project, participants were also co-researchers and were encouraged to give suggestions as to how the process could be improved. Thus, while there are both advantages and disadvantages in the payment system, which will be discussed in Section 7, such an arrangement worked well for this project. An equal number of men and women, many of them from poorer households, were able to participate in the workshop, and contributed to the workshop discussion.

4.6.5 Reaching linguistic understanding

As the discussion progressed, it became obvious that there was difficulty in understanding words such as ‘monitoring’ and ‘indicators’. Literal Nepali translations of ‘monitoring’ and ‘indicators’ are ‘anugaman’ and ‘suchak’, derived from Sanskrit. Although all the Forest Guards were Brahmin and Chhetri caste (who very often grow up learning Sanskrit language through religious texts) they found it difficult to explain the words. The word ‘anugaman’ is also viewed rather negatively, by Forest Guards and local village elite, as senior officials from the national, regional and district headquarters have often come to assess local work in the past.

Even approximate local words or phrases relating to monitoring or investigation have negative connotations, or are perceived as activities conducted only by officials and technicians. Phrases such as 'rekh dekh' ('keeping an eye on something'), 'lekha jokha' (weighing up and writing), 'khojbin' or 'chhanbin' (investigation - but usually referring to investigating someone else), were considered but do not help to develop a common understanding about the monitoring process.

Eventually, it was decided to describe the various actions that take place in monitoring - 'gareko kamlai pharkera herne' (reflect on the work already done), 'sikne' (learning) and 'yas anusar kam

garne' (taking action accordingly). These words were very meaningful to the forest users, primarily because they describe the context and need for monitoring, while they are familiar activities. From it users can recognise the challenge of doing them as a group in relation to forest management.

The value of these terms was reflected in the fact that the tole representatives (the workshop participants) themselves used them throughout the research period, when talking to each other and to the project team members. Very few of the participants repeated the words 'anugaman' or 'suchak' after they were used to explain the project objectives. The exercise proved very useful, with a profound influence on the way the forest users and the outside project team members perceived their roles in the research project, and hence the way in which both would work together.

4.7 Exchange of experiences / lessons between five research sites (joint workshop)

On completion of the initial workshops, tole meetings and assemblies in all five sites, a three day workshop was held with representatives from each site. Four representatives were selected by the committee, as far as possible from those that were involved in the first workshops, and of those, two representatives were women. Amongst these were FECOFUN representatives where the FUG had membership.

This workshop was included in the original planned methodology. The original *purpose* of the workshop was to provide a chance to exchange experiences from each site, and criteria and indicators developed within each of those sites. This however changed, as the project team had by now realised that there was far more to be done in order to establish some kind of on going planning and monitoring. Thus the purposes of the workshop were:

- To exchange experiences of the different project processes carried out in each site
- To develop a common understanding between representatives all five sites as well as with the project team of what were the critical, or most useful steps and characteristics of the process
- To highlight how this process benefited the groups, and any problems or negative aspects that were encountered
- To discuss how the process can be used practically in the future
- To discuss the decisions made in the assembly, and identify gaps or problems encountered in implementation and monitoring

To discuss the requirements for exchange of information between the groups and the Range Post and Range Post level FECOFUN committee. The workshop involved work in respective groups to highlight the major steps that the representatives could recall from the project process in their site, and then presentations and discussion in the plenary. Part of the analysis was to look at how the process had translated into real actions by the groups, and whether they think that some variant of the process can be followed in future without excessive cost to the users.

With regards to information exchange between local level organisations, three groups were formed representing the five sites, Range Post staff and FECOFUN (with additional FECOFUN committee members). Each group summarised both the information that they would like to impart to other individual organisations, as well as information that they require from other organisations. These were presented to the whole group. It was hoped that this would generate discussion between the groups and highlight any discrepancies or shortfalls as relates to different expectations and understandings of each other's roles.

However, it became apparent that none of the organisations had ever discussed each other's roles in such a way before, and the information that they drew up related primarily to broad categories of activities, rather than verifiable actions and services. This meant that, at this level of discussion there was little opportunity to undertake any detailed analysis, and in reality it became an exercise in raising awareness of each other's broad mission statements.

For the project team a major output of the workshop was the realisation that there were more critical steps to be followed before a decision made in the assembly could be put into action and the implementation and impacts monitored by the group members themselves. Arrangements were therefore made to meet for two days each with the original representatives from each site.

4.8 Meeting with Range Post level FECOFUN members and RP staff

A workshop was held with staff of Kushmisera Range Post and the FECOFUN Kushmisera Range Post area committee at Kushmisera Range Post. The purpose of the workshop was for representatives from both organisations to examine their relations with each other, and with FUGs, on which to provide a basis for monitoring interfaces at the local level. In the future it will be important to involve other local organisations, such as HIMAWANTI (Himalayan Women Association Network International), or other youth clubs etc., as well as VDCs. However, as the project had had most contact with these two organisations, the workshop focused on them.

Although the original objective of the workshop was to look directly at the information exchange (monitoring interface) between local organisations involved with FUGs, experiences from the case study sites and the joint workshop led to a different approach. It was clear that there could be no mutual monitoring interface between FUGs, Range Post and FECOFUN, unless all parties were aware of the roles, responsibilities and capacities of members of each other. It is not just an issue of the number of times a FUG is visited by staff of the Range Post, but whether the visit was useful or whether this was in response to specific requests from the FUG. Monitoring between organisations requires each organisation to have expectations, and thus an understanding of the kind of ongoing services and skills available, as well as the overall mission and strategy of another organisation. In this light, it was necessary to examine with the Range Post and FECOFUN representatives the potentials for both common and independent strategies in the community forestry process within the Range Post area. This strategy will still need to be developed over time, particularly as the human resources of FECOFUN are likely to change constantly as new member FUGs are formed.

The main activities in the workshop were:

- Discussion on local historical background to each organisation: highlighting achievements, any changes in strategy or mission (particularly relating to the Range Post) and areas where both organisations have worked together in the community forestry process. Other information was gathered on the current status of community forestry within the Range Post, as well as remaining forest areas with potential for hand over, backlog of applications for community forestry and conflicts.
- The identification of the potential roles of each organisation in the major steps of the community forestry process including awareness raising, processing applications for community forestry, identification of users, forest survey and general information gathering on prospective community forests and preparation of constitution and Operational Plans.
- Discussion of information exchange between FECOFUN and Range Post and between them and FUGs with the representatives of these stakeholders at the Range Post level.

The workshop lasted two days though the Range Post staff and FECOFUN committee met for another day after this to continue discussions.

4.9 District level stakeholders meeting (in Baglung)

A two-day workshop was held with representatives from LFP, DFO, Range Post staff, FECOFUN (district and Range Post level committees) and the case study FUGs. The purposes of the workshop were to disseminate field experiences and preliminary findings from the case study sites, to identify the expectations and interests of district level stakeholders in the field research process undertaken within the project and to discuss monitoring practices amongst organisations within the district.

Part of the workshop was chiefly for open discussion and exchange of ideas regarding the field process and how it relates to their own practices in monitoring. The original objective of the workshop was for stakeholders to further develop their own indicator sets in collaboration with local level

organisations, but this was impracticable given the time available, and it should also be remembered that there were only five local level institutions represented, which meant that the process would not have been in any way representative of the whole district. There were two activities related to the monitoring practices of these organisations:

- Discussion on monitoring information requirements - though the discussion did not go into detail about the indicators used by different organisations (see Section 6.5.4). The question was also asked as to why particular information was needed (i.e. what are the implications for the activities of the organisation?)
- Discussion on mechanisms for monitoring - how and when is information gathered and analysed and by who?

4.10 Time spent in the field research

An overall time frame is given, in Table 4.4 for each major activity during the field research. This indicates the amount of time that collaborators spent with the project team. Whilst the project team aimed to make the best possible use of the intervening period between monsoons, when farmers have comparatively less workload, there were periods of intense agricultural activity during which time it was difficult to arrange meetings with people. These also varied between sites but it was not always possible to arrange the time schedule accordingly. Generally the agricultural workload gradually increased from March onwards, but even when there was not any activity in the fields, people's preoccupation with the weather and timing of the work increased throughout this period and it was harder for them to concentrate on project activities.

Table 4.4: Time spent in the field research (in days)

	DFO	RP	Research Sites					Total
			a	b	c	d	e	
Brainstorming, preparation & team building	4	4	-	-	-	-	-	8
FUG committee meeting	-	-	-1	1	1	1	1	5
Tole meetings	-	-	4	3	4	5	3	19
Visit to other research sites	-	-	-	-	1	5	1	7
Workshops with tole representatives	-	-	12	8	7	7	5	39
Presentation and sharing of ideas in tole meetings	-	-	4	3	1	2	1	11
FUG general assembly meeting	-	-	1	1	3	1	1	7
Arrangement for follow up work	-	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
Meeting of RP staff & FECOFUN members	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	3
Joint workshop	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	3
Meeting in Baglung	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Total days	6	12	24	18	19	23	14	116

a = Pallo Pakho, b = Jana Chetana; c = Bhane; d = Sirupata; e = Jyamire

4.11 Arrangements for follow-up work

It is impossible to make conclusions about the likely effectiveness of the monitoring systems arising from the research process that was undertaken with the five groups, from seven months of fieldwork. Any community forestry arrangement will be complex and the participation of different people in group processes is affected by many livelihood factors as well as social-psychological factors, coupled with the long time horizons involved with forest eco-systems and thus the benefits accruing to the users. It is necessary to gain some feedback over time to assess the strengths and weaknesses of this process in assisting to build the capacity of local people to actively learn from and adapt their forest management practices, as well as to adjust the process as necessary.

After the research work in the field, each site has committed itself to involvement in follow-up work. This will involve critical observations on the way in which members interact and the way in which decisions are made. Both FUGC and the tole representatives decided to follow the process as new issues arise or to set the agenda for annual planning before the general assembly.

The next Section provides information on the research area – Baglung district, Kushmisera Range Post and the five research sites.

5. General information on research area

5.1 General information on Baglung District

Baglung District is situated in the western development region of Nepal, at approximately 275 km west of the capital, Kathmandu (see map). The eastern section of the district in the Kali Gandaki valley, and tributary valleys, is within easy reach of a road linking Baglung (the district headquarters) with Pokhara and Kathmandu (built around 10 years ago). To the west of this catchment area the district is remote, and isolated from the district headquarters.

Figure 5.1: Location of the study area

Table 5.1 shows the Human Development Index and Purchasing Price Parity per capita income averages for Nepal as a whole and for Baglung district (NESAC, 1998), showing Baglung district as having higher than average values. The UNDP classify the Human Development Index for Baglung District as indicating low human development. The table also shows that the average holding size (CBS, 2000), amongst those holding land (i.e. excluding 0 values for landless and thus no indication of the number of landless) is in fact lower than the average for the rest of Nepal.

Table 5.1: Basic livelihoods indices for Baglung District

	Human Development Index (1996)	PPP Per capita income, US$ (1996)	Average land holding size (1991/2)
National level	0.325	1189	0.96ha
Range across 75 districts throughout Nepal	0.147 (Mugu) - 0.603 - (Kathmandu)	530 (Bajura) - 3236 (Kathmandu)	0.28ha (Achham) - 1.64ha[10] (Bardiya)
Middle hills region	0.357	1299	0.77ha
Middle hills-Western development region	0.351	1235	0.78ha
Baglung District	0.337	1281	0.75ha

[10] This range refers to predominantly rural districts, and excludes Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur districts

In general, wage labour forms a very large part of the contributions to people's livelihoods in Baglung district, and there are very few households that do not have at least one male member that is working or has worked (or is planning to work) in Kathmandu, India or the Middle East. These observations are reflected in the statistics shown above, particularly given that very often households will sell parcels of land for the initial investment in going abroad to work.

Implications for the way in which people perceive the common property forest are (a) very few households can do without the regular supplies of firewood, fodder and animal bedding materials, and (b) in terms of capital assets, however, the common property forest may be seen as less important, if they are better able to buy these products.

5.2 Kushmisera Range Post area

5.2.1 Area and people

Kushmisera Range Post area falls within the eastern strip of Baglung district, with a maximum of 10-12 hours walking to reach the road head (in Kushma, the headquarters of neighbouring Parbat District). Thus compared to other areas in Baglung District, this could be described as having medium accessibility to markets and road transport. The Range Post itself is situated in Kushmisera Bazaar, which is a growing market place. Some have described Kushmisera as being similar to Baglung 15-20 years ago before the road connected it to Pokhara. In fact a road has been under construction to connect Kushmisera to Baglung approximately 20 miles to the north, although at the time of the project the market town of Kushma (Parbat District headquarters) was more accessible to the residents of Kushmisera and the surrounding area, than Baglung itself. The main form of goods transportation to the area has been mules.

The Range Post area covers two valleys (Theuli Khola and Raaudi Khola, which are both tributaries of the Kali Gandaki river) enclosed by a horse-shoe of ridges reaching 2000-2300m above sea level. It covers VDCs[11] within, and one rather isolated VDC (Chhisti) that lies on the other side of the horse-shoe ridge. Kushmisera Bazaar lies at about 700m above sea level on the confluence of the Theuli Khola and Raaudi Khola, so the Range Post is quite centrally located, with a maximum of 8-9 hours walk to reach the furthest FUGs in the area.

The residents of the area around Kushmisera are predominantly Bahun (Brahmin caste, Sharma, Acharya and Sapkota) and Magar (an ethnic group rather than a caste, though they adhere to many caste traditions), with minority occupational caste groups (Kami, Sarki and Darji). Although this kind of combination of social groupings is quite common throughout the western hills, in fact there is a higher proportion of Brahmin population. People in Nepal often regard this area as being pervaded by a strong Brahmin culture, and there is a larger number of people employed as priests (Pandit) than in other areas of Nepal.

Foreign employment is one of the most significant wage earners in the area for most social groups (including occupational caste groups). The army has been the most lucrative option, though this occupation has been more open to Magars and Gurungs than other castes and ethnic groups. Many of the wealthiest people in the area are either currently in the armed forces or army pensioners.

In terms of political representation, Brahmins and Magars appear to be quite equal. In villages where large numbers of Brahmins and Magars live together, occasionally party political allegiance has been divided along ethnic lines.

[11] Village Development Committee (VDC) is a village council and represents the smallest political unit and government administrative boundary. Each VDC is divided into nine wards.

5.2.2 The Range Post

A Range Post is the lowest level office of the government's Forest Department field offices. A District Forest Office normally has five to eight Range Posts and each Range Post covers five to ten Village Development Committees (VDCs) with population ranging from 25,000 – 50,000 people (or 5,000 – 10,000 households).

Kushmisera Range Post is staffed by a Ranger, one Forest Operations Assistant and five Forest Guards. Generally Rangers and Forest Operations Assistants are transferred quite regularly and are not local to the area. Kushmisera is no exception, and the Ranger (Madhav Baral) had only just taken his position there two months prior to the project. He subsequently left for studying forestry degree course at the Institute of Forestry (3 years programme) one month into the field work, and there was no Ranger present for the remainder of the study. The Forest Operations Assistant was also changed during the research fieldwork.

The community forestry programme effectively began in Kushmisera in 1995 when the first FUG was formed (The first FUG in Baglung district was formed in 1992). At the time of the project there were a total of twenty-three FUGs formed in the area, with an increasing rate of formation (Table 5.2)

Kushmisera was selected for its overall social, biophysical and geographical diversity. However, this has meant that in some dimensions it is not wholly representative of the situation across the district.

One factor that would have a bearing on the way in which local people perceive community forestry in the field research sites is the amount of forest resource there is for them to manage. It is therefore important to compare how the average figure for community forest area per household in Kushmisera Range Post compares with those of other Range Post areas in Baglung (which is given in Table 5.2). The figures show that the ratio is at the lower end of the range for Baglung district.

Table 5.2: Community forest area in Kushmisera and other Range Posts of Baglung district

Range Post	**Community Forest Area (ha)**	**No. of FUGs**	**Av. Forest Area ha / FUG**	**No. of HHs**	**Average ratio of forest area/ HH (ha/HH)**
Baglung RP	600.34	46	13.05	4558	0.13
Burtibang RP	3683.06	40	92.08	5020	0.73
Bungadhoban RP	432.93	18	24.05	2095	0.21
Dobilla RP	1331.78	33	40.36	4862	0.27
Hatiya RP	1845.18	44	41.94	6463	0.29
Hugdisir RP	420.81	23	18.30	2289	0.18
Kharbang RP	447.8	26	17.22	2185	0.20
Kushmisera RP	**661.23**	**23**	**28.75**	**2813**	**0.24**
Total	**9423.13**	**253**	**37.25**	**30285**	**0.31**

5.3 Basic information and characteristics of the case study sites

As explained in the last chapter, five sites (4 FUGs and 1 non-FUG) were selected for detailed investigations. These include Pallo Pakho, Jana Chetana, Bhane, Sirupata and Jyamire. The reasons for selecting these individual sites and the specific questions related to them have been explained in section 5.4.6. Table 5.3 summarises the main characteristics of these sites.

The basic information on these sites are provided in Table 5.4. Jana Chetana as having the largest forest area per household and Sirupata as having the lowest. Jana Chetana in fact has the largest forest area in the Range Post area, though one other FUG (Naule), that was not selected, has a higher ratio of forest area per household (1.45 hectares per household).

The average ratio for the five research sites is compared with the average for Nepal and the average taken from a set of 14 case studies undertaken by another DFID/NRSP funded research project (R6678) in east Nepal (see Table 5.5). These figures show that the research site ratios are reasonably well representative of the situation across Nepal, and are much closer to average for Baglung district,

and fit well with the Kushmisera Range Post average. However,, there is no doubt still some variation within the sites to highlight major implications for the process.

Table 5.3: Characteristics of the sites selected for detailed investigations

Characteristics	Sites				
	a	b	c	d	e
FUG or Non-FUG	FUG	FUG	FUG	FUG	N-FUG
Long or recently established[1]	Long	Recent	Recent	Recent	N.A.
Homogenous or mixed group	Homogenous	Mixed	Homogenous	Mixed	Mixed
Forest type & natural or plantation	Sal-Chilaune (natural)	Mixed (natural)	Katus-Chilaune (natural)	Pine (plantation)	Mixed (natural)
Forest area / household ration[2]	Low	High	Low	Low	Low
Distance to market[3]	Close	Long	Close	Close	Medium
Forest resource utilisation[4]	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Low
Altitude[5]	Low	High	Low	Medium	Medium

Sites: a = Pallo Pakho; b = Jana Chetana; c = Bhane; d = Sirupata; e = Jyamire
1 Long = over 5 years; Recent = less than 5 years
2 High = over 0.25 ; Low =Less than 0.25
3 Close = 1-2 hours walk; Long = more than 2 hours walk
4 High = harvest timber; Medium = harvest green firewood (branches); Low = collection of grass / dry leaves / fallen twigs
5 Low = Up to 1,000 m; High = 0over 1,500 m; Medium = between 1,000 and 1,500 m

Table 5.4: Basic information on the selected case study sites

Research site	Altitude of forest (m)	Forest Area (ha)	H-hold (no.)	Forest Area/h-hold ratio (ha/h-hold)
Pallo Pakho	900 – 1,100	9.00	81	0.11
Jana Chetana	1,800 – 2,200	105.25	136	0.77
Bhane	900 – 1,000	5.00	59	0.08
Sirupata	1,100 – 1,200	6.34	150	0.04
Jyamire	1,000 – 1,100	8.00*	80	0.10

* Estimated by the Conservation Committee Chairman

Table 5.5: Average forest area per FUG and forest area / household ratio

	Average Forest Area/FUG (ha)	Forest Area/HH ratio (Av. ha/HH)
Nepal*	72.22	0.65
Sites investigated in 3 districts in eastern Nepal**	77.83	0.63
Baglung District	37.25	0.31
Kushmisera	28.75	0.24
Research sites	26.72	0.26

* Calculated from 01/2000 estimates (after Branney et al., 2000) ** Springate-Beginski et al. (1999)

5.4 Description of individual case study sites

5.4.1 Pallo Pakho

Pallo Pakho FUG was the first to be formed in Kushmisera Range Post area (1995), and has already undertaken a review of its five-year Operational Plan. It is about half an hour's walk from the Range Post. The village comprises six settlements (or toles), and the people are predominantly Brahmin. Most households have a source off-farm cash earnings. Foreign employment is a wage earner for a large number of households (36 out of 81 households), while others are employed as teachers, shopkeepers, carpenters and priests.

The forest comprises of mainly Sal and Chilaune and to a lesser extent Tiju. The forest has many open areas. These have been either left to regenerate naturally (after banning open grazing), or have been planted with a variety of fodder tree species, Tej Pat (cinnamon) and Amriso (broom grass).

There is a long history of community protection of the forest, prior to FUG formation. Since 1974, the people had been employing a forest watcher, paid through a mana-pathi system (contributions of grains from each household). The sense of ownership of the forest has an even longer history. The villagers had been engaged in a legal battle since 1945 to keep various blocks of forest from falling into private ownership by members of what is now the neighbouring Amalachaur VDC. To date, four of these blocks have been handed over to the FUG, whilst two further blocks, on the adjacent hillside, are still under dispute.

It was the involvement in this legal battle that formed the main basis for membership of the FUG. Currently there are eleven households on the other side of the forest that have claimed rights to use the forest, but were initially refused membership of the FUG, on the grounds that they did not contribute to the court case.

In terms of meeting daily forest product requirements, the community forest has not been making a significant contribution. Households receive an equal share of 4-5 bhari (loads) of firewood a year. An average household will normally consume 70-100 bhari a year.

Table 5.6: Basic information on Pallo Pakho FUG

Address	Pallo Pakho FUG, Tar, Kushmisera VDC, Ward Nos. 3 and 6, Baglung District
Time since formation of FUG	Long-established (1995/ 2051 BS)
No. of households	81 h-holds
Caste/ ethnicity	Homogenous
Members in committee	13
Women in the committee	2
Membership criteria	Membership - contribution to previous high court case for communal access to forest as a primary basis, and also Acharya kinship (residence of Tar village)
Forest area	9 ha
Altitude of forest	900 - 1100m above sea level
Forest type	Sal/ Chilaune/ Tiju
Market accessibility	Close to market (3 hours walking distance from Kushma)
Fund	112,000 NRs
Resource utilisation strategy	Income generation from sale of forest products (e.g. timber, grass & amriso)
Member of FECOFUN	Yes

Pallo Pakho has, however, been reasonably successful in generating relatively a large amount of funds from a small forest. Much of the revenue has been generated by the auctioning of grass harvesting rights and the sale of Amriso and firewood and timber. Some fund has been used to give credit the members of the FUG. Perhaps the most notable activity has been the building of a school with two class rooms.

5.4.2 Jana Chetana

Jana Chetana FUG was formed in 1999. It was recommended to the project team by the Range Post staff as a relatively strong (active) group, and had won the district prize that very year. However, one of the major criteria for selection of Jana Chetana FUG was the higher ratio of forest area to household number (0.8 ha per household), compared to other groups (less than 0.4 ha per household).

The main settlement, Kalo Patal, is situated at about 4-5 hours walk from Kushmisera Range Post. It is a comparatively high altitude site (referred to as 'lek' in Nepali) with a temperate climate.

Most FUG households are predominantly Magar, though they are mixed with Bahun and Kami households, and there is a separate Darji tole next to the forest. There is also a separate settlement of goat herdsmen in the neighbouring Ward No.4.

Most Magar households have at least one family member employed abroad, very often in the Indian army. Many also have pensions from both the Indian and British army. Amongst the Kami households only one is employed as a blacksmith, with another three households involved in house building (notably carpentry and joinery). The thirteen Darji households generally are not engaged in their

traditional tailoring occupation (as most households these days buy imported clothes), and they are thus reliant on hiring out labour (particularly portering).

The predominant species in the forest is Rakta Chandan, with suppressed Chilaune and Katus regeneration, and Lali Gurans. There were many valuable species of medicinal plants, such as Chiraito and Sugandhawal. Nagbeli, a creeping lycopod (used in local treatments for rheumatism and blood and lung infections) also covers large areas of open land and trail banks.

Table 5.7: Basic information on Jana Chetana FUG

Address	Jana Chetana FUG, Kalo Patal, Damek VDC, Ward Nos. 4 & 7
Time since formation of FUG	18months (1999)
No. of households	135 h-holds
Caste/ ethnicity	Heterogeneous (Magar, Gurung, Bahun, Jaishi, Kami, Damai)
Members in the committee	15
Women in the committee	6
Membership criteria	People wishing to join the group must pledge labour contributions to the management of the forest
Forest area	105 ha
Altitude of forest	1800 - 2200
Forest type	Mixed – Rachan, chilaune, khasru, gurans
Fund	32,000 NRs
Market accessibility	Comparatively remote – 8 hours walking distance from Kushma
Resources utilisation strategy	Equal distribution system
Member of FECOFUN	Yes

Along the lower reaches of the forest there are patches of plantation, including an area of Khote Sallo and *Pinus patula* (an introduced species) plantation. After the FUG formation, other species, including Chilaune, Lankuri and Amriso, have been planted.

Prior to the FUG formation, there was a Conservation Committee, mainly of Ward No 7 people, which aimed to prevent uncontrolled illicit felling. They employed forest watcher.

The achievement of the FUG to date is impressive. Not only is this a reflection of the great potentials of the community forestry process, but also the magnanimity and vision of a large number of current FUG members. A notable achievement was the inclusion in the FUG of the goat-herder (Aite Kharka tole) from the neighbouring Ward No.4. This is important, as in other sites, membership of a FUG has been restricted to Ward boundaries. In this case, a consensus was reached with the goat herders to set aside 30 hain one block for open grazing. Another notable characteristic of this FUG is that nearly half of the committee members are women, and the vice-chairperson is a woman. One member said that in Jana Chetana the women had already become used to participating in community level decision-making as most of the men work abroad.

5.4.3 Bhane

Bhane FUG, a part of Painyu Thanthap VDC's Ward No. 8, is situated about one and a half hour's walk from Kushmisera Range Post. Most of the settlements are situated on the top of a steep spur, with the forest covering the hillside below, except one tole (Theuli), which is at the base of the hill.

The FUG households are predominantly Bahun and Magar. There is also one Kami household, and one Sarki household. A significant numbers of households have access to off-farm cash earnings abroad. Most Magars, and some Bahun and Chhetri households receive Indian army pensions. The youger members of the Kami household also members work abroad.

Bhane forest is dominated by Chilaune and Katus species and in a small part by Sal. It is flanked by private forest on both sides. The forest could be described generally as unmanaged and overgrown with weeds.

In 1988, the users had formed a Conservation Committee and employed a forest watcher. In 1997, they formed FUG mainly because they felt that with firmer rights to the forest, the people would be better able to deal with illicit felling by people from neighbouring villages. It transpired that the Operational Plan was prepared in one afternoon in a meeting at the Range Post between two FUG committee officials and the Ranger, without any consultation with the group.

Bhane had undertaken a review of its Operational Plan, for the second time in four years. In both instances, the review was primarily for re-election of the chairman rather than to revise the Operation Plan. Apparently, there were little co-operation between the second chairman and the vice-chairman (due to conflicting party allegiances). The current (third) chairman, who took over from the previous chairman after his tragic accident in 1999, had only just returned from service in the Indian Army. He had been away from the village for twenty-eight years, with only brief visits in between. He is regarded as the most willing and trustworthy candidate, particularly because he had not had any time to even make sense of the political alliances and misdealing within the group. However, by the time this project started operating, the chairman seemed quite bewildered by his undertaking. He had tried to hold committee meetings every month, but many committee members would simply not come.

Table 5.8: Basic information on Bhane FUG

Address	Bhane (Kami Danda), Painyu Thanthap VDC, Ward No. 8
Time since formation of FUG	5 years (1997/ 2053 BS)
No. of households	59 h-holds
Caste/ ethnicity	Heterogeneous
Members in the committee	11
Women in the committee	2
Membership criteria	Residence of Ward No. 8 of Painyu Thanthap VDC
Forest area	5 ha
Altitude of forest	900 - 1000m above sea level
Forest type	Predominantly Sal and Katus-Chilaune
Fund	3500 NRs
Market accessibility	Close to market (4 hours walking distance from Kushma)
Resource utilisation strategy	Harvesting of firewood has taken place once in 5 years
Member of FECOFUN	No

5.4.4 Sirupata

Sirupata FUG members live in seven toles scattered across the hillside above the main Kushmisera bazaar. In addition, there are many members living in the bazaar area.

Table 5.9: Basic information on Sirupata FUG

Address	Sirupata FUG, Kushmisera VDC, Ward Nos. 4 & 5
Time since formation of FUG	Long-established - 6 years (1995/ 2051 BS)
No. of households	132 h-holds (though this has now increased to approxi. 150 h-holds)
Caste/ ethnicity	Heterogeneous: Magar, Bahun, Chhetri, Sarki, Newar
Members in the committee	11
Women in the committee	4
Membership criteria	Participation in tree planting activity. This is being blurred by opening memberships to new immigrant h-holds in Kushmisera Bazaar
Forest area	6.34 ha
Altitude of forest	1100 - 1200m above sea level
Forest type	Khote Salla (P. roxburghii)
Fund	12,000 NRs
Market accessibility	Close to market (3 hours walking distance from Kushma)
Resource utilisation strategy	Income from auction of grass fodder, and amriso cultivation
Member of FECOFUN	Yes

Sirupata FUG was chosen because of its large ratio of households to forest area, and the fact that whole of the forest being a plantation. The FUG was formed not long after Pallo Pakho, mainly driven by political rivalry - a testimony to the local political power base that FUGs provide. Also, initially a resident of Ward No.4 had received a nursery training, with support from the DFO, to raise

seedlings to plant on a public land. The nurseryman later encouraged villagers to form a FUG to secure benefits from the plantation. As in Pallo Pakho, some revenue has been raised through auctioning of grass, most of which, however, is used to pay the forest watcher.

5.4.5 Jyamire

Jyamire, which represents Non-FUG site, forms Ward No. 5 of Painyu Thanthap VDC, is adjacent to Bhane FUG. The forest, which comprises of Chilaune and Sal species, suffers from the lack of protection. Nearly all the trees are diseased, hollow, and only of use for dry firewood. On much of the south-west part of the open grassland has been planted with Khote Sallo in 1998, with support from the Rural Energy Development Project (REDP).

Table 5.10: Basic information on Jyamire Conservation Committee

Address	Jyamire, Painyu Thanthap VDC, Ward No. 5
Time since formation of CC	12 years (1989/ 2045 BS)
No. of households	80 h-holds
Caste/ ethnicity	Heterogeneous (Brahmin, Magar, Sarki)
Members in committee	11
Women in committee	0
Membership criteria	Residence of Ward No. 5
Forest area	8 ha (Approx.) (No survey of the forest area)
Altitude of forest	1000 - 1100m above sea level
Forest type	Predominantly Sal and Chilaune-Katus
Fund	22,000 NRs
Market accessibility	Mid-distance to market (4 hours walking distance from Kushma)
Resource utilisation strategy	Forest area has been used for open grazing, though banned recently.
Member of FECOFUN	N/A

As the forest, in principle, is still under the control of the government's Forest Department, the villagers must apply for permission from the DFO to fell any trees. However, given that the Range Post staff are now almost fully committed to supporting already existing FUGs, they do not have time for patrolling nor do they respond to reports of illicit felling.

There Conservation Committee sets rules regarding the protection of the forest and apprehends people who break the rules, though in terms of the use of the forest resource the rules are very blurred. The users contribute to the salary of the forest watcher by collecting grains.

The Jyamire forest users seem to have a variety of interests in the forest, although they as a group have not taken control of the forest. One notable conflict of interest has been over rights to open grazing in the forest as there is little common grazing land anywhere else in the Ward. There are also differences on the ways forest products should be utilised. For example, the Committee has been selling firewood outside the Ward, rather than distributing it to the members. Whereas, Sarki members, who depend solely on the forest for firewood, have more recently started to use a part of their wage to buy firewood from the private tree owners.

6 Current community forestry management practices and challenges and opportunities to developing monitoring systems at the local level

6.1 Introduction

This section presents research findings relating to one of the three main outputs of the research project (Output 1). It describes current approaches to management (and monitoring) of forest resources used by the District Forest Office / Range Post and local communities, as well as the role played by other organisations at the Range Post level, primarily the Federation of Community Forest Users, Nepal (FECOFUN). It then discusses some of the major factors that are currently constraining the development of an effective monitoring system for common property forest resource management.

The section first examines the ways in which the District Forest Office / Range Post manage common/public forests in general and how they:

- Identify specific forests and their users for handover as community forests;
- Form forest user groups (FUGs);
- Help the FUGs to prepare Operational (management) Plans; and,
- Monitor the forest management by FUGs.

It then discusses the various issues facing local level common property forest management planning and monitoring. This is followed by a description of the role played by FECOFUN in community forest management at the Range Post level and the issues associated with the involvement of the local political units – the Village Development Committees (VDCs) - in community forestry processes.

6.2 Planning practices in the District Forest Office / Range Post

Within the community forestry programme the DFO and Range Post are still the main actors in FUG formation and support to already established FUGs. In the past this support focused on training in technical aspects of forest management though more recently (from the mid-1990's) in areas where they are supported by donor-funded field projects, they have also been under pressure to expand their repertoire to cover an enormous range of forest and livelihood related activities. It has been presumed that they are the right organisation to cover all aspects of the community forestry programme. Therefore, people in rural areas are often more familiar with the Range Post staff than they are with field staff from other sectors including agriculture (in a purely comparative sense).

The DFO and Range Post also maintain a high profile in local level forest management through their involvement in planning for forest management at all levels, including forest management operations at the local level. The principal areas where they are involved, which are discussed below, are:

- Management of national forests
- FUG formation and preparation and approval of Operational Plan
- Operational Plan review
- Preparation of FUG annual action plans
- Technical support to FUGs

6.2.1 Management of national forests

The research shows that the DFO and RP staff are caught in their conflicting roles of patrolling (responding to illegal felling) in the national forests and providing technical assistance to community forest management. Only ten years ago patrolling of national forests was a major activity of the Range Post staff. In Nepal, every patch of forest, unless registered as a private, religious, or community forest (formally handed over to a FUG), is considered a national forest, and lies in control of the government's Forest Department. Over the years, the area under the national forests has reduced gradually, at least in the middle hills region, as the number of community forests increased. Nevertheless, a significant proportion (over 80%) of the total forest area in the Range Post is still under the national forest (and, indeed, this may be the case over most hill districts).

The subsequent priority given to community forestry, and the enormous demands made on the Range Post staff in implementing community forestry has meant that they now have very little time to patrol national forests. In Kushmisera Range Post, the staff were almost completely engaged with community forestry, and apart from the work with Jyamire, there was very little mention of activities in national forest areas.

Local people must have permission from the DFO to remove any living material from the forest. More specifically, on requesting to fell a tree within a national forest, Range Post staff themselves must select and mark the trees, which are permitted to be felled.

This is a long procedure and generally the staff of the Range Post accept that people will fell illegally if at all. Thus they see that their major role is to respond to any reports of illicit felling. This is then reported to the DFO.

In practice, given the lack of human resources and time to deal with any illegal activities the Range Post staff are happy if they hear nothing of the day-to-day happenings in the national forests.

The legislation surrounding government forests is still very blurred, particularly as the introduction of the Local Self-Governance Act (1998, revised 2000) has left overlaps in the authority over forest resources between the Range Post and the VDC. In Jyamire it appears that VDC has very often used the forest resource without notifying the Range Post (or the conservation committee). Whichever institution should ultimately hold authority over the national forest resource, there is a problem in that there is little communication between them.

The involvement of Kushmisera Range Post staff has also included technical assistance in plantations in non-community forest areas and in some instances conflict resolution. Some of these plantations are funded by the DFO, which provides the seedlings as well as incentive payments (1 NR / seedling planted) to the local people, though others have been funded by different organisations, as in Jyamire where the funding came from the Rural Energy Development Project, with an interest in watershed conservation.

In Kushmisera, there were fifty two patches of forest, identified either in the geographical sense or in terms of the communities that use them, that have not been handed over to an FUG. Amongst these the Range Post staff could identify sixteen forests around which there are on-going, occasionally acrimonious, conflicts (see Appendix 4). Many of these conflicts are related to encroachment into forests controlled by conservation committees (such as Jyamire conservation committee), or disputes over whether or how community forests should be formed, and who should be involved. Involvement in conflict resolution is limited to areas where community forestry is on the agenda - primarily as part of the formation process in identifying users and surveying the forest area.

Most other contact with people outside of the community forestry process is mainly for awareness raising about community forestry itself, though there seems to be little in the way of organised awareness raising and this activity is rather more opportunistic. Certainly the awareness raising programmes do not seem to have reached the majority of local people, and least of all the poorest and more disadvantaged people who often have to rely on the interpretation of more influential people in the village.

6.2.2 FUG formation

The FUG formation process essentially involves identifying the users and forest area and the resolution of any conflicts, preparation of an FUG constitution with the election of the executive committee and the subsequent definition of roles and responsibilities, the preparation of an Operational Plan, including a forest inventory, and its subsequent approval by the DFO. Most of these activities are undertaken by the Range Post staff with the DFO assessing and amending the Operational Plan before the FUG can undertake any activities in the forest.

The DFO essentially sets annual targets for FUG formation in a meeting with all the Rangers, based on the number of applications that are outstanding in each Range Post. Neupane (2000) notes that

these proposed targets, that are used to draw up the annual budget, are usually accepted by the National Planning Commission (NPC) but with lower budgets than originally proposed. Given that the budget proposals are drawn up according to the ideal length of time that it would take to form an FUG, any reduction adds pressure to complete FUG formation as quickly as possible. The pressure is obviously transferred from the DFO to the Ranger and forest guards.

In Kushmisera there were a total of twenty outstanding applications for community forestry (see Appendix 4). This could be seen as a huge problem for the Range Post, given that the average annual rate of formation in the last seven years had been between three and four FUGs. During the period of field investigations the Range Post staff succeeded in preparing two Operational Plans for new FUGs, though they were still awaiting approval by the DFO.

Given the pressure to form FUGs as quickly as possible there is a tendency to avoid those areas where there is severe conflict. Of the four FUGs, two of them, Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana had emerged from a history of major conflict. However, these had generally been resolved, or were already in the process of resolution, through the efforts of the local people themselves, prior to the request to undertake community forestry. In Pallo Pakho the conflict, with members of the neighbouring Amalachaur VDC, over the area currently under community forest management had been resolved by a high court decision, following a case that had been collectively funded by the residents themselves. In Jana Chetana, the conflict was itself internal due to uncontrolled illicit felling by residents, and efforts had been made by some ward residents to raise awareness of the benefits of community forestry in bringing benefits to all.

This is not to disparage the value of forest guards in conflict resolution, nor to imply that they wish to take easy options. However, it is necessary to note that there is very little time for the forest guards to get involved in mediating serious conflicts over user rights to forests.

The Operational Plan, alongside the constitution, is the most important document prepared during the formation process, without which the FUG would not be able to operate. Most of the formation process is taken up in both preparing and approving it. In theory it has a dual function. Firstly it should be used by the FUG members to guide their forest management activities. However, it is also a document that is legally binding, and as such is intended to be a Memorandum of Understanding between the FUG and DFO.

The Operational Plan contains a general description of the forest (based on a forest survey), forest management objectives, a timetable of forest management activities, forest product distribution system, a system of fines and other punishments and an outline of how funds will be used.

The forest survey is clearly a crucial step if the FUG is to have firm legal access to the forest in the future. The forest guards in Kushmisera usually began with a resource map drawn up with the local people, showing major landmarks, which can then form the basis for a more detailed survey, using a tape and compass method.

Recently new guidelines have been introduced that also require an inventory of the forest with a minimum sampling intensity of 0.5% of the forest area, producing age (or dbh) class stand counts for each species. The data from the inventory is then used to calculate a maximum sustainable cut using mean annual increment (MAI) figures for each major species (drawn-up from non-local trial plots).

This will demand for a substantial time of the Range Post staff for undertaking such a detailed forest survey/inventory work, organising data and calculating the forest area, timber volume and the maximum sustainable cut, as well as writing up the constitution and Operational (management) Plan drawn up at the site. During the period of the project, in Kushmisera only three of the five forest guards were fully literate and thus able to write up Operational Plans, though the other two were quite elderly and nearing retirement age. However, this appears to be the major part of the workload of the forest guards, and this puts pressure on them to obtain the relevant data from the field as quickly as possible. One of the forest guards reported that in one of the two new FUG sites that they had been to in that year, the actual management plan was prepared in one day.

What emerges from this is that, from the perspective of the forest guards, the FUG formation process requires two different elements that are very difficult to reconcile in a short space of time. The first is rigour and accuracy in forest surveying, preparation of the forest inventory, as well as in the writing of the constitution and Operational Plan in a language that will be interpretable in legal circles. The other is the stated need for the forest guards to act as facilitators, or even animators, in encouraging the active participation of all interest groups in resolving conflict and building meaningful consensus in developing the Operational Plan.

6.2.3 Operational Plan Review

Currently, the Operational Plan is valid for a maximum five year period after which it has to be reviewed. Under current guidelines, the Operational Plan can be reviewed before that time if a FUG so wishes, though not before two years have passed since the approval of the preceding Operational Plan. It has, however, been recently proposed to extend the minimum period between reviews to the full five years.

In the five research sites there have been two reviews of Operational Plans following the end of the five year period (Pallo Pakho and Sirupata). Jana Chetana undertook a review during the field research period (2 years after the FUG had been formed), and Bhane has reviewed the Operational Plan twice, principally to re-elect the executive committee. In the case of Bhane, there were no changes to the forest management plan. Neupane (2000) also noted that this is quite common as the Range Post staff generally discourage any such changes. It is however necessary to do a forest inventory each time an Operational Plan is revised. It must also be assessed, amended and approved by the DFO each time, and thus the process remains quite a lengthy one.

The current workload of Operational Plan review is already stretching the DFO's human resources to the limit, and is likely to be stretched even further as more FUGs become established. Thus from one angle the proposal to extend the length of time between reviews to five years would seem to be pragmatic. However, the current circumstances dictate that the FUG must follow the operations outlined in the Operational Plan, and this can be very problematic for the forest users if there is a perceived need to change the management plan or objectives. An example of this kind of problem occurred at the end of the workshop in Bhane when the representatives decided that a review of their Operational Plan would be needed. They had only just reviewed their Operational Plan the previous year after an unforeseeable problem meant that the committee needed to be changed, and thus they were informed that they could not review their Operational Plan for another year.

6.2.4 Preparation of FUG annual action plans

During the period of the project the on-going practice in annual action plan preparation had been for two to three representatives from clusters of about ten to twelve FUGs within the Range Post area to come together for a planning meeting (termed as 'cluster planning'). The DFO or AFO is also present to provide guidance in developing the plans. These plans are not legally binding, though they must be prepared within the limits set by the Operational Plan, and generally refer to the finer details of implementation of the activities stipulated in the Operational Plan.

This appears at first glance to be an opportunity for greater exchange of ideas between FUGs and joint planning. It could also be an opportunity for the DFO to plan how resources should be allocated according to the needs of the FUGs, and arrange events such as study tours. However, ‘cluster planning’ has made little use of such opportunities. Rather it simply increases the influence of the DFO or AFO in FUGs' regular planning, and decreases the involvement of the users themselves (see, for example, Neupane, 2000 and Springate-Beginski, 2001).

Another problem with the planning process is that it is often done with people who may not even be aware of the current plans in the FUG, and on return to the FUG there is little dissemination of the action plan to the rest of the group, only to the chairman. These problems have, however been recognised by the Department of Forests and it has been decided that the Range Post staff should go to individual FUGs to assist in the action plan design.

6.2.5 Technical support to FUGs

The main fora for planning technical support to FUGs are four monthly meetings between Range Post staff and FUG committee members. However, this is more of a chance for the Range Post staff to monitor the progress of the FUG in implementing their Operational Plans, rather than for feedback. In reality, the Range Post (which has no official status in the bureaucracy) must act under the directives of the DFO, which will decide where, and with who, training or other services should be given. Any requests from the FUGs must be processed through the DFO.

As mentioned above, the DFO and Range Post staff are under pressure to widen their scope for service delivery to cover many aspects relating to the community forest and livelihoods interface. However, with such a huge portfolio of planning objectives in the DFO it has been difficult for them to develop the necessary skills at the Range Post level. There are indeed varying levels of skills amongst the forest guards within the Range Post, and the forest guards lack the confidence to be able to tell FUG members what kind of services they can provide them with.

In Kushmisera, the Range Post staff were confident that they could provide FUGs with general technical support, information on technical assistance from other organisations and information on new policies and directives. One forest guard had recently received training as a trainer in NTFP management, and thus was able to state this as one of their services (see Table 6.2). Range Post staff do not get involved in conflict resolution in FUGs after they are formed, but expect FUGs to resolve problems themselves (or risk revocation of their community forest). This is not to say that they have no services to provide, but that they are clearly bewildered as to what is expected of them.

With such a wide range of planning objectives for service delivery, and a rather unpredictable degree of skill at the Range Post level, along with an obvious lack of human resources, it is very difficult for FUGs to know what they can expect of the DFO. Therefore, instead of FUGs demanding these services, the DFO plans where and when to undertake them. As an example, training or credit programmes are often focused on a few FUGs within a Range Post. This led to complaints by some FUG members in Sirupata, who feel that the DFO and other organisations have been biased to one particular FUG (Pallo Pakho).

6.3 DFO/ Range Post monitoring practices

At the district level, formal monitoring activities are mostly undertaken by the DFO. The bureaucratic structure is well suited to gathering and collating large amounts of quantitative (and to a lesser extent qualitative) data, and the DFO monitoring information also feeds into the monitoring systems of both LFP and FECOFUN at the district level. It was obvious that the monitoring information requirements for the DFO, LFP and FECOFUN are all quite similar. This is because most of the information comes from the DFO itself, and also because each organisation is eager to be involved in every aspect of community forestry (also see Section 6.5.4).

At the workshop in Baglung the DFO highlighted the following sources of information for their monitoring: FUG annual report; Forest resource inventory; FUG categorisation. When asked why particular information was being gathered, the DFO replied that he could not question the reasoning of his superiors in the DoF and MFSC. Thus, in the discussion below, where there is speculation as to the intentions behind gathering information, this refers largely to the central authority in the DoF and MFSC.

6.3.1 FUG annual report

The FUG annual report has been the most important of the data sources for the Department of Forests' monitoring of community forestry. It is formatted so that it can be used to evaluate the performance of the FUG against the activities in the Operational Plan, as well as against legal requirements. A translation of this format is given in Appendix 5. The report covers representation of women, different castes and ethnic groups in the FUGC, forest condition, FUGC and assembly meetings, silvicultural activities, plantation or nursery establishment, general observations on conservation activities as well as any illegal activities or forest fires, income generation and fund mobilisation and details of revenue

and expenses. This then feeds into an FUG database which is used for collation and analysis by both LFP and FECOFUN, as well as district, regional and national level analysis.

The annual report is compiled by forest guards in each FUG. This is sometimes done with the committee or just with one or two FUG officials. There is rarely verification of the information from across the group, and the general idea is to get them done as quickly as possible. For certain aspects such as forest product extraction the forest guard may already have some idea through visits at the time of harvest, but for others such as revenue and expenses, particularly where the FUG books have not been well kept, the forest guard relies on oral testimony of the FUG officials. One FUG official from Kushmisera said that they regularly tell the forest guards that they have a lower net income than they actually have, mainly because they are afraid of extortion by the DFO, who might note those FUGs with larger funds.

6.3.2 Forest resource inventory

In the FUG annual report (Appendix 5) the forest condition and trends are only reported in categories: 1 = very good; 2 = good; 3 = not much improvement; and 4 = worse. However, this has been seen by the DoF as insufficient for rigorous evaluation of the nation's forest resources.

By repeating the forest resource inventory with every revision of the Operational Plan it is possible for the DFO to evaluate trends in amounts of woody biomass across the district. The forest resource inventory only became a compulsory component of FUG Operational Plans in 1999, and so by the time of the project most of the established FUGs had still to prepare an inventory. Of those that have prepared a baseline inventory, few will have undertaken a second. Therefore there is little experience of how this will work in practice.

The inventory guidelines have been criticised, by some because they are too inflexible particularly in specifying inappropriate sampling intensities and plot sizes (Shambhu Dangal, 2000, pers. Comm.), and by others because they are seen as a symptom of the Department of Forests' wish to retain power over the forest resources. As will be discussed below, there is scope for collaboration between local people and the forest guards in preparing the inventory, as some of the information will be useful to the forest users as well. However, this does not appear to be the reality at present. In the four FUGs, not even the committee members could understand the meaning of the inventory in their Operational Plans, and less so the ensuing calculations of the maximum sustainable cut. It therefore remains primarily a tool for the DFO's evaluation. Certainly if there is any recorded deterioration in a community forest the DFO will then have the power to revoke the FUGs' legal access to the forest.

In the workshop in Baglung this issue was discussed (as part of an overall discussion on the Operational Plan), and it was concluded that many of the units, as well as the language used in the inventory were incomprehensible to the Forest Guards, let alone the users.

Another major problem with the inventory guidelines is the method of calculating maximum sustainable cuts. These calculations use mean annual increments that are derived from trial plots under controlled conditions for particular species and some species mixes. However, the local ecological, and physical characteristics, such as soil fertility and depth or sunlight levels, of any forest or part of a forest are unique. Importantly, the management objectives of the FUG which affect variables such as thinning rates will also have an impact on the rate of growth of trees. Also, for example, coppicing will produce large numbers of stems that are counted as regeneration in the inventory. It therefore raises the question as to what the particular interests of the DoF are in forest management by using such methods for evaluating forest condition across the country.

6.3.3 FUG categorisation

The FUG categorisation system was developed in collaboration between LFP, DFO and FECOFUN within Baglung district. This appears to be the standard practice, at least across the seven hills districts in east and west Nepal supported by LFP. On the one hand, the annual report is intended to be a means of evaluating the performance of the FUG against the template of the Operational Plan. On the other hand, the FUG categorisation system is designed to enable a more systematic scoring of FUGs'

progress in terms of a wide variety of forest resource, institutional, social and economic aspects (although adherence to the Operational Plan is one of the indicators included in the format). A translation of the format and indicators is given in Appendix 6.

The data is gathered by forest guards on an annual basis. The message that they must bear in mind is to use their own best judgement ('aphno swabibek ko prayog garnuhos'). For each aspect there are either qualitative (particularly presence or absence indicators) or quantitative indicators, or indeed the forest guard is simply asked to make a judgement as to the degree to which a certain aspect has been fulfilled. For example, the forest guard must make a judgement as to how well roles and responsibilities have been defined in the committee, scoring for 'complete', 'partial' or 'not at all'. The scoring systems were developed by DFO, LFP and FECOFUN staff, who are professionals with considerable wide ranging field experience.

There was no form of participation of FUG representatives in developing these criteria, weightings and scores, with two important implications:

- Although these criteria, weightings and scores are developed on a firm basis of experience, they cannot account for the interests of the forest users. As an example, in the section on distribution of forest products in the FUG, the practice which receives the lowest score is auctioning. The reasoning is quite clear, in that this results in wealthier members having greater access to grass fodder and timber, for example, whilst excluding the poor. However, this also depends on the strategies that the poorer members wish to take. In the case of Pallo Pakho and Sirupata, members were aware that the forest resource was not likely to yield substantial direct benefits to individuals if the forest products were shared out amongst them. Instead they saw greater potential benefits from auctioning to a few wealthier households, as this would raise more funds for the FUG. In both FUGs there has been some attempt to mobilise these funds for the benefit of the poor.

  Another example from the categorisation is the scoring given for use of the funds. FUGs score highest 1.0 if they have placed all their funds in a bank account, 0.5 if they have part of the fund in the bank account and part of it with individuals and 0 if the fund is with committee members. Certainly the DFO encourages all FUGs to set up a bank account (and indeed assists them by writing a letter of authorisation to the bank). However, this must be a matter of choice for a group that is somewhere between a community and an organisation. In Bhane for example, there was considerable discussion as to what should be done with the funds. It was decided that the fund would be useless in a bank account and whatever revenue came to the group would be allocated to tole representatives and then, through discussion in tole meetings (also based on criteria for wealth ranking), would be distributed as credit.

- Any monitoring system is flexible and shows the need for openness to innovation or new ways of thinking at the local level. In practice it would be impossible to incorporate the weightings of over thousands of FUGs in a district, with anything more than a very superficial PRA scoring system that is unlikely to indicate much about the forest users' real interests and values.

Both the DFO and LFP recognise the need to be realistic about the effectiveness of the categorisation system in informing their service delivery, though it is probably the best it could be for achieving this purpose. However, the categorisation system is also used as the basis for prize-giving for best practice in FUGs. Although awards to well functioning FUGs can help to boost the confidence of some FUGs, there is also a danger that criteria developed by professionals will ultimately take precedence in the FUG over the priorities of the forest users themselves. An example of this came from Pallo Pakho, where FUG members wished to find out the criteria for prize-winning. In all the case study FUGs, in fact, prize-winning has distinctly been an interest of the more elite members.

6.3.4 Range Post monitoring

The Range Post is the principal point of contact for the forest users, and staff at the DFO only occasionally make visits to the field. Therefore, there are many activities that are specific to the Range Post, though there is little provision for Range Post level self-monitoring. At the meeting in Baglung, one of the Range Post staff said that there had always been a feeling that the Range Post team should

review their work, but 'practical and technical difficulties meant that it was not possible to do so in practice'. Furthermore, up until the time of the project there was also no provision for the Range Post staff to keep copies of monitoring formats, such as the FUG annual reports, and the FUG categorisation forms. This was discussed at the workshop in Baglung, and the DFO recognised this problem. He said that the problem would be rectified by providing two carbon copies for the Range Post and the FUG.

Range Post staff are essentially data gatherers within this formal monitoring system, and all formal analysis of the FUG data base is undertaken at the DFO and higher levels. The Range Post staff also visit FUGs at agreed times when any major silvicultural and harvesting activity (most notably, thinning, pruning and singling activities) takes place. This means that the Range Post must therefore be notified in advance when any such activity takes place. This is principally for the purposes of ensuring that all the activities take place according to the Operational Plan.

As has already been mentioned above, the Range Post does not have the authority to make decisions and needs to refer to every issue to the DFO in Baglung. This makes the power of decision-making on the basis of local needs very unclear. There are no monthly review and planning meetings at the Range Post. The forest guards can only act on the direction of the DFO. However, the Ranger does meet with the DFO every month, and thus there is opportunity for some direct feedback to the DFO.

During the period of the research, Range Post staff, on their own initiative (though inspired by the discussions with the research project team on monitoring) developed a categorisation system for FUGs in a similar fashion to the district level categorisation. They said that they have yet to develop specific indicators, though they gave scores for major aspects of community forestry and allotted categories of very active, medium active and less active to each FUG. The representatives from the Range Post at the workshop in Baglung informed the DFO that they had done this, and the DFO was supportive of this kind of initiative. The DFO also recognised the importance of encouraging this kind of activity in other Range Posts. However, there are limits to the kind of institutional change that can be instilled by the DFO, and it is clear that the main constraint to developing the monitoring systems at the local level lies in the way in which roles, responsibilities, and specifically decision making power is defined at different levels.

6.4 Local level common forest management planning and monitoring issues

6.4.1 Overview

This section considers the ways in which both informal processes within local communities, as well as general approaches to forest management, interact with formal processes that have essentially been superimposed upon them in the community forestry process. This serves to highlight constraints to developing meaningful monitoring processes, both self-monitoring as well as monitoring of service delivery at the local level.

The first part considers the overall participation in planning in both FUG and non-FUG scenarios and the purposes of, and interests in, forest management from the experiences of the case study sites. Then we discuss the ways in which current structured planning processes are translated in the local context, looking at both interactions within the community and between the community and other organisations. We also consider pre-community forestry situations and how these continue to affect the way in which subsequent FUGs function, and in particular their implications for monitoring in the future.

6.4.2 Participation in planning

In general, to date, there has been considerable documentation of experiences relating to FUG processes Gilmour and Fisher, 1991; Hobley, 1996; Malla, 1997). Many have highlighted problems of elite domination of FUG planning in order to fulfil private rather than plural group interests (Hobley, 1996; Paudel, 1999; Neupane, 2000; Malla 2001). There has been a noted lack of participation of disadvantaged groups such as women (Paudel, 1999; Neupane, 2000), who are often most

knowledgeable about forest resources (Hobley, 19996), and poorer groups in general who are often most reliant on common property forest resources (Malla, 2000). From the experiences of the research sites this has also been a problem.

In three of the FUG sites (Jana Chetana, Bhane and Sirupata) FUG officials mentioned the lack of awareness and enthusiasm for participating in FUG activities, most notably in coming to assemblies (and in some cases, committee meetings). In the most extreme case of Bhane (and Jyamire, which, although not a FUG, exhibits the similar problems), many people claimed that meetings were called at very short notice, that decisions were normally already made beforehand, and that meetings were simply for informing those present about these decisions. Generally assembly meetings were not called for overall planning but rather the subject matter was controlled by the FUG officials. These are usually for single purposes, such as informing people about the firewood harvest. Those that are unhappy with the decision may argue openly at the meeting, though ultimately they may never know the real reason or interests that lie behind the decision made. FUGs and non-FUGs thus appear to conduct assemblies in similar way.

In Bhane, most of the FUG members were under the impression that the committee was the ultimate authority for the group, and thus had sole decision-making power. This was seen as a problem by both the ordinary members, who felt that they were not being listened to in FUG planning, and the committee members, who were unable to shoulder the burden of responsibility for the implementation of the decisions that they themselves had made.

The community forestry guidelines emphasise consensus across the FUG as the basis for decision-making. However, this is not a methodological guide, but rather a theoretical one. Consensus requires more than just broad acceptance at the planning meeting, as there could be a number of reasons for accepting a decision, which may often include the desire to avoid conflict with certain individuals.

Reasons for lack of participation in decision-making have also been extensively documented in the literature. Three key reasons are:

- *The time costs of participation* - in all the five sites poorer groups have been precluded from active participation because of wage labour obligations. This was a reason for reluctance amongst many poorer groups, and particularly occupational caste groups, to participate in the project workshop until mention was made of compensatory payments, and even then many were committed to particular jobs such as house-building (in Jana Chetana).
- *Power relations* - there are many complex and binding relations between members that are outside of the FUG institutional set up, but which affect it functioning. Most notably, patron-client relations, which may lead to dependence on wealthier individuals for employment, loans, grain, firewood, timber and livestock fodder, and ultimately affect the way in which a poorer member puts forward their interests in meetings. In Jyamire, for example, some Sarki residents were bound in this way to wealthier Bahun members in the conservation committee.
- *The monopoly on knowledge* - most of the dealings related to common property forests are undertaken by dominant groups, and thus the majority of the group are treated as passive units working within a framework of positive and negative incentives. There are no open fora for individuals to collectively affect change within the group, instead they tend to hold private grievances at receiving inadequate benefits, such as firewood bundles.

How the notions of inclusiveness in planning can be interpreted in the local context? Pallo Pakho provides an interesting example where “participation” did not have the positive connotation held by outsiders. The chairman had the deep respect of nearly all the members of the group, even though many major decisions were not made through assembly meetings. In fact the chairman himself would go to individual households to discuss particular matters relating to the FUG, and many decisions would be made on this basis in committee meetings, or other private gatherings (such as at a gathering for the funeral rites of one of the members, when a decision was made to build a school). It is clear that there was a strong group spirit in Pallo Pakho, with few internal conflicts, and thus, at the time, little perceived need to improve processes within the group. Attempts by the research project team to identify where participation could be increased, on the basis of the community forestry guideline requirements for decision-making in assemblies, were at first viewed negatively as criticism by most

of the representatives at the workshop. Through practice they later decided that the process used in the project was very useful for them, amongst other things in improving communications and reducing the work burden of a few people (such as the chairman).

We can conclude that ideals for inclusive planning, that are often discussed in theoretical terms by community forestry professionals, are not always clear cut. Certainly, many people may wish to delegate considerable responsibility to one or two members for decision-making. This may depend on the degree of trust for those members, or indeed the perceived importance of the issues in question to an individual member.

6.4.3 What are forests being managed for?

In the absence of a more detailed study into the capacities of the forests (which would have required more than one complete annual cycle), it is not possible to conclude whether forests are being harvested to their potential or not, even where harvesting of forest tree products had taken place on a systematic basis (in Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana). In Bhane, Sirupata and Jyamire there had clearly not been any significant use of the forest, and in all three this has led in some form or another to a deterioration in forest vitality. Whatever the current rates of extraction, it is clear from discussion that none of the common property forests in question have been contributing significantly to the subsistence requirements of the users. It is also clear that none of the forests have been *over*-harvested through felling and pruning activities, although heavy grazing pressure in Sirupata and Jyamire has damaged regeneration.

Compared with the situation on private land where trees are pruned intensively (accounting for the increased light and nutrient availability), it is clear that forest users have not been able to actively manage their common property forests. The focus has instead been on protecting them. This has been widely reported from experiences throughout the hills (see for example, Malla, 2000, 2001, Neupane, 2000). In Pallo Pakho, Sirupata and Jyamire in particular grazing was banned in order to promote regeneration. Despite disagreements about the degree to which grazing should be controlled (in Jyamire), most users were clear that there needed to be some control. However, there appears to have been little open discussion as to the potential supply of forest products such as firewood, fodder and timber, and the levels of harvesting have been determined by committee members.

In all the FUG sites committee members, or other more dominant members of the group, mentioned that they would like some kind of recognition from outsiders for protecting the community forests. In Bhane for example, one committee member commented: *'we decided to leave the forest alone, because we hoped that in future someone might come and reward us for protecting it'.* This is not to say that all elite members only have interests in protecting the forests, as there have been other examples where they have taken the opportunity to harvest firewood and timber for personal gain. However, there has been a strong sense, amongst those that have had contact with outsiders and forest department staff, that rewards can be gained from outsiders who have in the past preached about protecting the natural environment.

In many cases, where plans have been made for plantation the choice of species has also been decided either by dominant members in the community or by outsiders. For example, in Sirupata and Jyamire the choice of a single species, Khote Salla (a fast growing pine species), reflected the interests of outsiders (DFO and REDF) in soil conservation. During discussion with representatives it emerged that the majority of users had no desire to plant salla in the forest. Again, in Bhane, the vice-chairman had plans to plant salla and sissau in one of the forest blocks, which, following discussion with the representatives, did not reflect the wider interests of the users.

There is a lack of open discussion on common forest management, and that users are not fully aware of their rights to use the forests (or in the case of Jyamire, the right to claim the forest as theirs in the future). The forests and their management are seen as the reserve of professional foresters, despite the in-depth knowledge that users have of the management of their own or other's private trees. In the absence of open discussion, many of the decision are made on an arbitrary basis by FUG officials.

6.4.4 The process of FUG formation: selection of users and forests

The community forestry guidelines stipulate that membership of a FUG is on the basis of need, proximity to the forest, or an ability and willingness to contribute to it's management in some form or other. In reality there are many criteria that local people themselves have for identification of users and forests, and these may affect both the FUG formation process as well as the subsequent potentials of the community forest arrangement to provide benefits to the members and those people around the forest. Some criteria that were identified in the case study sites are:

- *Boundaries of forest and forest users:* One criterion that has been assumed quite commonly across much of the middle hills region is the administrative / political boundaries of VDC and Wards. Such boundaries have provided the basis for inclusion and exclusion of people from FUGs in Bhane where the membership has been based on residence of Ward No.8 of Painyu Thanthap VDC. In Jyamire the conservation committee is also Ward based, and it is likely that residence of the Ward will be a powerful membership criterion (despite the fact that some users from the neighbouring wards were excluded from using the forest for grazing when the Ward boundaries were defined). In Jana Chetana, efforts were made to include people from other Wards, given the sheer size of the forest that had originally been under the control of a Ward level Conservation Committee.

- *Traditional land use rights (birta* land ownership*)*: This criterion did not have any basis in any of the four FUGs, though it was a distinct interest in Jyamire. Interests in traditional *birta* claims are perhaps less likely to affect the identification of users, partly because this would be centred on a very small group of people, and the Range Post staff would be most likely to actively seek to include more households than would generally be involved in such a claim. At least two generations have passed since *birta* was phased out in the 1950s, and interests in reclaiming *birta* forests would also be obscured by the large number of people from the same family. However, in Jyamire there were 38 households within one tole (Pipal Rukh) that identified a claim to part of the forest in Ward No.5, and were indeed seeking to form an FUG at the exclusion of all other residents of the ward, although no formal application had been made. In particular, they sought to exclude a Magar tole, and the Sarki tole.

  It is important to note that although it is unlikely that a FUG would be formed according to birta rights, claimants may well form a powerful interest group within the FUG. While the chairman of the conservation committee was not from Pipal Rukh, it was clear that the some of the residents of Pipal Rukh had considerably more power in decision-making than the chairman, or at least the chairman was powerless to prevent them from using the forest as they wish, either for grazing or felling trees.

- *Involvement in collective efforts prior to FUG formation:* There may be diverse historical contexts to FUG formation that provide the basis for FUG membership. In Pallo Pakho membership criteria were partly based on prior contribution to the high court case to prevent the forests from falling into private ownership. Subsequently newcomers to the ward have been invited to join the FUG. However, residents (11 households) of the neighbouring ward that also wished to join the FUG have so far been refused membership by the chairman on the grounds that they did not contribute to the high court case. It is clear that in this instance the long history of collective effort has led to a strong sense of group spirit, and a feeling of ownership of the forest, though this has also been at the expense of other people's interests.

  The sole criterion for membership of Sirupata at the formation stage was involvement in the establishment of the pine plantation, although newcomers to Kushmisera (Sera) Bazaar have also been invited to take part in the tree planting activity, and hence were included as members of the group.

Often mobilisation of local people by a few more dominant members of the community to form a community forestry group may be achieved without any clear understanding of what the implications of community forestry are for the users, nor any clear sighted analysis of what people really need

from forests. This was particularly the case in Sirupata where considerable time and effort was made in forming a very large group to manage a very small parcel of plantation and open land.
The Range Post staff at Kushmisera also reflected that the demand for community forestry has been coming largely from the local elite who can see community forestry as a way of settling problematic conflicts, and for the considerable power and influence that can be accrued to FUG officials.

The process of formation usually begins with the identification of the forest in question, which is also often predetermined by the local elite when they place their application into the Range Post. Subsequently, the Range Post staff set about the task of identifying the users of the forest. However the identified users may also use many other forest areas that will not be discussed during the formation process. In this way the interests of the elite members in one particular patch of forest are fulfilled by the formation process, though the analysis of the needs of those that are more dependent on common property forests (and very often the more disadvantaged groups) must be restricted to those relevant to the forest area in question.

The emerging theme from this analysis is that with so many forces defining who can and cannot join a FUG, as well as defining the area of forest to be managed, there is little space for planning forest management on the basis of people's needs. In the cases where users have been excluded from a FUG, particularly that of Pallo Pakho, serve to highlight that patterns of forest usage are far too complex and diffuse to be brought under a single umbrella of one forest and one community.

6.4.5 Process of Operational Plan preparation

The Operational Plan is, in theory, designed for the purpose of assisting the FUG in managing their forest over a period of five years. We have already described how it also serves the function of ensuring that the DFO can monitor and control the activities that are undertaken by the FUG. The experiences of the case study FUGs suggest that the Operational Plan better fulfils the latter rather than the former purpose.

The community forestry guidelines on OP preparation stipulate the following compulsory components[12]:

a) Forest description - name, boundaries, area (ha), forest condition and forest type
b) Forest map (survey map)
c) Forest block division, and description of each block - name, boundary, area, aspect, gradient (cragginess), soil, forest type, dominant species, useful species, forest age (pole stage, mature or mixed) and status of natural regeneration
d) Forest management objectives
e) Method of protection of the forest
f) Silvicultural activities - methods for thinning, pruning, cleaning and other operations
g) Nursery, plantation, income generation activities, and time table for implementation
h) Description of areas that may be suitable for medicinal plant cultivation, medicinal plants species found in the forest, programme and time table for medicinal plant cultivation
i) Mechanism for sale and distribution of forest products and management of other income sources
j) Fines and other punishments (as permitted in Article 29 of the Forest Act, 1993)
k) Wildlife conservation activities
l) Other issues stipulated by the DoF

These components must be included, and satisfy the DFO, in order for the FUG to function. Doubtless these are all issues that the FUG would need to cover as they plan for forest management. However, the Operational Plan is prepared in one continuous process lasting only a few days (or in the case of Bhane, in one afternoon). It should also be remembered that the people who participate in meetings to prepare the Operation Plan do so for the first time in such extensive and intensive detail. Issues such as the distribution of forest products within the group, methods for thinning and pruning, and indeed timetables for both plantation and medicinal plant cultivation would need far more negotiation and experimentation than this process could ever allow.

[12] All these are stipulated in Article 28 of the Forest Rules (HMGN, 1995), except for the forest inventory which was introduced in 1999.

6.4.5.1 Awareness of the Operational Plan

Some attempt was made to discuss the Operational Plan with representatives in all four FUG sites. This was intended to help the forest users identify any difficulties that they had had in implementing their plans. However, whenever the project team suggested the Operational Plan as a topic for discussion, the representatives would not respond. It emerged that, in all of the four FUG groups only a minority of members had ever heard of the Operational Plan, and most people were unaware that they had any kind of plan at all. In Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana only committee members were aware of the Operational Plan and its importance in the community forestry process. In Bhane and Sirupata many of the committee members were also unaware of their Operational Plan. The project team avoided asking the representatives directly about their knowledge of the Operational Plan. Instead they discussed the issue first, and explained that it was a document to describe how they will work in future (*kam garne tarika*).

The lack of awareness of FUG members of their Operational Plans has been identified as a problem in many previous studies in other areas. One of the reasons for this lack of awareness is the lack of participation in its preparation. Certainly, in Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana representatives said that there was very little participation in the formation process. In Bhane, there were no planning activities undertaken in the village at all and so most of the representatives could not even comment on the preparation of the Operational Plan.

In Pallo Pakho, it was noted that women in particular did not participate in the meetings during the formation process. Many of the women representatives at the workshop themselves said that there was no problem with this because their husbands informed them of the outcomes - essentially they did not see any reason to go to a meeting if their husbands, who have more time, would be there. However, in the subsequent review of Pallo Pakho's Operational Plan (one year prior to the project), a member of staff from LFP was also present, and placed emphasis on the maximum participation of women in the process.

The issue is certainly more complex than just addressing a lack of participation in meetings for preparing the Operational Plan. One DoF representative who was present at the workshop in Baglung also said that the problem did not lie with the local people, but that the lack of awareness of the Operational Plan is an indicator of a problem in the process itself. Certainly the official language used in the Operational Plan, and the presentation of, in particular, the inventory was highlighted as an issue. The Baglung DFO suggested that there needs to be some rethinking of the language and the units used in the plan.

There is however a fundamental issue that needs to be addressed about the nature of local planning practices and how this relates to the process of Operational Plan preparation.

6.4.5.2 Difficulties in building consensus

Even in an instance where there has been a long history of collective management of a forest prior to the formation of the FUG (which is rare in the Kushmisera area), the management practices would have developed over time through experimentation and adjustment to changing circumstances. Where there has been little collective management in the past, as has been the case in all the case study sites (save collective protection through a mana-pathi system), the very process of on-going planning would need to be developed over time. However, in the formation process the pressure to come to decisions on a variety of issues means that people are required to commit to very detailed plans that ultimately they do not feel committed to, or at least they do not recognise the significance of the decisions for themselves.

It was apparent from the work with the tole representatives, that there is a tendency to focus on one or two critical issues that need to be addressed first before the group can effectively work together (this will be discussed further in section 7.4.6.3). Even in Pallo Pakho, as the most active of the FUGs in the field study, the chairman himself noted that it is simply not practical to make all the decisions in one meeting.

The complexities of power relations, and private interests within the group, require that trust needs to be built up within the group before there can be any commitment to a plan, or a sense that the plan can be brought to reality. Until that happens, the preparation of the Operational Plan is a formality for many, and largely irrelevant to their interests. This is particularly important for disadvantaged groups whose voices have seldom been heard in meetings. Encouraging them to participate in meetings will not necessarily lead to their empowerment. Indeed the lack of participation by disadvantaged group in meetings, may partly be interpreted as an exercise of their 'power' to choose not to attend a meeting, on the grounds that it will be a waste of their time.

In Bhane, during a discussion about how women could become more confident to voice their opinions in meetings, one of the women representatives said that they needed to take action first before they could begin to actively participate in discussions. This would clearly require the group to make one or two decisions that relate to women's concerns and to make sure that the decisions are included in the Operational Plan and that they are implemented. This will set an example, providing a basis for the women to believe that their views and opinions are taken into account. There is very little opportunity for this in the current procedures for Operational Plan preparation.

6.4.6 Developing effective forest management monitoring systems at the local level

The issues relevant to local level planning, that have been mentioned above, are by default relevant to local level monitoring. They can be summarised in terms of:

- How interests are negotiated,
- What decisions are made,
- On what basis, and
- By who.

In the case study sites monitoring had never been *seen* as a discrete activity that people *do*. It is obviously something all FUG members do to some extent, both individually and collectively. The degree to which forest users monitor their common property forest and the activities taking place in the FUG will depend on the degree of benefit that they perceive in doing so, or the degree of relevance to their livelihoods. In this respect it should be remembered that, unlike professional foresters in the DoF or in donor-funded field projects such as LFP, 'forest users' are *not* full time foresters.

Given the many complex political processes at the local level surrounding common property forest management, many people feel powerless to shape the way in which forests are managed. In an environment of mistrust, particularly where there is a culture of avoidance of open and prolonged conflict within a village, forest management may stagnate and with people no longer taking an interest. In rationalising their time and efforts, rather than expending effort on challenging the powerful members of their community (and indeed their patrons) in order to ensure a secure supply of firewood, many have changed their focus towards the labour markets, in urban centres or in India and the Middle-East. Foreign employment is increasingly being seen as the benchmark of prosperity in Baglung district, and people are often disparaging of the potentials of their local area, including forests.

By way of summary, there are four themes mentioned here that constrain the development of active collective learning within the group through monitoring, which would be enhanced by developing monitoring systems. These are described in the following sections.

6.4.6.1 Understanding the potential benefits of community forestry and how they can be distributed

Many of the representatives reflected during the fieldwork that they had not really considered the costs and benefits of community forestry. This is however fundamental to good group functioning, and essentially it is something that people should have a reasonable idea of at the outset of FUG formation, and continue to negotiate. These costs and benefits are not only measurable in person days

contributed to FUG activities and forest product bundles, but depend on the changing values of the users for the forest and the FUG.

6.4.6.2 Developing mutual trust within the group

Developing trust within the group may take time, and without it detailed planning will be largely ineffectual. There is a clear role for monitoring in this respect, though, again, it is a 'chicken and egg' scenario, in that it will be difficult to fully institutionalise monitoring as an activity if there is little mutual trust between the members.

6.4.6.3 An understanding of people's rights

It is important for local people to be aware of legislation and the rights that this secures for them, and to continually monitor change in policy. This is particularly important in areas where FUGs have not been formed. In Jyamire many of the people had been monitoring the *implementation* of community forestry. Through this monitoring they perhaps have a deeper understanding of the 'real world' community forestry policy and procedures than they are given credit for. However, the problem remains that they are not aware of the legal *endowments* made in the Forest Act (1993) and community forestry guidelines. Unless they are aware of these issues they will not have any grounding from which they can identify and seek to address the social and institutional constraints to meeting their needs and interests from common property forest management.

Communication of government policy and circulars (orders and instructions) of Forest Ministry/Department is another problem for forest users. Any changes in policy and legislation are usually communicated orally by the Range Post staff, and are therefore subject to their interpretation. One example of this is a circular that was sent directly by the Forest Ministry to DFOs throughout the country eighteen months prior to the project, without the necessary consultation and approval from other ministries, that was to effectively ban forest users from harvesting green wood from community forests. There was little legal basis for such a circular, though in Kushmisera it was communicated orally to FUGs. This caused considerable confusion. Forest users must know the legal basis of any information they receive - and Range Post staff and DFO must be able to provide written evidence.

However, monitoring of forest policy is not just about receiving information. Local people need to be fully conscious of their basic rights and develop some indigenous sense of justice, such that they can respond to changes in policy and legislation (via media such as FECOFUN). Of course, as this relates to forests this must be coupled with an understanding of, and negotiation with, other outsider interests in the forest.

6.4.6.4 Developing local demand for services

The lack of awareness among forest users of the roles of other organisations is a major constraint to their being able to actively seek services. There is therefore a mismatch between FUGs expectations for services (if they have any at all) and the actual capacity of other organisations to provide them.

6.4.7 Monitoring of biological diversity by community forestry stakeholders

Currently the DFO, LFP and FECOFUN have specific interests in monitoring species diversity in community forests. In particular FECOFUN have included profiles of species diversity for each FUG as part of its information requirements (see also consultation report by Nepal Trust for Biodiversity, 1999). The forest inventory requirements also specify information on tree species and any other species of economic value (such as medicinal plants), though they are not comprehensive.

However, there are limited means of addressing how the livelihood needs and interests of different stakeholders may affect biological diversity in the future. Therefore, there is little information that can assist in negotiating and defining different stakeholders' roles in biological diversity management. With the present information sets there is little room for compromise in identifying appropriate strategies within changing social, institutional, policy and market environments. This would require an understanding of how different stakeholders value different components of biological diversity, and how these changing contexts may affect them. The options open to the Department of Forests (as a key actor in the implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan) are either to allow forest users to

access forest resources, or to revoke a community forestry arrangement should there be any decline in biological (in this case, species) diversity.

6.5 The role of FECOFUN in local level community forestry

6.5.1 Description of organisation

FECOFUN is a network covering most of the districts across Nepal. It was formed for the purpose of supporting member FUGs in a variety of technical and institutional aspects, though most particularly as a powerful lobbying force in the community forestry sector. It essentially sees itself as a grassroots organisation, though it did not derive from coalescing local and regional networks already in existence. Rather it began with a small network of FUGs in the east of Nepal, and was subsequently formed as a national network, taking in new members as new FUGs are formed across the country.

There are other networks for forest users, most notably, HIMAWANTI, which is specifically for women (set up by ICIMOD), and recently another parallel network has been initiated by some senior officials in the DoF. However, to date FECOFUN remains the most widespread and well-known network. They have representatives at the central level (in Kathmandu) and at the district level, and a committee constituted of FUG representatives at the Range Post level. They are thus a powerful, though inevitably bureaucratic, organisation.

As has already been described in the previous section, the project had contact with FECOFUN at the Range Post and (less so) at the district level. Most of the observations from the fieldwork therefore relate to local level activities, particularly arising from a joint workshop with the Kushmisera FECOFUN committee and Kushmisera Range Post staff.

6.5.2 Relationship with local people

Despite the fact that FECOFUN describes itself as a grassroots organisation, and is for the large part constituted of local FUG representatives, ordinary FUG members know very little about FECOFUN. In Jana Chetana, during a discussion of the role of FECOFUN, it emerged that none of the representatives apart from the FUG officials and the FECOFUN representative herself knew anything about the organisation. This shows the problem that the FECOFUN representative reports little about her activities with FECOFUN to any of the other FUG members. Throughout the four FUG sites, few but the FUG officials and the FECOFUN representatives themselves could actually say what the role of FECOFUN was.

The Kushmisera FECOFUN committee has, in fact, undertaken several activities with FUGs. In the workshop they highlighted the following activities:

- Raising awareness of government community forestry programmes (particularly on forest users' legal rights)
- Support to FUG members, and non-FUG members that have been excluded from the benefits of community forestry
- Legal advice
- Conflict resolution in both FUGs and non-FUGs

Their regular contact with FUGs comes through participation in meetings every four months(jointly with the Range Post staff) with the committee, and occasionally as observers at the assembly meetings. They also have had contact with non-FUG groups in facilitating conflict resolution, which can raise awareness of community forestry as well. This role does not fall within the remit of FECOFUN, as essentially FECOFUN's involvement is only supposed to begin after the formation of the FUG.

It is clear that FECOFUN can provide an important source of support to FUGs, though it should be remembered that all the representatives work on a voluntary basis and so there is a reliance on their

dedication and commitment. Also, of twenty-three FUGs in Kushmisera, only twelve have FECOFUN representatives and this means that they have to spread their activities quite thinly.

6.5.3 Relationship with the Range Post

Both the Range Post and FECOFUN are grassroots nodes of large national level forestry sector institutions. There is a potential for these organisations to jointly work and contribute more positively to community forestry processes. Apparently, there have been some attempts at joint planning, through four-monthly meetings with the Range Post which aim to review the issues arising from the four-monthly meetings in which both organisations are present. However, there is little in the way of partnership roles, or complimentary usage of the different skills in both organisations for common strategies in the community forestry process.

During the project period, a workshop was organised in which the Range Post level FECOFUN representatives and Range Post staff. They were asked to define the partnership role in promoting community forestry programme. Using a matrix for some of the major steps within the community forestry process it was possible to identify some areas where their activities compliment each other, although some of this is speculative. The outcome of the workshop is summarised in Table 6.1.

However, it became obvious in the workshop discussion that neither the FECOFUN committee members nor the Range Post staff feel confident to undertake analysis of their own strengths and weaknesses in developing partnership roles. This is largely because they do not have a sense of autonomy, particularly in the Range Post. Furthermore, although the similarity may end there, in such situations flexibility and innovation in interactions with the forest users at the local level need to be reconciled with more rigid bureaucratic processes

Negative perceptions of Range Post and FECOFUN towards each other have also contributed to the poor relationships between the two organisations. FECOFUN identifies itself as a defender of forest users' rights, and this seems to be translated into a very negative perception of the Range Post staff. This is reciprocated by the Range Post staff. Interestingly the reasons that they give for their negative views of each other are in principle the same - that the other is bureaucratic and ineffectual - although the Range Post is also viewed as the manifestation of the government 'oppression' of the forest users. In other words, central level politics have translated into personal animosity at the local level.

The Range Post's role is somewhat reduced to the more technical and regulatory activities (i.e. gathering the necessary data for providing the FUG with its legal grounding), whilst the FECOFUN representatives have highlighted less clear-cut and more time-consuming roles (such as conflict resolution). It is also important to note that they recognised a greater need for increased involvement of VDCs in co-ordinating awareness raising programmes for community forestry

Table: 6.1 Potential partnership roles in the community forestry process

Community forest formation process	Range Post	FECOFUN
Information and awareness raising about community forestry	Take some time to discuss strategy in VDC meetings Co-ordinate with VDC members to raise awareness with conservation committees and schools	
Community forestry applications	Receipt	
	Preliminary investigations and allocation of activities	
	Information on strategy to DFO	
User identification	Identify poor and disadvantaged users	Traditional users
Information on group and forest	Demarcation of forest boundary	Boundary conflict resolution
Decision to form community forest	Both (with users)	
Constitution	Lists containing the names of FUG Committee Officials and forest user household heads	Ensure clarity in roles & responsibilities
Operational plan	Survey and inventory	Distribution system

6.5.4 Monitoring information

A workshop was organised amongst the Range Post level forestry organisations, mainly RP and FECOFUN, to develop an understand of their information requirements. The areas on which the two organisations exchange information are summarised in Table 6.2

Table 6.2 : Information exchange between Range Post level institutions and FUGs

Information to and from the Range Post	
FUG	FECOFUN
Oral and written information Requests and applications (written) Reports (FUG annual report) Information on forest resources Interests and requirements of FUG members Historical background of forest usage in FUG locality	Request assistance when necessary Description of activities undertaken by FECOFUN within Range Post Help from outside organisations. Training for capacity building New management methods and skills Information on activities of non-local forestry s/holder organisations
Information on tech. services Information on trg. programmes DFO annual targets NTFP management New legislation, policies and circulars in written form	
Information to and from FECOFUN	
FUG	Range Post
Applications (workshop attendance) FUG activities and progress Forest species information Needs and interests of the FUG members Any activities specifically designed to raise the living standards of poorer members of FUGs	Amendments and new legislation, policies and circulars Other stakeholder organisations Various kinds of financial, physical and technical assistance available How is FECOFUN viewed by donor organisations?
Respond accordingly to requests and applications made by the FUG	Inform Range Post of implementation and impact of new directives and policies in FUGs

In the same workshop, later two main questions were asked: what do you want to know from other organisations and what do you want to communicate or tell other organisations? The workshop tried to address these two questions. Although the discussion did not go into detail about the indicators used by different organisations, the question was also asked as to why particular information was needed (i.e. what are the implications for the activities of the organisation?). The outcome of the workshop discussion is summarised in Appendix 7.

It can be seen from the Appendix that there appears to be little marked difference of monitoring information requirements between DFO, LFP and FECOFUN. This is primarily because the information comes from the same data source (DoF monitoring formats). It is hard to recognise any interests specific to FECOFUN that relate to their activities. This information came from a district level meeting and even for FECOFUN this is where most of the information analysis is undertaken, though clearly the interpretation and responses will be different from the DFO.

It is at the local level, however, that there is a need to develop monitoring systems according to specific activities. This requires FUGs to have some expectations of FECOFUN (and the Range Post) and at present this is not the case. Wherever services have been discussed between FECOFUN representatives and FUG representatives the discussion has been so vague as to leave most of the representatives none the wiser. The activities outlined in Table 6.1 represent some preliminary discussions on the potentials for local action, though they need to be further fine-tuned, and cover a larger set of activities relating to FUG support, chiefly to plan how to make the best use of resources. For the purposes of monitoring between FUGs and FECOFUN, FUGs should also be aware of the resource constraints facing FECOFUN.

6.6 Involvement of VDCs

It is clear that VDCs are marginalised from the community forestry process. Even within the context of this field study, the project team reflected that there was inadequate involvement of the VDC in shaping the research. The project team discussed the objectives of the project with members of two of the VDCs in the research area (Kushmisera and Painyu Thanthap VDCs) and consulted them on site selection. It was difficult, however, to identify more specific roles that they could play, particularly given their own time constraints.

VDCs have no clearly defined role in the community forestry process, with a huge proportion of activities relating to the community forestry and livelihoods interface being undertaken by the Range Post. However, the VDCs as the people's representatives are essential to the protection of people's rights in all respects, including community forestry. Perhaps the greatest barrier has been the fact that control of forest resources between VDCs, the DFO and FUGs is very blurred. This is in part due to discrepancies between the Forest Act (1993) and the Local Self-Governance Act (1998 and subsequently 2000), where limits to either party's control over forest resources have not been clearly defined. Subsequently, the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MFSC) drafted a revision of the Forest Act by claiming that water resources should also fall within the forest sector jurisdiction. This further antagonised DDCs and VDCs who saw to it that the Act was not passed.

The current approach to marginalise the VDCs from community forestry processes has led to the development of a negative perception of the role of the DFO amongst the VDC officials. For example, in Jana Chetana, the Vice-Chairman of Damek VDC attended one day of the representatives' workshop. At the end of the workshop, he criticised the Ranger for not involving the VDC sufficiently in forest management. He had been aware of the considerable development activity that had already taken place in Jana Chetana, but felt that the VDC should have had greater input into this as well as to help co-ordinate community forestry activities throughout the VDC. Instead, the FUG's primary contact is with a forest bureaucracy that is neither representative of the people's interests, and is only accountable to superiors within the Department.

The VDCs recognise the need for democratic decision-making within FUGs, though they feel that the strong links between FUG officials and the DFO mean that FUGs essentially act as extensions of central government. Certainly, the structure of communication channels (including monitoring) supports this suggestion, given that the DFO is monitoring every aspect of people's livelihoods as they relate to community forestry.

While there is certainly a need for greater involvement of the VDC in ensuring that community forestry contributes positively to people's livelihoods, it is beyond the scope of this project to explore means of achieving this.

6.7 Summary

The following appear to be the greatest constraints to improving both the involvement of local people in conscious learning through planning and monitoring in forest management, as well as the service delivery of other organisations to FUGs and users of forests where there is no FUG.

a) FUG formation begins with the identification of the forest rather than the livelihood needs of the local people. From the outset planning focuses on linear relationships between one 'community' and an already identified forest area. This reflects the fact that very often it is one or two dominant members of the community that identify the forest according to their own interests, which may not represent the wider patterns of usage of other forest areas across the community. In some instances (in the case study sites) this has greatly compromised the potential contribution that community forestry can make to the livelihoods of local people.
b) The two stated functions of the Operational Plan, namely as a document to guide forest management, as well as a legally binding document for regulatory purposes, are difficult to reconcile with each other. In reality the regulatory function takes precedence, such that detailed management decisions are also scrutinised by the DFO.

c) The schedules for management planning, and in particular Operational Plan preparation are ultimately set by the human resource constraints of the DFO. This means that FUG members are forced to come to decisions in a very short space of time, and many of these decisions require far more investigation, negotiation and experimentation. Consensus requires recognition of the need to experiment with unknown or unresolved issues and a containment of disagreement within certain parameters. There is no scope for this in the procedures for preparing the Operational Plan.
d) There is little understanding within the Department of Forests as a whole, of why particular monitoring information is being gathered, how it will be used and what their capacity will be to respond to that information. This point is crucial if the DFO is to increase its service orientation. Possibly because there is little demand coming from FUGs the DFO monitoring systems are less focused towards self-assessment (impacts of DFO activities, rather than just general changes in FUGs), with a tendency to monitor the work of others rather than one's own work.
e) There is very little involvement in community forestry of organisations that regard the livelihoods of local people as well as the security of their rights, as a priority. In the context of developing monitoring systems for community forestry, it is necessary to have organisations that understand and sympathise with local people's livelihood needs and can interpret these in relation to government and private services in different sectors. While the need to involve local NGOs / CBOs and VDCs in community forestry processes is recognised, there is no guarantee that the involvement of these organisations will necessarily result in a better understanding of local livelihoods issues.

One of the research project's main objectives was to develop an understanding of the ways in which the various stakeholders currently manage and monitor common property forest resources in the villages. There has been considerable development of detailed procedures for planning (and monitoring) in community forestry, and indeed attention has been given to encouraging participation of FUG members in planning. Despite this there is a gap in the involvement of different groups. Procedures for planning forest management and monitoring are tailored more to the requirements of the DFO, which almost has a monopoly in defining the way in which planning and monitoring is done. By contrast, within the FUGs, procedures for planning are dominated by a few selected FUG committee officials, especially the chairmen and secretaries, who in turn seem to see their role to be to fulfil the requirements of the DFO (i.e. protection and limited utilisation of the resource), rather than those of the forest users (who are more concerned with livelihood issues). Consequently, stakeholders, such as VDCs, local NGOs / CBOs, and FECOFUN, who have a better understanding of the livelihood issues, have been marginalised from the community forestry processes. At present there is no mechanism in place that would enable the various stakeholders to come together and discuss each others interests in forest resources, agree on management objectives, methods and procedures to achieve these objectives, and the ways (process and indicators) in which to measure progress.

7 Developing forest users' planning and monitoring systems: the field process

7.1 Introduction

The previous section described the reasons for the lack of effective planning for common property forest management at the local level and hence the lack of an appropriate monitoring process with suitable indicators. This section, which relates to output 2, describes the process of developing a forest management planning and monitoring system with the forest users.

The overall purpose of the process relates to more long term and subtle changes within communities and their forests. However, the findings presented here are based largely on the observations of processes and outcomes that occurred during a seven-month period. Given the short length of the project it is difficult to describe any definite long-term livelihood outcomes, though it is hoped that the reader will find some realistic evaluation of the potential for improving livelihoods through forest management.

It is possible to draw out a procedure for facilitating forest users' planning and monitoring that should address many of the problems highlighted in the previous section. However, it should be noted that many of the constraints mentioned earlier relate to procedures of community forestry in general and are in effect external to the field process. An arrangement has been made with the participating forest user group members and the Range Post staff for follow up work during the next twelve months. This will to some extent help identify ways in which a more favourable policy and procedural context can be developed to ensure that this process can be effectively used across the middle hills of Nepal.

The main findings relating to the process of the monitoring system are structured into three parts. We first describe the process used to develop the monitoring system and ways in which it had to be adapted as the research progressed. We then present a generic, or transferable methodology, for developing monitoring systems with forest users, highlighting the major elements of the process. This is followed by discussion on the range of aspects of forest resource management, including forest biodiversity, for which the generic methodology might be used. We then look at the role of outside facilitators and the information requirements of different stakeholders, as they relate to the development of monitoring system with the forest users.

Before discussing in detail the main elements of the monitoring system it is necessary to look back at the field research methodology and to reflect on the important lessons learned and hence the subsequent changes in the focus of the research. These will help to unravel some of the confusions that have existed as regards to the need for a participatory monitoring process.

7.2 Commentary on the methodology used

The findings of the field research have arisen from an overall assessment of the major lessons learnt throughout each of the case studies. However, they are not reflected in entirety in the methodology used in each of the research sites. This is principally because these lessons had, during the course of the field research, forced the project team to evaluate the activities in terms of their achievement of the overall purpose of the project (and even the goal set by NRSP). The original expected outputs of the project were to develop site-specific indicators with the forest users, and to build them into an overall indicator framework that could then be adapted to local conditions in other areas. This presupposes that in so doing the forest users would be better able to develop planning strategies for managing forests in a way that would better contribute to their livelihood security and improvement (as the original goal of the project had been stated). Thus, in evaluating the field research activities against the *goal* of the research project, it was necessary to re-examine the validity of the research project outputs themselves.

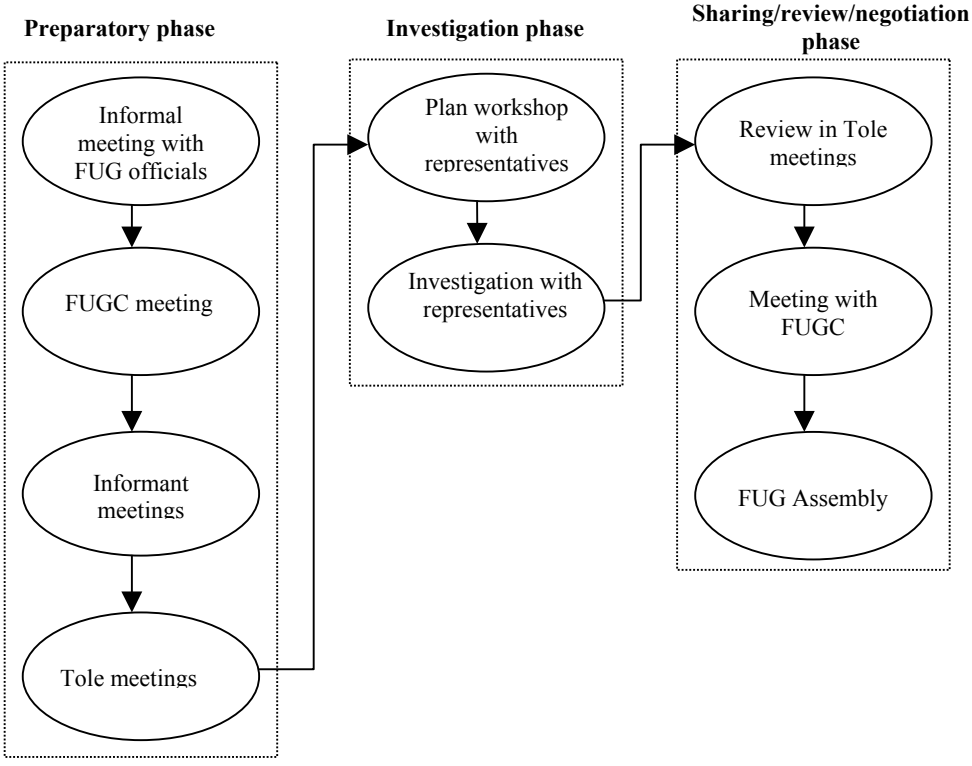
During the initial stages of the field research, it became obvious to the project team that there is a long chain of prerequisites to achieving the project objective of identifying and using formal indicators with the forest users. The FUG tole representatives in the two pilot sites (Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana) expressed the view that, although they had developed a set of indicators, they were not sure whether they would use them in actual practice. Moreover, the tole representatives found it hard to explain the indicators to the rest of their tole residents. Different members interpreted the indicators differently and they found it almost impossible to achieve any degree of consensus. The emphasis of the research methodology therefore had to change. Rather than forcing the users to come up with a set of indicators and ways to achieve these, it became necessary to look at the process of community forest management planning and implementation. Both monitoring indicators and the process of determining and using these indicators must be an integral part of the forest management planning and implementation.

Furthermore, the FUGs were able to establish a self- monitoring system, including a provision for a follow-up action. However, due to time constraints, the research team was unable to observe and reflect upon the use of the system by the concerned community members and its impact.

7.3 Research methodology used for a detailed field investigation towards developing forest users' monitoring system

This section describes in detail the methodology (in terms of phases and steps) used to develop forest users' monitoring systems and the various activities undertaken under each phases and step as well as the ways in which they were adapted as the research work progressed from the 'pilot' site to other sites (Figure 7.1). The overall process can be broadly divided into three phases: preparatory, investigation and sharing/review/negotiation, and each of these phases involves two to four sequential steps/activities..

Figure 7.1**:** Field research process used for a detailed investigations in each site



The preparatory phase involves four sequential steps and includes first an informal meeting with the FUG officials, which is followed by a formal meeting with the FUG Committee and the key informant meeting and a series of tole level meetings. The objective of the preparatory phase is to inform all the concerned forest users about the objective of the project, develop and approve a plan of actions for the

subsequent phase. In this phase the FUG, through tole meetings, select tole representatives to participate in the workshop (carry out investigation). The investigation phase actually involves tole representatives to define the forest management problems and issues facing the FUG, their solutions and ways to achieve the solutions. Based on this, the tole representatives then prepare a proposal for consideration and approval by the FUG as a whole, which leads into the final phase – sharing/review and negotiation phase, that involves two sequential steps - tole meetings and FUG general assembly. Table 7.1 outlines the objectives and expected outputs of the various activities in the research process.

Table 7.1: Objectives and expected outputs of different activities in the process

Phase	Activity	Objective / Outcome
Preparatory	Discussion with key members	• Discuss the project objectives, rationale & benefits • Fix a date, time and place for meeting with FUGC members
	FUG Committee meeting	• Discuss forest user group activities, achievements and issues with the Committee officials • Discuss the project objectives, rationale & benefits • Discuss the need to communicate the project objectives to the rest of the forest users through tole (hamlets) meetings • Fix dates, time and place for tole meetings and arrangements for informing the villagers for the meeting
	Tole meetings	• In each tole, discuss forest user group activities, achievements, issues them. • Discuss the project objectives, rationale and benefits • Nominate/select tole representatives, at least 1 man and 1 woman per tole, to participate in the project workshop • Inform the date, time & place of the workshop, and its logistics
Detailed Investigation	Workshop with Tole representatives	• Discuss and agree on the agenda of discussion in the workshop, relating to forest management practices, including monitoring (visit fields & forests) • Document the outcomes of the discussion, including a set of monitoring indicators, if any, that arise • Plan and prepare for sharing and reflection of the outcome of the workshop with the rest of the FUGC officials and tole members
Sharing & reflection with the rest of the members	Tole meetings and FUG general assembly	• Tole representatives share and reflect the outcome of the workshop with the FUGC officials and fellow tole residents. • Tole representatives consider the views, comments and the feedback from the FUGC officials and tole residents, and incorporate in the report.

In the following sections, we describe the work undertaken under each of these phases and activity, their outcome and the ways in which the approaches and methods were adapted as the research work progressed.

7.3.1 Preparatory phase

7.3.1.1 Discussion with the key members

After having agreed on the FUGs to include in the detailed research work, a meeting was held with the concerned forest user group committee officials to discuss dates for field work in their respective areas. Major calendar events, such as crop harvesting, festivals etc., during which it would not be possible to hold meetings were identified, and tentative dates for project involvement were worked out for all the selected sites. It was agreed that the key members would then go back to their villages, discuss with the rest of the FUG members and confirm the dates with the Range Post.

7.3.1.2 Executive committee (FUG committee and conservation committee) meetings

The main objective of this meeting was to formally introduce the project to the FUG and to agree on a general approach to working in the village. In each FUG Committee meeting, we first introduced ourselves, explained the project objectives, rationale, and the perceived benefits or likely outcome of the project. We then discussed the roles of the concerned FUG members and the project team (including the Range Post staff) in the research and general approaches to working in the village. Considerable time was spent discussing the concept of 'monitoring' and, particularly during the pilot cases, the use of 'indicators' and ways in which they could be helpful in assessing the management of common property forest.

This was followed by a discussion on the general working approach, the role of the project team and villagers and on the need to inform the rest of the FUG members, mainly through meetings at the tole level. Committee members were asked to draw a very quick social map to help in identifying appropriate toles. The committee officials then set dates, times and places for tole level meetings and divided responsibilities among themselves for organising the tole meetings in their respective toles.

Reflecting on the experiences of the five sites as a whole, the project team did not feel that the discussion on monitoring (and indicators in some sites) enabled the committee members to develop a common understanding before agreeing to undertake the research process. It was also difficult to address the 'negative' connotations that the word 'monitoring' carries with it. For example, a FUG committee official in Pallo Pakho asked whether the government Forest Department was planning to take the forest back after the forest condition has improved. By contrast, the committee officials in Jyamire, the non-FUG site, were concerned that the project team might intend to persuade them to convert their forest into a community forest.

It was also necessary for us to be flexible, even with this formal procedure. In Bhane for example, very few committee members actually came to the committee meeting, even though it had been arranged two months previously. Although the main committee officials (chairman, vice-chairman, secretary and treasurer) were present, most of the members were either unable to come for personal reasons or were only ever in the village for brief periods of time, as they spent much of their time tending their land in the Tarai.

It was particularly important to be flexible with identification of suitable tole divisions for the subsequent meetings as villages do not have very clear divisions between different toles due to evenly scattered houses across the hillside. In one FUG, Sirupata, we had to bargain and compromise on the representation from each tole mainly because of time constraints (prior to the wheat harvest), which meant that there were fewer meetings with larger toles merged together.

7.3.1.3 Tole meetings

One of the objectives of the tole level meetings, common throughout the field research, was to reach people more widely, beyond the FUG committee officials. The other objective was to select representatives for the later workshop. The tole meeting agendas were very similar to those for the FUG committee meetings. These meetings could be quite repetitive and tedious where there were several tole meetings to be undertaken in the FUG (as in Sirupata, where there were 10 in total) especially for the Range Post staff, who are normally used to communicating through the FUG chairman only. However, the importance of tole meetings cannot be undermined and should not be rushed through (Malla et al., 2001). For the residents of each tole, it was the first time they had heard about the project. It was also when many of the FUG members, especially those who were not selected to take part in the later workshop, could get first-hand information on the project. Reflection on the experience of a previous research project, FFMP and feedback from the tole residents suggested that this is one of the best ways to communicate information in the village and make it public. Many tole residents reported that they continue with further discussions amongst their fellow tole members following tole meetings, and hold tole meetings to prepare themselves for the subsequent FUG general assemblies.

Generally tole meetings lasted for approximately two to three hours, as this is really as much time as any normal person could afford to give to such a meeting. There were however, differences in procedures used in the tole meetings depending on the circumstances. In many instances tole meetings had to be held early in the morning and at night time, and so it was often difficult to use any visual techniques to explain the project when it was already dark. Invariably this meant that representatives had varying degrees of understanding of the project prior to the workshop.

In a sense it is hard to find a member that would adequately represent the interests of everyone in the tole, especially in such circumstances where there were many individuals from diverse castes or ethnic groups within one tole. For example, in Jana Chetana we were concerned that there were no Kami members amongst the tole representatives. We discussed this issue with the secretary and chairman. They understood the problem, and they themselves went on visits to some of the Kami

households to gauge what were the reasons for them not putting themselves forward for the workshop. Most of them were simply too busy with house building work, though one man who had not been at the tole meeting decided that he was interested to go. One of the project team members discussed the objectives of the workshop with him, and he eventually agreed to come.

7.3.2 Discussion with tole representatives (workshop)

This is where the main research work took place, involving discussion with the selected tole and FUG committee representatives, both men and women. The total time spent with tole representatives in each site ranged from 10 – 20 days. The subjects/topics of discussion in the workshop in different sites are described below, and this reflects how subjects changed and adjusted as the project team learned and moved from one research site to another.

7.3.2.1 Identify major aspects of common forest management

This step was common throughout all the sites and is crucial in defining the scope and direction of the research. However, there were differences in the way in which the major aspects of common forest management were identified in the different sites. These were not so much due to specific local contexts but rather reflect lessons learnt as the research progressed.

In the first two sites (Pallo Pakho FUG and Jana Chetana FUG), participants were asked to identify the key topics that they would need to monitor in relation to community forestry. This was quite an abstract approach, and it was necessary to use examples to give them a clearer conceptual picture. The principal idea was that they should view the community forestry arrangement as a multifaceted asset. The project team used an example of purchasing a buffalo, asking the participants what would be the main aspects of the buffalo (behaviour, milk quality, etc.) that they would want to look at to decide whether it was good quality or not. Through group brainstorming (or in small groups of women, men and committee members) major aspects were identified and categorised. These aspects were then used to define the subject matter and agenda for the rest of the research. These are shown in Table 7.2.

At this stage the project team were aiming to create the circumstances whereby the participants could then go into more detail and identify indicators for each aspect (see next section). However, we discovered that this process was too abstract to relate to the real issues that they were facing. The project team wished to emphasise holistic analysis though that came at the expense of action oriented research focused on the priorities of the participants themselves. As an indication of this problem, the project team were very much leading the process at this point and it was difficult to open up two-way discussion.

Table 7.2: Aspects of forest management identified by the two forest user groups

Pallo Pakho FUG	**Jana Chetana FUG**
1. Forest resources utilisation 2. Forest management 3. Forest condition 4. Skill development and employment 5. Income generation 6. Fund mobilisation 7. Institutional development (FUG) 8. Communication and information	1. Forest product usage and equal distribution 2. Forest condition and management (nursery and plantation) 3. Environment improvement and wildlife conservation 4. Income generation 5. Group spirit and awareness raising (institutional development) 6. Fund mobilisation 7. Recognition (as model FUG)

In response to this, in the remaining site, the project team undertook to use issues raised in the tole meetings as the basis for identifying the topics in Table 7.3.

The results were more akin to research questions and reflected particular concerns raised in the tole meetings (or in subsequent discussions). For example, research questions emerging from Sirupata FUG were less specific than those of Bhane FUG and Jyamire Conservation Committee, because very few of the members of Sirupata had taken interest in the plantation, nor had they perceived livelihood contributions from it. Although identified through brainstorming in small groups, many of the

questions raised in Sirupata (such as the relationship between Sirupata and Range Post and NUKCFP/LFP) were put forward by the chairman and secretary.

Table 7.3: Major issues raised in the tole meetings in the subsequent 3 forest user group sites

Bhane FUG	Sirupata FUG	Jyamire CC
1.How can the group view the forest as their property, in the same way that they view their own private land? 2.How can the group be made aware of the potential benefits from the forest? 3.What are the responsibilities and rights of the group and committee? 4.What are the other rules and regulations that affect us? 5.Forest management 6.How can we establish income generation activities with our small funds? 7.What species should we plant for income generation? 8.What are the reasons for members not coming to meetings?	1.Thinning/ pruning, grass fodder distribution 2.How can we find out where to plant what species? 3.What is the relationship between the group and committee? 4.How can we plant species according to our needs? 5.How can we protect the forest? 6.How can we mobilise the funds of the FUG? 7.What do we need to consider if we want to expand the area of our community forest? 8.Relationship between group and range post, and the role of range post 9.What services should we expect from NUKCFP (LFP)? 10.How can we find out about rules and regulations related to forestry?	1.Whose forest is it? 2.If it is our forest then why should we have to give forest products to the VDC? 3.How can we make the forest trees straight? 4.How can we meet our needs for firewood and fodder? 5.What can we do about grazing/ hay grass cutting in the plantation area (why is it banned?) 6.Boundary conflicts and internal conflicts 7.What is the committee doing for the group, and why? 8.We do not know what the revenues and expenses are, nor where the remaining money is. 9.What methods should we use to communicate information to the whole group? 10.Group rules and regulations and how to ensure that they are abided by

7.3.2.2 Identify indicators for particular aspects of community forest management.

The identification of indicators for different aspects of community forestry was the main concern of the fieldwork at the outset. However, for reasons that will be described below this was only a specific focus of the research in the pilot sites. In later sites, the focus shifted to facilitating the initiation of broader group level processes of learning-through-action.

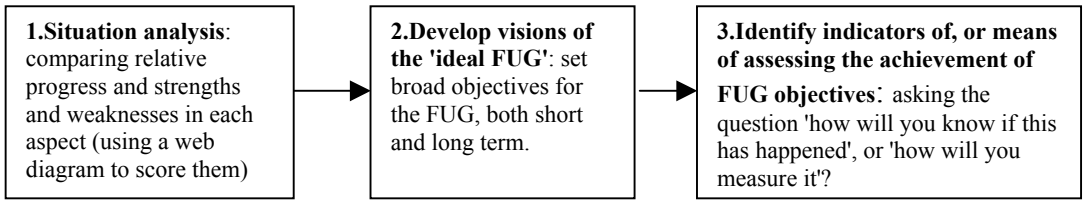
The identification of indicators covered a large number of different activities for different aspects, but is highlighted here as a particular approach that the project team attempted to use in the pilot sites (Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana).

The approaches to identifying indicators that were used in the pilot sites are broadly divided into those relating to the forest resource and those related to the FUG (which would then incorporate issues of forest management and benefit distribution amongst other institutional processes).

The forest resource was the starting point in both the pilot study sites because:

- By visiting the forest first, we encouraged more active and open discussion between the participants on the issues facing their group, leading to new insights and reflections.
- Another reason was that it would be possible to identify some indicators of forest condition, as well as discuss general forest resource assessment methods, prior to developing an action plan (see next section).
- At this stage the project team were still focusing on monitoring per se with less emphasis on the action planning process as a whole.
- 'Visioning', or objective setting could be used to develop indicators by producing a value-based image of the 'ideal FUG'. The approach to developing indicators in Pallo Pakho is summarised in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.2: Process of developing indicators (used in Pallo Pakho)



This methods builds on previous pilot research undertaken by NUKCFP in the Koshi Hills (see Hood et al., 1998), in picturing the 'ideal FUG'. However, we included an analysis of achievements so far, and of the current status of the FUG. By analysing the experiences so far, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses we thought that there could be a basis for developing realistic, relevant and specific objectives. Participants were asked to imagine what would be the ideal situation for the FUG, and each put forward their objectives, which were listed, and where two or more objectives were similar they were amalgamated with the agreement of the participants. Once the list of objectives was drawn up they were arranged into major categories, and for each objective, the way in which they would be monitored, or the actual indicators were identified. These are presented in a table in Appendix 8a

In Jana Chetana different methods were used for objective setting for different aspects. For certain topics the current situation was discussed in detail and then targets were set where variables were readily identifiable. This was done for the forest resource, extraction and distribution of forest products. For institutional development a visioning technique was used, with the group effectively brainstorming the qualities of a well-functioning group. The results of this exercise are presented in Appendix 8b.

Whilst these activities represent experimentation on the part of the project team during the pilot stages, they were not likely to be sustainable in the future.

7.3.2.3 Assess forest resources

The level of detail achieved during the workshop in forest resource assessment depended on the nature of the issues being investigated - in particular whether they were more focused on group dynamics or on the potential of the forest.

In Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana, both considered to be very well functioning groups, the focus was on how to improve the use of the forest resource (or, as was the case in Pallo Pakho, the use of funds generated through particular community forest products to improve private tree resources). In Jana Chetana, the representatives drew up a list of aspects, prior to the forest visit, that should be assessed (see Appendix 9), though the core of the assessment focused on species counts by age class.

In contrast, in Bhane and Jyamire, the research group prioritised institutional issues and consequently the visits to the forest were focused on symptoms of poor group functioning and basic actions needed to revitalise the forest eco-system.

7.3.2.4 Determine perceptions of, and levels of interest in, monitoring biodiversity

There are strong links between biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods, but these are not always recognised overtly or in those terms. The aim of the approach was to encourage the emergence of an informed perspective which helps local people to think through options for monitoring relevant aspects of biodiversity in their forests. Consequently biodiversity was introduced carefully, both as a response to aspects emphasised by the participants (i.e. that they were concerned to monitor “forest condition”), and as an external perspective which might help to provide some ideas to help them monitor aspects of interest to themselves. Its inclusion was explicitly justified on the following basis.

- Because some of the ideas which we will discuss will help villagers to monitor forest condition and give them information which will help them in management decisions.

- Because villagers want to achieve recognition by outsiders, and biodiversity is an aspect of great interest to outsiders.
- Because by knowing their resources, villagers will be better able to protect and conserve it for their own future use, and to claim their own rights in terms of knowledge and ownership of the resources, when outsiders want to use them for their own benefit.

The last of these points, relating to ownership of knowledge and resources, was not clearly appreciated by the participants in the workshop, but it is important to recognise and document such potential benefits from the process, given the current international political climate for biodiversity benefits and intellectual property rights.

The issue of biological diversity was only addressed directly in Pallo Pakho, with an explanation of the concept and an open discussion on the different values of the representatives for particular species or forest types. In other sites, information regarding values for biological diversity was drawn out of discussions on the forest condition and people's interests in different species or forest types. This information was analysed by the project team, rather than in collaboration with the representatives, because the representatives' workshops focused on institutional constraints rather than forest related issues. It was important, at this stage, for the project team to gather evidence to indicate how and at what point in time the biological diversity issues could be discussed. In Jana Chetana, during the forest resource assessment exercise, some values for species were also discussed.

Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews (SSIs) were guided by questions linked to a framework of values of biodiversity. This framework recognises that different stakeholders value the components of biodiversity differently. Those components can be clustered as: genes, varieties, species, ecosystems or habitats, and processes or functions. The values may be for individuals within each category (e.g. preferences for particular species), or for diversity per se within that category. Values may be use values (direct or indirect), or non-use values, many of which have intangible (such as spiritual or aesthetic values). These different dimensions of biodiversity are summarised in Box 7.1.

Outside members of the project team worked with the tole representatives to explore their perceptions of biodiversity and which components of biodiversity they would consider monitoring. The topic was first discussed in a plenary session with the representatives in the workshop, and forest visits with smaller groups, covering all the major forest types within the community forest.

Box 7.1 : Key dimensions of biodiversity

Levels of diversity
- Varieties
- Species
- Habitats
- Processes / ecological functions

Change in any component of diversity

Kinds of values
- Direct use values
- Indirect use values
- Existence values
- Option values (including bequest values)

Change in any kind of values

Differences in any of the above, between different kinds of respondent

By understanding both the components valued, and the kinds of values used, we can give examples of the kinds of indicators that different stakeholders might apply to forest management; of relevance of biodiversity (Table 7.4). This gives the facilitator a guide to help illustrate the purpose, for participants, but it should be noted that very different indicators might also emerge.

Table 7.4: Examples of indicators that different stakeholders may use, based on experience of values held

Indicators	Expect villagers might use	Expect outsiders might use
Presence / absence of indicator plant spp.		
Presence / absence of certain wild animals		
Presence of range of priority species	Useful species	Threatened or keystone species
Number of species		
Diversity of uses		
Number of varieties		
Number of forest habitats		
Access to full range of forest habitats		
Accessibility of forest (i.e. density of undergrowth etc.)		
Stable climate		
Stable water supply		
Stable soil		

The approach taken was to build as much as possible on priorities already highlighted by workshop participants, in this case a concern with forest condition and utility, and for external recognition. Biodiversity was explicitly introduced and discussed in the group, facilitated by key questions linked to the framework. Further, more detailed discussion was stimulated by forest walks, planned by the participants to include a range of different kinds of habitat found in their community forest. At the end of each day feedback and consolidation meetings were held to clarify and highlight points of interest, both with the participants and (later) with the facilitation team.

7.3.2.5 Exchange of experiences between the groups

During the workshops with representatives from individual sites some attempts were made to encourage the exchange of experiences and other information through the participation of representatives from other groups.

The major exchange activity undertaken was with Sirupata. Representatives divided themselves into three groups and each group spent two days with one of the three other groups (Pallo Pakho, Jana Chetana and Bhane) in which the research had been done. Prior to the visit the team had a one-day workshop specifically to develop a list of questions that the representatives could ask the host group members. After returning from the sites the research reflected on the findings from other sites and their implications for Sirupata (these reflections are summarised in Appendix 10).

This activity was a one-off and it is difficult to draw conclusions as to how such visits should be fitted into the process. Shortage of time was one of the reasons why the project chose to do such a different activity with Sirupata, as well as a sense that they may have a greater chance to reflect on their situation, particularly with such a small forest resource.

7.3.2.6 Group-level analysis of social justice and equity within FUGs

Social justice was a common theme in all the sites, though the methods used varied according to the nature of the issues prioritised by the representatives.

Social justice and equity issues were more relevant in Bhane and Jyamire, primarily because the priority issues relating to forest management linked back to problems within the group itself. In Sirupata there were few experiences of any kind of distribution of forest products or other benefits for them to reflect on, and so the issue was dealt with in a more speculative fashion, by asking if or when substantial benefits start to arise from the plantation how will these benefits be distributed within the group?

In Pallo Pakho the focus was more on adjusting existing arrangements for distribution of funds to favour the poorer members. In Jana Chetana, the representatives were very enthusiastic about the notion of equitable distribution, though with such a large and diverse group, with a large forest resource it was clear that developing appropriate systems for benefit distribution needed to be more gradual and carefully negotiated.

Some of the key lessons learned are summarised as follows.

- Despite the different circumstances of each site, all needed to establish social justice and equity as a broad goal for the group to consciously work towards, through experimentation and developing an understanding of how the group can work for the benefit of all. In all the participating FUG sites, wealth ranking was suggested as a basis for negotiating benefit distribution mechanisms (see Box 7.2). The exercise can generate some ideas such as favourable rates for sale of firewood, or weighting supply of firewood in favour of poorer member households. Similarly these can be applied to fund distribution and quota systems for representation in the committee.
- Introducing the subject needed some careful planning as well as sensitivity to the interests of the representatives at any particular time. Issues such as the distribution of forest product and group funds and participation of different social groups in decision-making, that are raised at the early stage of the workshop, could be brought together to identify common themes.
- It is important to use the appropriate sequence of analysis in order to generating interest in and, importantly, commitment to the goal of achieving social justice. The outside facilitators could then discuss the means of finding ways for achieving this in a transparent way.
- Simulations or proverbs can be used to build a conceptual picture, which can then be followed by an open discussion, highlighting any relevant experiences within the group and how the situation could be improved. It is important to recognise that not all representatives would be happy with the solutions identified, and this would need to be negotiated amongst the whole group over a long period of time. Indeed, it was stressed that this was not the intention of the exercise - as some representatives may then force these ideas on other members of the group.

Box 7.2: Use of wealth ranking exercise to reflect social justice and equity within a FUG

In three of the sites, Pallo Pakho, Jana Chetana and Bhane, the tole representatives did a wealth ranking exercise. Criteria and indicators for overall well being in the group were identified in the plenary and then smaller groups were formed to allocate appropriate categories to different households. These results were brought together and a final wealth rank was produced. The results of these wealth ranks are shown in Appendix 15. In Pallo Pakho this wealth ranking exercise was linked in to a major concern that had been highlighted in group discussions previously. Many participants were eager to see for themselves how FUG funds had been distributed across the group for the goat husbandry credit scheme, and whether they had really targeted the poorer members of the group. They saw that overall there had not been any huge discrepancies in the distribution (see Appendix 11), though they realised that some people that had received credit in the second year of the scheme were in the wealthiest rank and should not have been prioritised in that year. This highlighted the need for both greater transparency and more systematic means of distributing funds.

In Sirupata, however, the representatives agreed that it would a useful exercise to do in the future, but decided that they would rather do it with the rest of the group.

In Jyamire the representatives decided that they would rather try to negotiate distribution mechanisms in tole meetings at the appropriate times.

7.3.2.7 Draw-up proposals to address group issues, norms and rules

In the pilot sites (Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana) the focus of the workshop had been on developing indicators for each individual aspect of CFM. As the workshop drew to a close it became apparent that whilst there had been detailed discussion on many aspects of CFM, the representatives were not clear about what action to take following the workshop. On the last day of the workshops in both Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana an attempt was made to summarise all the outcomes of the workshop to identify what issues to take to the toles.

The representatives were clear about the notion of monitoring, or learning through action, and felt that this was an important message to take to the toles. Indeed they decided that they would like to use some of the tools that the project team had used to explain the concept to them. However, the message for the project team was clear, that the group needed to be committed to particular actions, to ensure the involvement of as many members as possible, before any discussion of criteria and indicators could be useful. The representatives 'filtered' out the most relevant information in the form of proposals to suggest to the rest of the group, and ignored the indicators that had been identified in

relation to them. In other words, it is important for the outsiders not to rush through the process and determine indicators.

In Bhane, Sirupata and Jyamire the group discussion focused on drawing up some proposals for immediate action to address some of the problems that had been discussed. However, simply identifying these actions was not enough. It was also necessary to identify ways of developing trust and raising interest in the group, particularly where mistrust has caused the group to stagnate. Therefore, among the proposals were also suggestions for:

- Group norms, or some kind of assurance that the group would continue to work in a particular fashion;
- Methods for communicating within the group;
- Methods for making decisions in the future; and
- Other information on the expected benefits coming from the forest, particularly in FUGs, such as Bhane, where lack of awareness of the benefits of active involvement in forest management was seen as a problem.

The proposals drawn up by representatives from these sites are in Appendix 12.

7.3.2.8 Preparation for presenting the workshop outcome at tole meetings

Once the representatives were clear on what messages to take to the tole meetings it was necessary to give further assistance in increasing their confidence to communicate these messages. This was necessary because:

- At least half of the representatives were women, and some of them would be presenting in front of men;
- The tole meeting has rarely been used in such a formal context, but rather communication has often been through small group discussions on a veranda. Many of the representatives will never have spoken out in such a way.

The representatives organised themselves in groups according to those that would be presenting in different tole meetings. While the representatives were to present in their own toles, some representatives felt that they did not have the confidence to do all the presenting and would ask for help from friends from other toles. One group would be asked to prepare and then rehearse the presentation, and then take suggestions from the other representatives and the project team.

7.3.3 Sharing / reflections the outcome of the workshop with the rest of the group members

7.3.3.1 Reflection (review / negotiation) at the Tole Meeting

The purpose of the tole meetings was to communicate workshop outcomes to the rest of the group and take in suggestions from the tole members. Initially, this was assumed to be the point where negotiation of indicators would take place. However, it was clear that this would not be a priority of the representatives and certainly not a priority of the remainder of the group, who had been less involved in the investigation. Thus the agenda for tole meetings consisted of the representatives explaining:

- The concept of learning through action in their own words;
- What was investigated and why; and
- What proposals were put forward and why.

7.3.3.2 Reflection (review / negotiation) at the FUG Committee Meeting

In Pallo Pakho, Jana Chetana and Bhane, the representatives decided that after the tole meetings they would also like to meet with the FUG committee to summarise all the issues that had arisen from both the workshop and the tole meetings. However it was not seen as a compulsory part of the process, as the committee had already been consulted and authorisation sought on the whole process at the outset.

7.3.3.3 Reflection (review/negotiation) at the FUG General Assembly

The assembly is, for any FUG, the only time when formal decisions can be made within the group. In Jyamire it was also recommended to the committee, and in tole meetings, that they hold an assembly to make the decisions, despite the fact that this had not been institutionalised prior to the project. However, assemblies are difficult to arrange and need to be planned in advance in order to ensure maximum participation. This presented a major weakness in the project process. The project team were not present in any of the assemblies and in retrospect too much emphasis was placed on finding the right approach for the first part of the sequence of events, namely the tole meetings and workshop, without adequate consideration of the decision-making processes towards the end of the sequence.

The project team did arrange meetings with the committee and tole representatives following each assembly to update on the tole meetings and the decisions made. The decisions made in these assemblies are shown in Appendix 13. The decisions made in any one assembly generally represented only a fraction of the proposals put forward. The chairman of Pallo Pakho reflected that it was impossible to include all the decisions in one assembly.

However, the fact that there were fewer decisions than were indicated by the number of proposals put forward should not be seen as a problem. Records of all the proposals were kept, and so could be included as agendas in the future. If too many decisions are made then the commitment to them will likely be less, as consensus can be deceptive.

7.3.4 Second workshop with tole representatives

A second two day workshop was organised with tole representatives in each research site. The project team identified a standard sequence of activities that would be carried out in each site. These were (a) draw-up work plans, (b) identify issues still under dispute, or areas where further research and experimentation would be needed, and (c) discuss methods for research In drawing up the work plans for each decision the representatives were asked to discuss why each decision was made, how it would be implemented and by who, when particular activities would be undertaken and what assistance would be needed (from Range Post staff or FECOFUN). In particular, when thinking about why a decision has been made, the representatives were asked to consider who would be likely to benefit and who would be disadvantaged by the decision. This was to identify where the likely areas of conflict would be, but was also important in the sense that those who are in disagreement over a particular decision feel that they are not being ignored by a powerful voice of majority. For this the representatives were divided into small groups and then the different suggestions were put forward in the plenary and a single work plan was drawn up. The work plans for each group are shown in Appendix 14.

There was then a discussion on the key areas of disagreement, or areas where it was felt that there was insufficient basis for carrying out a decision. These were treated as constraints in need of further detailed research. However, the broad methods for researching these issues were based on many of the information gathering and analysis techniques that had been discussed in the previous workshop, though in this situation they gained more relevance in the light of the specific research needs of the group. The three main activities that the project team suggested to representatives in each site were:

- Gathering information on forest product demand within the group
- Forest sample and demonstration plots
- Wealth ranking

Establishment of forest sample plots as well as wealth ranking were both activities that had been undertaken in some sites, though only discussed in others. The reason for this difference was that the representatives did not feel that it was appropriate to do such an exercise at that point in time, or else could not see the relevance of the activity.

Through discussing forest management options in some instances it was also apparent to both the project team and the representatives that there was still very little basis for clear decision-making on active forest management operations. Decisions regarding forest management made in the assembly had often only related to basic or broad ranging actions (such as clearing weeds, ban grazing, trial

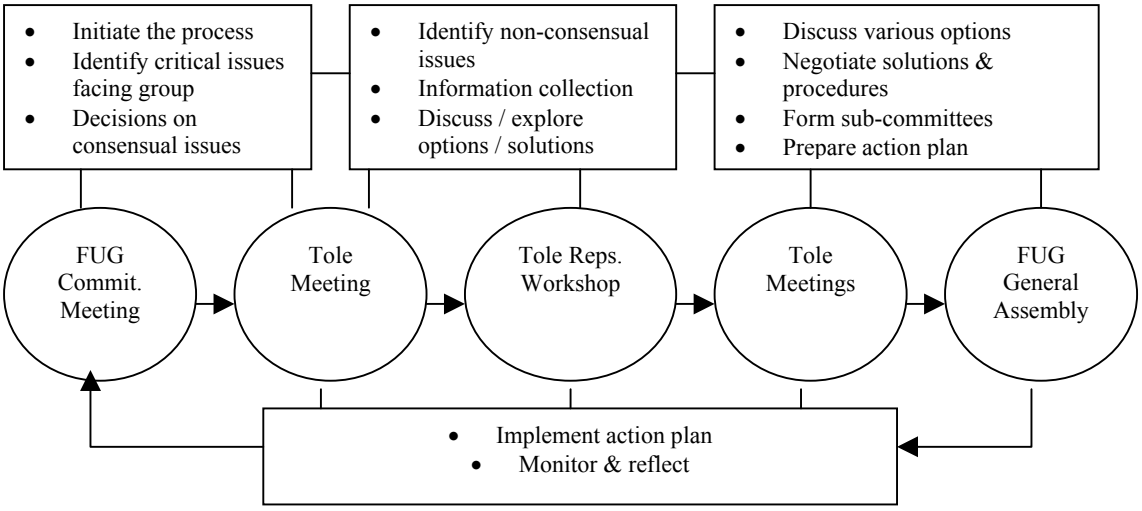
different species of planted seedlings in forest etc.) that had been identified as priority areas by the representatives. In these cases the representatives recognised the need for more systematic data gathering on forest product demand within the group (as relates to type of forest product as well as species).

In all sites, by way of example, the representatives put together information on their own requirements for firewood, grass and tree fodder and timber. Information was also gathered on representatives preferred species. By taking the average requirement and multiplying by the number of households in the group the representatives could also compare this with the general levels of supply from the community forest, and in some instances this gave a much clearer picture of the shortfall in supply (as in Sirupata).

7.4 A generic process of developing forest management planning and monitoring systems with and for use by forest users

What can we learn from the above process of participatory action research with the five FUG members? Can we work out a methodology, or process of developing a forest management planning and monitoring system with a FUG, and which the forest users could use to plan and monitor their community forest management activities on their own? Indeed, it has been possible for the project to develop such a 'generic process'. Figure 7.3 shows the process of developing forest management planning and monitoring systems, and Figure 7.4 shows the sequence of information collection and analysis when using the process.

Figure 7.3: a generic process of forest management planning and monitoring systems with forest users



The process, which involves five major steps – from FUG committee meeting through to FUG general assembly as the core elements, is simple and easy to understand for both outside facilitators and forest users. The process provides a FUG members with a systematic way to identify forest management issues facing them and their potential solutions, prepare a plan of actions and then determine ways in which to monitoring the implementation of the action plan, all in a participatory way.

7.5 Basic features of the process

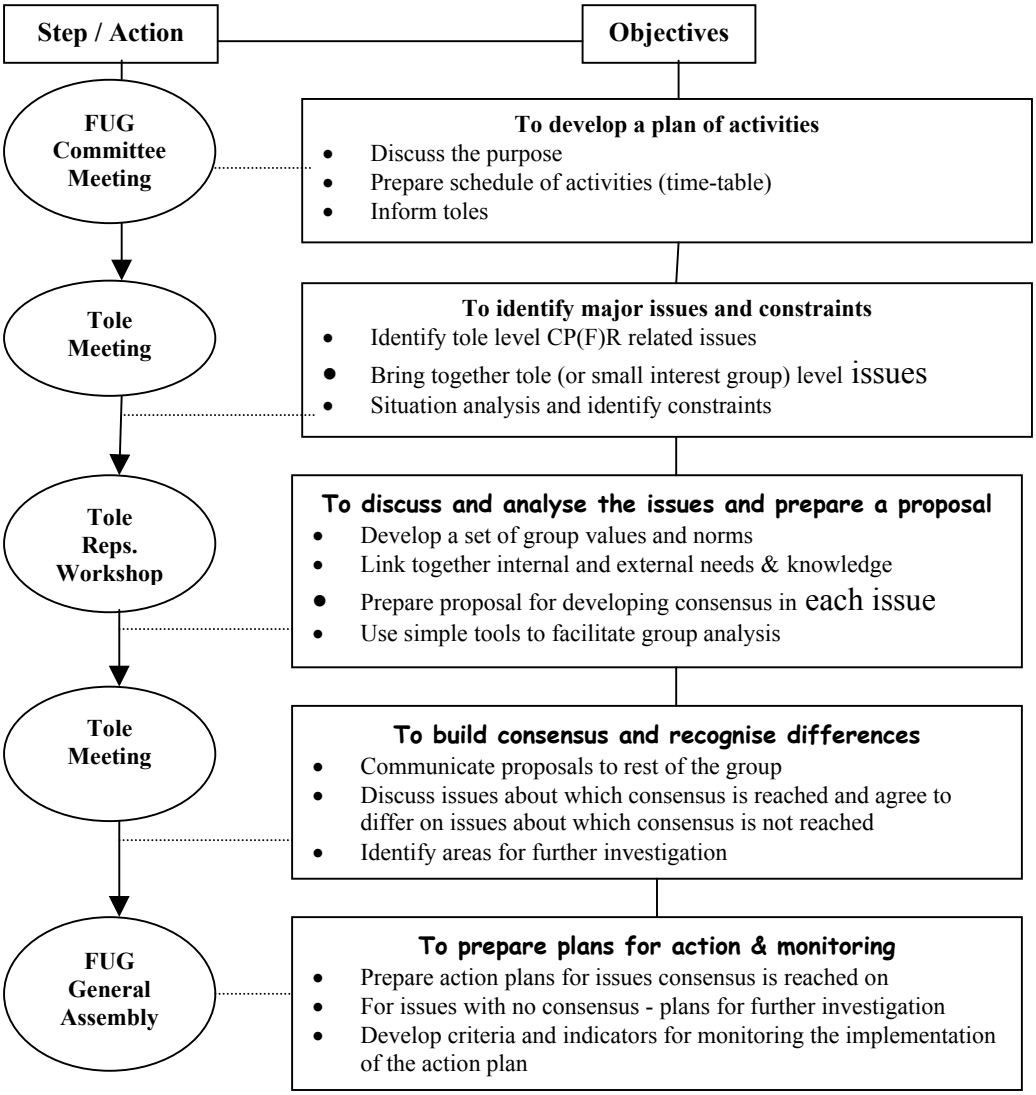
Some of the basic features of the process are as follows:

7.5.1 Participatory action and learning

The process, which views monitoring as an integral part of community forest management planning activities, involves a continuous process of participatory action and learning (PAL). It is designed for the purpose of enhancing forest users' on-going forest management planning and monitoring processes, although to start with they may require outside support to initiate and facilitate the process.

Therefore, the core elements are simple and replicable for it to be continued by the users themselves. It is also intended that the involvement of outside facilitators should be minimal in the future and shaped around agreed times when assistance will be needed, although this depends on the difficulties faced by the group in undertaking it. It may be that previously less active FUGs, or newly established FUGs, will require more facilitation over subsequent years.

Figure 7.4: Sequence of information collection and analysis



The process enables the group, especially during the tole representatives workshop, to follow through from the symptom to the root cause. The planning process must be flexible, with the main interaction between outside facilitators and tole representatives lasting about 5-7 days, in which priority issues and their solutions are discussed. However, it should be noted that the detailed action research work is carried out by the group at appropriate times throughout the year rather than within one continuous workshop.

At present the FUG planning processes (particularly Operational Plan preparation and review) are structured by the time schedules of the Range Post staff (which are in turn structured by the directives of the District Forest Office). Operations Plans have to be prepared in a single continuous, and typically very short, time period, at a time that suits the Range Post. Because there are many compulsory elements that need to be covered this may become a very rushed process that is insensitive to local peculiarities. Until all the elements are covered there can be no approval of the

Operational Plan, and the FUG cannot legally function. Such a rushed process will not yield results that are relevant to the users' needs. For example, the forest inventory (that has recently become a compulsory component of the Operational Plan) must be done during this single process. However, this would ideally be done as a separate activity at, or near, the time of harvesting firewood and other forest products. Thus, timing is a critical factor that affects the way users participate in forestry activities.

The process developed here has the potential to enable more structured planning around the time schedule of the users, and to be more linked to the specific interests of the users and the issues and questions facing them. For example, forest inventory would be undertaken, along with demonstration plot establishment, once the users have identified the relevance of issues that such activities may provide answers to. It would also be done at the time when most of the users are available to go into the forest, for example, at the firewood harvesting time.

7.5.2 Participation of interest groups

The process is designed to reach people beyond the FUG committee officials and to ensure that interests of all the members of the FUG are considered. Through tole level meetings, it is possible to reach the maximum number of households, especially women and disadvantaged members, although it is not so easy to involve the poorer household members in the programme (see Box 8.1).

Box 8.1: The Kami caste as an 'interest group'

Til Bahadur BK was selected by the project team and the FUG secretary, rather than by the household members of his tole, to go to the workshop, as the lack of representation by Kami households had been identified by the project team. Whilst there were only four practising blacksmiths in the FUG, most of them have reduced their traditional activity in favour of wood carving and house building. In this instance, as the trade is still the major source of Til Bahadur's income, he was probably the best person to represent the blacksmith group. However, he was perhaps not in a position to represent the interests of the other members of the Kami caste who have more interest in the forests timber potential for their carpentry and house building trades. It also appeared, through discussion with Til Bahadur, that since he had converted to Christianity other Kamis have ostracised him. This may affect the way in which the workshop information is shared with them, and indeed, the way in which the needs of other Kamis are put forward by Til Bahadur.

The community forest area itself had never yielded sufficient suitable tree species such as Angeri and Are for charcoal. Til Bahadur said that he had always used the forest further up the valley (Thulo Ban), which is a government forest. In order to get one head load of wood for charcoal he would have to walk for 3 hours each way and thus it is a whole day's work. It would be an advantage to him if there were more of these tree species in the community forest. The inclusion of his perspectives in the workshop served to highlight the diversity of interests that need to be considered in community forest management. At present he is able to collect dry wood amounting to one bhari per year, though, through planting more Angeri in the forest, this could increase.

It is important that individual cases, such as Til Bahadur, who are at a disadvantage when it comes to voicing their interests, are considered during decision-making. One of the objectives of the project process must be to initiate FUG processes that will ensure that their voices are heard. At least, it is possible that, at the personal level, Til Bahadur may have gained in confidence which is a positive outcome for the workshop. Taking an empirical perspective on the project process, however, this highlights the fact that the notion of 'interest groups' can lead to simplistic, or reductionist approaches to social analysis.

7.5.3 Sequence of information analysis

The effectiveness of the use of process also lies very much on the way activities are undertaken and more importantly the sequence these activities are planned and undertaken. For example, it would be inappropriate to organise tole level meetings without prior discussion with, and approval by, the FUG committee officials. On the other hand, one should avoid discussing the issues in detail with the committee officials and considering the possible solutions without first understanding the interests of the various interest groups and individuals. Moreover, although the main investigation work was done during the tole representative workshop, the discussion was based on the issues that arose from the tole level meetings. Similarly, the action plan was only approved based on the wider consultation of the solutions first at the tole level meetings and subsequently in the FUG general assembly. Figure 7.4 describes the actions and objectives of each step in the learning cycle.

7.5.4 Flexibility in the use of specific tools and techniques

The process allows the flexibility in the use of tools and techniques. For example, instead of using all tools and techniques in all of the five sites, only those were used that seemed relevant at the time to the situation of the particular research site, as is reflected in Table 7.5. Some activities, such as the visioning of an ideal FUG and forest resource condition, and the setting of criteria and indicators to measure whether or not these 'ideals' are achieved, were not found to be very helpful. Although at times interesting and helpful in engaging people, in the end they proved to be rather theoretical exercises, which did not focus on the real issues facing the FUGs.

In some situations, the participants did not want to undertake certain activities. For example, in Jyamire, people were reluctant to do wealth ranking and the estimation of the demand and supply of forest products, so the project team decided not to pursue these activities.

Table 7.5: Summary comparison of activities undertaken in each site

Stage	Activity	Sites				
		1	2	3	4	5
Preparation	Social/resource mapping (preliminary investigations with key informants)					
Tole meetings	Develop list of major tole level issues relating to community forestry at tole meetings					
Workshop with tole representatives	Summarisation of major issues arising from tole meetings and development of research questions					
	Situation analysis (web diagram)					
	Visioning/ objectives setting					
	Criteria and indicators for achievement of objectives					
	Preparation of criteria and indicators for forest condition prior to forest visit					
	Discussion on forest sample plots					
	Established forest sample plots and baseline information based on criteria and indicators					
	Demonstration plots (firewood & fodder harvesting)					
	Block wise qualitative forest assessment					
	Use social/resource map for discussion of major issues					
	Visits to other research sites for sharing of experiences and identifying relevant research questions / issues			Site 1	Sites 1 - 3	Site 3
	Identification of critical constraints to further progress in forest management					
	Discussion on equity issues					
	Wealth ranking					
	Norms and values in decision-making and communication					

1 = Pallo Pakho; 2 = Jana Chetana; 3 = Bhane; 4 = Sirupata; 5 = Jyamire

7.5 Aspects of forest management monitoring

A wide range of issues and aspects related to community forest management were covered at the workshops of tole representatives as well as in the joint workshops in Kushmisera Range Post and Baglung district head quarters. In these workshops, one common concern of the areas for monitoring emerged. The three most important aspects of forest management that need to be monitored and indicators developed for include:

- Monitoring of new issues and trends within the FUG and its forest resource
- Monitoring of implementation, and
- Monitoring of impact

7.5.1 Monitoring of new issues and trends

There is a need for monitoring constantly the new issues that arise within a FUG and their forests as well as the trends of such issues. Here the emphasis in on the discussion of all the prioritised issues in the forum. This will enable the representatives to analyse the linkages and critical constraints. In order to begin the negotiation process, the issues prioritised by the users themselves need to be addressed first. Critically, the outside facilitators may not regard them as important or sufficiently holistic, and in future it may be necessary to be prepared to address non-forest related issues as well. This is important because as long as these issues remain unresolved they will be an obstacle to mutual understanding and trust amongst various interest groups within the FUG – a prerequisite for the development of a meaningful monitoring system.

7.5.2 Monitoring of implementation

For each decision made during the FUG general assembly, it is necessary to clarify and record the proposed method and sequence of activities, the responsible person(s) and when activities should be carried out (see, for example Table 7.6).

Table 7.6: Work plan for implementation of decisions (Pallo Pakho) – a basis for monitoring

Decisions	Why	How	When	How to know if the work is done?
Each h/hold to receive 50 income generating seedlings to plant in their private land	Community forest resources insufficient to meet requirements of FUG members and so necessary to enhance private resources. - Increase self-sufficiency and income.	Committee tole representatives to manage the distribution of seedlings and ensure that they are planted.	End of Shrawan (July-August)	3 member committee to supervise distribution of seedlings

This information then provides the basis for monitoring the implementation of the decisions made. This can provide important information for FUG learning as regards the ways in which the group can function, as well as practical constraints.

In three of the five sites, sub-committees were formed for the monitoring of activities (such as credit schemes for lowest wealth category members). In addition, in all sites a three-member committee was formed to keep records of implementation.

7.5.3 Monitoring of impact

The third and final aspect of monitoring relates to the overall impact of forest management. In order to monitor the impact of forest management and whether the objectives of forest management are fulfilled, the forest users must first be aware of these objectives by asking why a decision was made. This is important, not just for future reflection, but also to ensure transparency. By recording the reasons for making a decision, this also opens up the decisions to the rest of the users group, providing them with the opportunity to put forward alternative proposals at a later date.

In a joint workshop, the representatives of five research sites, RP staff and FECOFUN representatives discussed the aspects of forest management that need impact monitoring, and the types of information and stakeholders that are involved. This is summarised in Table 7.7

After decisions have been made in the FUG general assembly it is then possible to filter out the areas where there are knowledge gaps, or where transparency is of paramount importance. These may be issues about which there has not been consensus (such as in Jyamire with the issue of grazing and its impact on the regeneration of the forest), or issues where there is a need to do on-going investigation, monitoring review and negotiation (such as equitable distribution systems, which may be constantly in need of adjustment).

Table 7.7: Aspects of forest management that need impact monitoring (joint workshop)

Aspects of management		Information source and utilisation	Concerned stakeholder
Forest boundary		Boundary description, conflicts	Forest users; FECOFUN
Users boundary		Family kinship, administrative boundary, traditional use right, participate in plantation	RP; FECOFUN
Forest condition	Biodiversity	Transact walk / sample plot	Forest users
	Habitat	Resource map / block wise forest type/ planned alterations to species composition	Forest users; RP
	Regeneration	Sample plot establishment; forest inventory	Forest users; RP
	Forest age	Sample plot (number of dead, diseased trees)	Forest users
	Soil condition	Regeneration	Forest users
Forest resource potential	Stocking level	Sample plot	Forest users
	Growing stock	Estimate. yields from s/plots; actual yields	Forest users; RP
	Growth stage	Sample plot establishment; forest inventory	Forest users; RP
Forest users' needs			
Livelihood security		Wealth ranking/ social maps (Tole level survey)	Forest users; LFP/ NGOs
Forest product distribution		Distribution based on demand & wealth categories; needs regular review	Forest users
Fund mobilisation		Priority to lowest wealth rank	Forest users
Representation		W/categories, gender, caste etc. in committees	Users; RP; FECOFUN
Decision making process		Prepare proposals; discuss in tole meetings; revise proposal; final decision in FUG assembly	FECOFUN; LFP
Communication		FUGC & tole meetings & FUG general assembly	RP; FECOFUN

7.5.4 Monitoring biological diversity

As indicated in Section 2, the intention of the research project with respect to biodiversity was to develop an understanding of the local people's perspective of biological diversity of forest and tree resources, rather than to undertake a detailed investigation, which would have required a complex process, including detailed inventories. A methodology was developed and tested in one pilot site (Pallo Pakho), and based on the information obtained, a framework was developed (see Table 7.8). This work indicates that utilitarian values for particular species and habitats do feature prominently, but that local forest users are also aware of ecological roles, aesthetic values and of the possibility of future (as yet unidentified) uses for species. In sites other than Pallo Pakho, the workshop discussions focused largely on the direct use values for species. This is chiefly because it fitted into the issues that the forest users themselves had prioritised. Some of the major lessons learned from the fieldwork relate to the following aspects:

Box 7.3: Feedback from Forest Guards and research assistants, on the biodiversity argument

1. Participants are now much clearer about what we mean by biodiversity; going to the forest stimulated thought; for example, one woman had a chance to reflect on the significance of seti-kath's appearance and discuss its usefulness with other FUG members.
2. It is an interesting indicator, that community forestry has allowed so much forest growth, that you can no longer see people walking through it.
3. Instead of counting species, the FUG could use the appearance of new species as an indicator.
4. The method stimulates critical thinking particularly for species that have no use, if someone from outside said there was a use they would not believe them without doing their own research.
5. People don't have a favourite habitat.

7.5.4.1 Usefulness of the biodiversity component

The framework was found to be a useful basis for formulating questions during semi-structured interviews and forest visits, to stimulate discussion on the full range of biodiversity-related values. It is particularly important to note the need for flexibility in the methods, so that biodiversity issues are introduced as a response to forest users' own priorities. In this case we were able to respond to a concern to monitor forest condition and usefulness, and to win external recognition. Two particularly encouraging results were the conclusion of the FUG members that the appearance of new species was an indicator of improved forest condition, and the extensive discussion around the effects of ban-mara (a "weed"), showing both awareness of ecological interactions and an interest in experimenting to find out what those effects are.

The facilitating team felt that it was worth introducing the notion of biodiversity as an externally-valued concept, and as an idea which could help FUG members to shape indicators, in particular for forest condition. It was evident that through the process of introducing the concept, and spending two forest walks discussing diversity, perceptions changed. Not only did the FUG change their views on which species are useful, and how many species there are in the forest, they also became curious about the concept of biodiversity and felt that it should be adopted into their priority aspects for monitoring.

It was also a useful basis for highlighting differences between individuals, in terms of what they value. This is an important foundation for exploring who makes decisions based on whose values. Feedback from Forest Guards and research assistants indicated that this process had been stimulating and useful (see Box 7.3).

7.5.4.2 Which aspects of biodiversity are valued locally?

The methodology provided some preliminary indications of the ways in which values link in to scientific constructs of biodiversity, and ways in which biodiversity is linked to local livelihoods. Not surprisingly, values are most clearly linked to individual species (particularly useful species), although clear values for species diversity and in particular for increasing diversity evolved during the workshop. Values for habitats were also apparent, although there were less clear-cut preferences for particular habitats and more general principles in terms of what is valued in a habitat (e.g. that it should be sustainable, shady, diverse, with good soil and water etc.). Awareness of ecological processes was evident although not a high priority, and perhaps not explored in enough detail to make conclusive statements. Finally, as has been shown in other studies, awareness of and value for within –species diversity of forest trees does not seem to be high. In all cases the kinds of values mentioned were largely utilitarian, although the classification of such values suffers from difficulties in deciding what is a "use", and it is clear that the less tangible values take more time to emerge, and indeed are often perceived only through the process of discussing and eliciting indicators. In particular it will be important to probe more on perceptions of ecosystem function, and the role of species and habitats in monitoring key processes – even if those species do not have perceived uses.

7.5.4.3 Multiple interests and biological diversity:

The experiences of the field research have shown that the process of negotiation can lead to a diversity of tree species that reflects the diversity of requirements for species across the FUG. This aspect was more obvious when looking at the way in which decisions have been made about forest management (and more specifically planting, species conservation or clearing) in communities where there had previously been little participation of the wider membership in planning.

For example, in Sirupata, the original plantation was established to reflect the interests of outsiders in soil conservation. Therefore the decision to plant only pine was not made by the villagers - rather incentive payments were made. During the workshop they decided that they should plant as many species as possible to see what would grow. This is because nobody could remember a time when there had ever been forest on the land that is currently within the community forest area - it had always been grazing land.

On the other hand, in Bhane, prior to the research, the vice-chairman had made all the plans for planting. He decided that chir pine (Sallo) and Sissau should be planted in block no.2 where there is some open space. Sissau is mainly found in the lower hills in the south. This emphasis on non-local species reflects those of outsider organisations (as well as the Forest Department) on non-local fast-growing trees At first, participants were very enthusiastic about the presence of so many useful species already in the forest, which they had not really been aware of before. They then focused on local species, already found in the private land of members, and these were prioritised during tole meetings and much of the planting has already been done. Some non-local species were also mentioned, such as Rai Khanyu, but they doubted whether it would grow well there.

In Jyamire, plantation activities had taken place in some of the open areas. This was funded by the Rural Energy Development Project for the purposes of soil conservation. Again the species specified was chir pine, which it has now been observed cannot grow there. Perhaps the fewer species mentioned here is a reflection that they are not yet legally entitled to actively manage the forest. This may increase should they decide to form a community forest use group. Another interesting point is that participants decided that Saj (Terminalia alata) is an important tree to protect. Saj is a useful species for timber as well as high quality firewood. Saj is usually associated with Sal forests, but more specifically it is a defining feature of their forest (Saj as a predominant species), and will definitely grow well there.

7.5.4.4 Perception of use rights and its effect on biodiversity values

Biodiversity values of forests and trees also seem to be affected by local people's perception of whether they have the access right to certain tree species and products. For example, in all five sites, after discussing the potential benefits of the forests, people highlighted that fodder tree species were in short supply, and subsequently people planned to plant these in the forest. Perhaps this is partly because of the fact that before they never really understood that they had actual rights to use the forest, and so it never occurred to them to manage it for fodder (this is particularly the case in Sirupata). Another example of the effect of rights of access to resources is that of bamboo. Bamboo clumps are generally managed by individual households, rather than as common property, even though they are very often planted on common land.

Biodiversity also appeared as an issue when discussing different types of forest. Participants were asked which blocks of forest they preferred. Very often this relates to the range of different uses that they can find in the forest.

7.5.4.5 Perception of outsiders' interests and its effect on biodiversity values

Outsiders interests in biodiversity and forest conservation and their action towards these interests can influence local action, especially that of the local elites. Local elites, such as the FUG chairman, may be more interested in recognition from outsiders and winning prizes, which usually relates to forest conservation (and more specifically protection). For example, in both Bhane and Sirupata, many of the officials said that they hoped for some kind of reward or recognition for protecting the forest. In Jyamire, the situation is slightly more complex. While the committee was formed in reality to reflect the interests of outsiders, as it helps to raise the status of the officials, various factions within the ward use the forest according to their own political party alliances or traditional feudal rights.

7.5.4.6 Matching forest users' perceptions with other stakeholders' requirements

Although the Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD) suggests that countries should have profiles for all major components of biological diversity (species, habitat, processes), there is no mention of this in the monitoring requirements of the Department of Forests (though species of value must be mentioned in the forest inventory, in the Operational Plan). It is, therefore, important that in any monitoring system everybody knows the interests of other stakeholders; local people should know that outsiders are interested in biodiversity, as it will enable them to actively negotiate with outsiders. However, it is necessary to find the right time to introduce this concept. It is important that the local people themselves also have a chance to express their interests and values for biological diversity, and to be able to place outsiders' interests in the context of their own. Then they can appreciate the contributions that they are making to fulfilling other people's interests as well as their own.

The need for people to be fully aware of these concerns is also greater with increasing market influence, which may lead to an emphasis on fewer, more valuable species, (without attention to ecological processes).

7.5.4.7 Analysis of biodiversity values

Using the values framework outlined in section 7.3.2.4, an ex-post analysis of the case studies was carried out and is summarised in Table 7.8. The framework was developed to assist 'outsiders' in identifying areas of conflicting and complementary interests in biological diversity. 'Outsiders' can use the framework to identify what interests there are in biodiversity, and to better identify how they

could work with local people to manage biodiversity in the future, although the research project, due to time constraints, was not able to develop a specific process for this purpose.

7.6 Role of outside facilitators

In developing the monitoring process with forest users in the five sites, some common elements emerged about the roles of both the external facilitators and the forest users in collaborative action-research. The process has arisen as a result of a series of sequential interventions by outside facilitators and subsequent responses by users. In other words, the users did not actively ask outside facilitators to assist them in forest management research. However, in order for the facilitators to adapt the process to the local context, it was necessary to be responsive to that reality and to be aware of the own preconception. The major roles of the facilitators can be summarised as:

- Defining the overall process of research and communication in terms of the sequence of meetings (in particular, tole meetings) – though the users set the timetable.
- Assisting in bringing together different issues, interests and perceptions in relation to group functioning and the forest resource (particularly where these conflict with each other) – in a sense, bringing the jigsaw pieces of the group to the negotiating table.
- Providing a broader picture of social, economic, environmental and political realities (in particular, equity, power relations and environmental degradation) that are global concerns. Many of these issues are understood implicitly by users, though prevailing fatalism ensures that these remain issues for private discussion. In highlighting the fact that these are widespread issues, this creates a critical group awareness, and group level self-assessment, by relating these issues to their own social reality.
- Providing a standard set of information that gives a common basis for transparent decision-making in common property forest resource management.

7.7 Summary

This section has described the process and the various elements of developing a generic process for use by forest users in planning and monitoring of their community forest management activities. It has focused on three major aspects, which are as follows:

- A participatory action research process to work with forest users in developing monitoring system that would be used by members of a FUG,
- A systematic generic process for monitoring by FUGs their own community forest management activities.
- A framework for incorporating the biodiversity component into the monitoring system.

The PAR does appear to offer significant potential for FUGs to manage their forests more actively, and to function better as sustainable and equitable local institutions. However, participatory action research cannot be solely developed and "delivered" by outside researcher. It has to be integrated into a support programme involving better information gathering and analysis; better and more equitable forest management planning; and encouragement for FUGs to learn through doing and to be flexible and innovative in their forest management.

The generic process, as shown in 7.2, is designed for enhancing forest users' on-going forest management planning and monitoring processes in a more systematic and organised manner. Core elements of the methodology are very simple and replicable, and the process shows the major steps, in terms of what activities to undertake, when, how and by whom. Once the system is in place, the concerned FUG members should be able to use the process on their own and adapt it to their local circumstances. Although initially some outside support will be required to help initiate and facilitate the process, it is intended that the involvement of outside facilitators should be minimal in the future.

The generic process:

- Enables the majority of FUG members to be reached, beyond the FUG committee officials, and ensures that all the interest groups' views and concerns are taken into consideration.

- Provides a sequential framework for information collection and analysis, explaining the required actions and the objectives for each step or activity.
- Explains the stage at which the interests of various interest groups and individuals should be brought together for discussion and negotiation, and the ways in which this can be done.

The major role of the external facilitators can be summarised as follows:

- Defining the overall process of research and communication in terms of the sequence of meetings (in particular, tole meetings) – though the users set the timetable.
- Assisting in bringing together different issues, interests and perceptions in relation to group functioning and the forest resource (particularly where these conflict with each other), and help negotiate solutions.
- Providing a broader picture of social, economic, environmental and political realities (in particular, equity, power relations and environmental degradation) that are global concerns. This will create a critical group awareness, and group level self-assessment, by relating these issues to their own social reality.
- Providing a standard set of information that gives a common basis for transparent decision-making in common property forest

For monitoring biological diversity, a framework has been developed. Some of the major lessons learned include the following:

- *Flexibility:* Discussing biological diversity with forest users requires flexibility, in particular in how different issues relating to different kinds of values for biological diversity should be linked to the issues prioritised by the forest users.
- *Multiple interests and biological diversity*: the process of negotiation can lead to a diversity of tree species that reflects the diversity of requirements for species across the FUG. This aspect was more obvious when looking at the way in which decisions are made about forest management planning, more specifically when deciding about planting trees, and conserving or clearing certain species. This is more reflective especially in communities where there has previously been little participation of the wider membership in planning activities.
- *Perception of access or use rights*: Values of the biological diversity of forests and trees also seem to be affected by local people's perception of the access or use rights to forests and tree resources (specific tree species and forest products).
- *Perception of outsiders' interests:* Outsiders' interests in biological diversity and forest conservation and their actions towards these objectives also seem to influence local people's actions, especially that of the local elites, such as FUG committee officials.
- *Matching forest users' perceptions with other stakeholders' monitoring requirements:* It is important that in any monitoring system the local community members know other stakeholders' interests in biodiversity, as it this will enable them to actively negotiate.

Table 7.7: Biodiversity values inferred through PM&E process

Key: D – direct use (consumption or sale); I – indirect use (environmental regulation); E – existence value (appreciation of beauty; intrinsic value)
O – option or bequest value (including political value, or the realisation that it is of value because others want it); *Italics* indicate negative values.

	Pallo Pakho	**Jana Chetana**	**Bhane**	**Sirupata**	**Jyamire**
	Well-functioning, cohesive FUG. Relatively easy access to market town.	Well-functioning FUG; High forest: household ratio. Remote.	Less active FUG; small forest area	Community forest is very small plantation. Relatively easy access to market town	No FUG. Highly politicised access to forest. Fairly remote.
Infra-specific (genes and varieties)	D: Awareness of varieties of fig (Khan and Rai Khanyu, which produces more fodder); Rai Khanyu is valued more than Khanyu	None	D: Awareness of varieties of fig (Khanyu and Rai Khanyu, which produces more fodder); Rai Khanyu is valued more than Khanyu	D: Awareness of varieties of fig (Khanyu and Rai Khanyu, which produces more fodder); Rai Khanyu is valued more than Khanyu	D: Awareness of varieties of fig (Khanyu and Rai Khanyu, which produces more fodder); Rai Khanyu is valued more than Khanyu
Species	D: range of uses; species with no use to be cleared E: some species valued for beauty; some with religious value. *D: Non-used spp.. described as 'bad'. This perspective changing through dialogue.* Diversity O: more species better than few; increased awareness of number of useful spp..; need for enrichment planting to bring in new spp. *O: lack of individual ownership restricts management rights, less interest in fodder trees*	D: interest in spp. identification to enhance marketing of NTFPs; non-used spp cleared. Market influences no. of spp. valued. E: Cultural value of medicinal plants decreasing. Diversity O: need for enrichment planting to bring in new spp.	D: Protection led FUG to plant more spp. (all useful). Note that elites focus on narrow range of commercial spp. E: Non-used spp. are not known, generally will be cut back . O: need for enrichment planting to bring in new spp. Diversity: previously unaware of no. of useful spp in the forest.	D: Want local spp instead of planted ones. Much interest in regeneration of broad-leaved / fodder spp. I: explicitly decided to enrich forest with local broadleaved species. O: need for enrichment planting to bring in new spp. Diversity O: Plant as many species as possible to see which will grow best. Risk management.	D: interested in few species because they don't own the forest. D: species suggested for enrichment are not local. Responses rather *ad hoc* because real chances of management seem remote. I: In view of the water shortage problem in the ward, there is a preference for species that are good water retainers (chilaune). *I: Bamboo conversely uses a lot of water, and for this reason, they are unsure of whether to plant any more in the forest* Diversity: prefer landslide areas to undisturbed forest because there are many useful species in one place. O: need for enrichment planting to bring in new spp.
Ecosystems	D: need for different habitats. No favourite habitat.	D: Appreciate natural habitat more than degraded, or plantation, but in contrast to Pallo Pakho, want to change the dominant species, due to the lack of direct use of the current dominant species (Rakta Chandan)	I: identified local species as priority for enrichment planting. *E: Not sure of change in forest condition, due to previous lack of interest in community forest.* Hade Unyun (a fern regarded as a weed), has prevented establishment and growth of seedlings -	D: Want forest instead of plantation. Focus on protecting natural regeneration rather than plantation - local broad-leaved species of more use to them than pine *E: more greenery would be better (value expressed by elites)* O: joined CFUG to assure	D: appreciation of negative effects of poor forest condition on productivity; appreciation of importance of soil condition for forest regeneration. O: only interested in forest if their ownership is clearly recognised, permitting their access and management. Otherwise, encroach. *O: access to forest is through political allegiance.* *E: no existence values, not very interested in forest because not theirs.*

	Pallo Pakho	Jana Chetana	Bhane	Sirupata	Jyamire
			seen as a major problem	rights to share of benefits. *O: (negative) don't trust government not to take the forest back once improved.*	
Processes	I: appreciation of role in water and soil regulation	*Negative I: competition with farming*		D: want to benefit from more water sources within protected forest, and from soil conservation.	
Biological diversity as a whole	O: Understanding outsiders' interests in conservation, whole group looking for recognition and honour.	O: political capital to be gained by elite groups in conserving biodiversity; officials working with them are looking for recognition and prizes.	O: elite groups seeking outside recognition have resulted in over-protection of forests with negative impact on biodiversity	O: Understanding outsiders' interests in conservation, political capital to be gained by elite groups in conserving biodiversity.	

8. Improving monitoring systems of organisations operating at the Range Post level

8.1 Introduction

Section 7 discussed monitoring systems at the individual FUG level and the processes involved in developing a monitoring system. These processes identified through this research should help to raise the profile of FUGs in demanding and negotiating services. But success at the FUG level also requires support and understanding at the District/Range Post level. Organisations involved at this level include, DFO/RP, FECOFUN, field projects and NGOs and CBOs. It is important for the DFO/RP and other organisations to recognise and develop the monitoring process of community forest before taking the decision to form a community forest group in villages.

This section relates to output 3 of the research project and discusses monitoring issues at the Range Post level and how these might be addressed. For a local level monitoring system to function effectively, the Forest Department's Range Post level offices and other organisations, such as FECOFUN, will need to develop strategies (both partnership-based and independently) and short-term action plans according to the demand generated at the FUG level. This requires the involvement of a wider range of organisations including Village Development Committees, active FUGs and other NGOs. In particular, the Government Range Post staff must be given some autonomy to negotiate work schedules with the FUGs.

Due to time constraints, the project team was unable to investigate in detail how the monitoring system at the Range Post level could be improved. Most of the materials presented here are the outcome of the joint workshops at the Range Post in Kushmisera and District Forest Office in Baglung, although the field work in the individual research sites also shed light on the problems associated with the forest management planning at the Range Post level.

In the following sections, we discuss first the need for making the Range Post more responsible and accountable, and the need to integrate monitoring with the forest management planning processes. We will then look into the need for more effective and systematic information exchange between the FUGs and outside organisations, especially DFO/RP, and the nature and types of information required. We will then argue for the need to link the information requirements with the capacity of relevant organisations to respond to this information as well as the cost of the monitoring on the FUGs. Finally, we discuss the need to reconcile the perspectives of livelihoods and biological diversity and the need to consider different monitoring systems for different levels of the government Forest Department offices.

8.2 Authority and accountability of the Range Post

The Range Post is the main point of contact for the forest users, and there are many activities that are specific to the Range Post. Moreover, the district (DFO) level monitoring, and hence the regional and national level monitoring systems, depend largely on the information supplied by the Range Posts.

However, the Range Post has no official status of its own, as the authority of decision-making lies with the DFO. Almost all of the Range Post level activities are planned and implemented on the direction of the DFO in Baglung. The Range Post staff may be used for gathering data, but all the formal analysis of the FUG database is done at the DFO and at higher levels. There is little provision for Range Post level self-monitoring. It does not even have the provision to keep copies of monitoring formats, such as the FUG annual reports and the FUG categorisation forms. At the workshop in Baglung, the DFO did express the need to keep such information at the Range Post level.

Range Post staff should be encouraged to develop their own independent impact assessment methods. The Ranger and Forest Guards recognise the need for their organisation to have a monitoring system that has the strategy for (a) the self-monitoring of the Range Post's own programmes and activities,

and (b) the participatory monitoring and evaluation of the forest management planning and monitoring activities in villages, together with the concerned FUGs as well as other Range Post level NGOs and CBOs.

As discussed in Section 4, during the period of the project fieldwork in Kushmisera, the Range Post staff, on their own initiative, developed their own categorisation system for FUGs within their area. They developed a form of scoring system for major aspects of community forestry and ranked the twenty three FUGs in the Range Post in terms of 'active', 'medium active' and 'less active'. When the Range Post staff reported what they had done at the workshop in Baglung, the DFO appreciated the work and encouraged the staff of other Range Posts to take similar initiatives.

However, the issue is much more complex than just that of the staff taking initiative. It involves a critical analysis of the current institutional set-up and the roles and responsibilities of the DFO and Range Post staff. This will mean vesting much greater authority for decision-making at the Range Post level.

8.3 Integrating monitoring with the forest management planning processes

Prior to the research project intervention, there had been the tendency to view monitoring as a separate, one-off activity, to be carried out once a while, usually at the time of revising the Operational Plan. The Range Post staff, as forest users, tended to view monitoring in a negative sense, as an activity for senior officials to undertake, primarily to check the work of their juniors, and find out mistakes and take action against the people responsible.

In the case of community forest management, both Range Post staff and FUG committee officials thought it was the job of the DFO/RP. Both groups also viewed monitoring as an assessment of whether the FUG is protecting their community forest resource according to the Operational Plan. There is no provision for monitoring in any of the FUG Operational Plans.

This general, limited view on monitoring has changed among the Range Post staff and members of the five local communities who participated in the research project. These people now see monitoring as an essential component of forest management, and something that helps to improve the process of management planning and to achieve forest management goals. Therefore, it is important to recognise that self-monitoring your own work is as important as the monitoring of other people's work. All the four FUGs now feel strongly to include in their Operational Plan of a provision for monitoring and the process to do it. Similarly, the Forest Guards have also decided to develop a strategy to monitor their own forest management planning activities and to help FUGs develop systems to monitor their forest management activities.

The Kushmisera Range Post staff now understand that their role in monitoring is two fold. One is to help FUGs develop their own self-monitoring system, which should be integrated with FUG formation and Operational Plan preparation. The other is to develop their own independent impact assessment methods.

For example, as mentioned above, during the period of the field research, perhaps inspired by the discussion with the research project team, the Range Post staff, on their own initiative, developed a categorisation system for FUGs. Although the categories seemed somewhat similar to the ones provided by the District Forest Office at Baglung, nevertheless, the important point is that the category system was developed by the Range Post staff themselves, within the Range Post. They have control over the category system, and will be able to make adjustments in the system, delete or add new categories, as new knowledge and a new system develops. In comparison, the staff have no control over the category system provided by the DFO.

8.4 Information flows between stakeholders

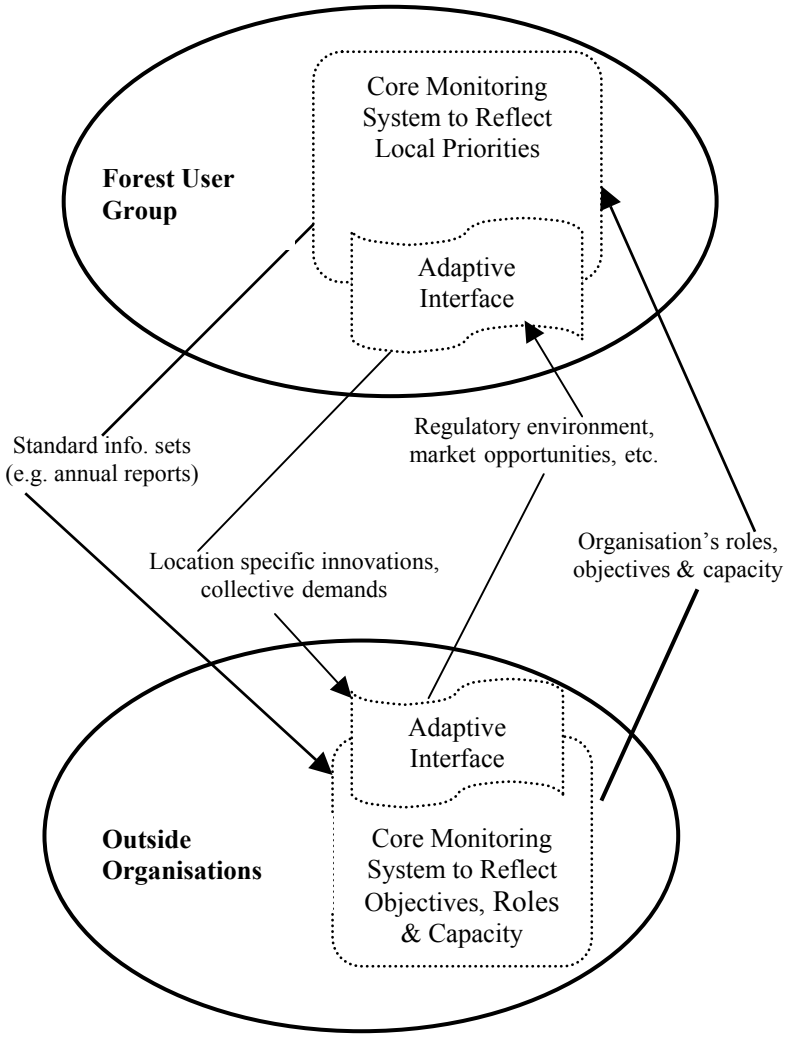
One of the most serious constraints to improving the monitoring system at the Range Post level and at the FUG level is the lack of a systematic, effective communication system. In Section 7, we proposed

a monitoring system that allows information to flow among the members within a community, or a FUG. There is a need to develop a similar understanding of the information exchange between FUGs and the government forestry office and other organisations operating at the Range Post (sub-district) level.

At present, a number of organisations and field projects, apart from DFO/RP and LFP, operate in the Kushmisera Range Post area, such as FECOFUN, REDP and other NGOs/CBOs. These organisations have their own specific objectives and programmes, and therefore skills and capabilities to assist rural communities. However, at present, there is little understanding of the objectives, roles and capacities of these local organisations amongst the members of the FUGs where this research project operated. Similarly, these local organisations also seem to lack the mechanism for comprehending local communities' priorities.

In a joint workshop in the Kushmisera Range Post an attempt was made to work out the nature and type of information that FUGs and outside organisations need, and how this information might be exchanged between the organisations. The outcome of the discussion is presented in a schematic diagram (see Figure 8.1).

Figure 8.1: Nature and type of information exchange between FUGs and outside organisations



Both FUG and outside organisations usually have their own core monitoring systems, reflecting their priority issues, objectives, roles and capacities. Outside organisations need to be aware of the FUGs' priority needs and problems if they are to make any useful contributions to address those needs and issues. In turn the FUGs will need to understand the objectives, roles and capabilities of the outside organisations if they wish to seek their support.

Furthermore, both FUGs and outside organisations need to be flexible in their approaches to collaboration. Owing to their different circumstances, the needs and priorities of individual FUGs will vary from place to place, and therefore the ways to address these will also need to be adapted. Similarly, because of changes in policies and opportunities arising from wider changes at the national and regional levels, the outside organisations may need to adjust their overall programme objectives and roles. The FUGs need to be aware of these so that they can benefit from the changes, or take action against any negative consequences of such changes.

It should, however, be noted that Figure 8.1 represents a very simplistic view of two-way information flow between a FUG and an outside organisation. Information requirements will vary in time and space, and it is important for monitoring systems to encompass localised and short-term information requirements with standard sets of indicators for monitoring at different times and levels.

8.5 Monitoring information requirements and the capacity of organisations

There is a need to link monitoring information requirements with the capacity of organisations to respond to this information. Information requirements of the DFO, LFP and FECOFUN are all similar, mainly because most of the information comes from the DFO itself. The requirements also suggest that each of these organisations wants to be involved in all aspects of community forestry. It is unclear why particular information needs to be gathered and how it is used and by whom.

A constraint is that the burden of collecting information falls on the shoulders of the Range Post staff and FUG members. Not only are these the people least likely to use the information gathered, but their capacity to collect some of the information may also be limited. A Range Post usually has five Forest Guards who are mainly responsible for collecting FUG annual reports, undertaking forest resource inventory and completing the form of FUG categorisation. However, most of these Forest Guards are incapable of undertaking many of these activities. For example, in Kushmisera Range Post, only two Forest Guards have passed School Leaving Certificate examinations and one had completed year 9. The other two can hardly read and write. Only one of the two Forest Guards with an SLC has undertaken a three-month forestry training course.

The formats for information such as FUG annual reports and forest resource inventory are quite complex. Even the Forest Guard who has received three months training is unable to understand the format for forest resource inventory supplied by the Forest Department, let alone actually undertake the forest resource inventory in the field. Similarly, most FUG members, including the FUG committee members, cannot read or write and find it hard to complete the annual report format.

8.6 The cost of developing monitoring system / process for FUGs

In attempting to develop a collaborative monitoring system tailored to community forestry, we are faced with a ‘chicken and egg’ scenario. Monitoring, as with any managerial activity, can only improve material well-being if there is already the resource potential in place. The cost of group planning and monitoring vary little from place to place, as can be seen with the costs incurred in both Jana Chetana and Sirupata. However, the potential benefits accruing from those activities are by no means the same between FUGs. This can be seen from the same examples, where Jana Chetana perceives greater potentials from increasing harvesting intensity and income from medicinal plants, compared with Sirupata, which has fewer options from a small common land with a longer time horizon.

Within the community forestry legislative framework there is however scope for using group level inquiry and monitoring, prior to the formation of a FUG, to form more realistic community forest arrangements. In discussing the costs for the FUG it is necessary to consider the research allowances given to the tole representatives for participating in the workshops. The overall costs of the workshops were greater than the total amount available in the FUG fund in all cases except Pallo Pakho. However, the circumstances of the field research dictated that some form of compensatory payment

should be given. Firstly, it is important to organise these workshop in the individual FUG sites in to effectively address the location specific research questions of the forest users themselves. Secondly, the actual process by which these can be addressed need to be developed together with the forest users themselves. If the process is to be ultimately seen as a facilitation service to be provided to the users, it should be remembered that the users in the case study sites were not given the final product! In fact, they were co-researchers in the development of the service as well as for developing their own specific research questions. There is no doubt that the workshops in Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana could have been considerably shorter in time. Whilst this was a lesson for the research project team, it would have been a huge cost to the users had there been no form of compensation (although we recognise that researching a process usually takes longer than actually just doing it). However, the development of a monitoring process could be reduced to a minimum (probably up to 50 percent) if it is integrated with the processes of FUG formation and Operational Plan preparation, as argued in section 8.3 above.

Table 8.1: Costs of workshops with tole representatives

Research sites	Workshop duration (No. of days)*	Cost	
		NRs	#
Pallo Pakho	14	44,400	431
Jana Chetana	10	33,495	325
Bhane	9	26,555	258
Sirupata	9	31,645	307
Jyamire	7	15,800	155
Joint workshop	3	10,260	100

*This does not include the time spent in FUGC and individual tole level meetings

8.7 Community forestry and livelihoods

The original purpose of the project was to develop a set of indicators to assess community forest management from a livelihoods perspective. During interactions with forest users, DFO/RP staff and staff of the various field projects, the research project team members consciously attempted to determine the extent to which local communities' livelihoods are improved through community forestry interventions. Through this, it became evident that local people and outside professionals view the link between forests and livelihoods differently (see Figure 8.2).

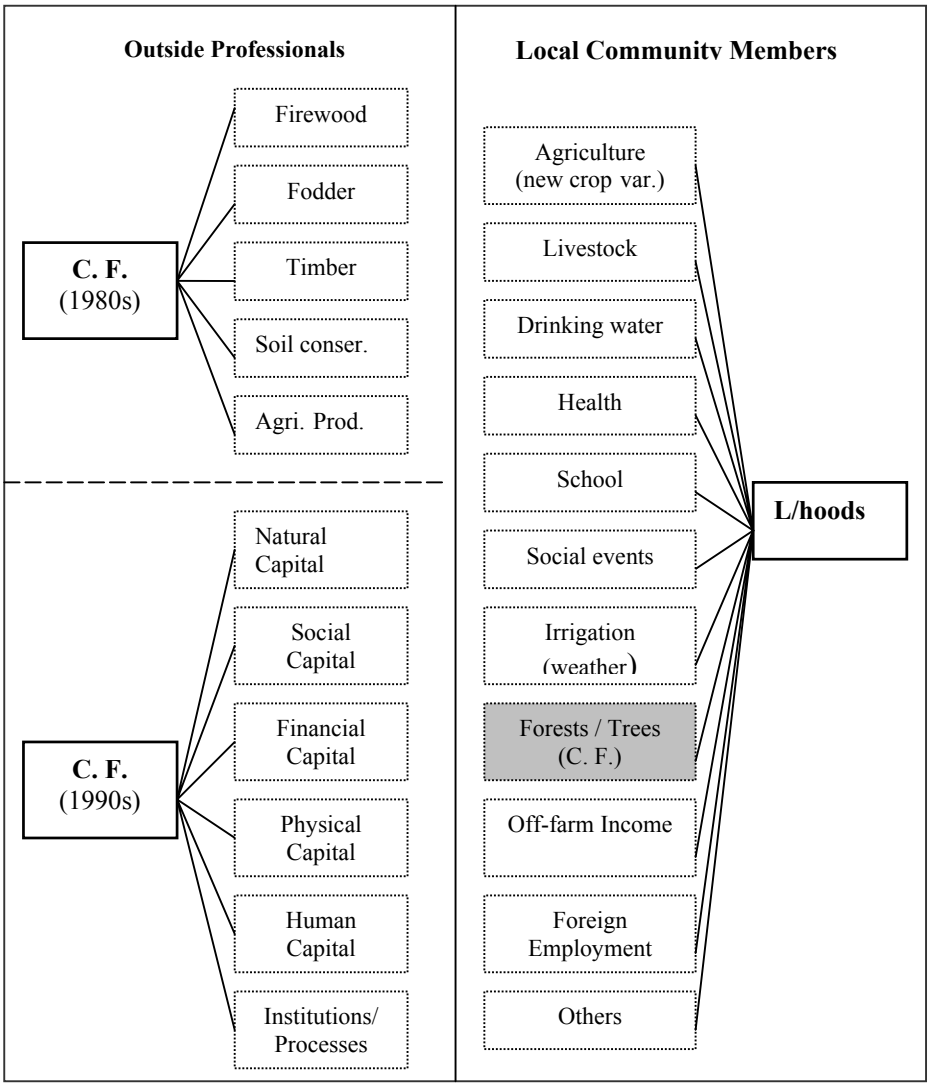
As Figure 8.2 reflects, outside professionals tend to view community forests in isolation and at the same time try to achieve a range of objectives through community forestry. On the other hand, local communities see community forests as one of the several components of their livelihoods. The forest and tree resources (especially community forests), though important, can meet only so much of their livelihood needs. The extent to which they can spend their time and energy in managing the forest resources is also limited. It is then not surprising that local communities are not so keen in participating in community forestry activities, especially in situations where there is no guarantee that such participation will contribute to their livelihood improvement.

8.8 Matching forest users' perceptions and values for biological diversity with other stakeholders' monitoring requirements

This was only discussed at the district level workshop. FECOFUN wish to use species diversity profiles with each FUG in order to monitor biodiversity. It was to discuss this issue with other stakeholders, partly because very few stakeholders know exactly what they need this information for.

As mentioned in an earlier section, despite the Convention for Biological Diversity's (CBD) suggestion that each country should have profiles for all major components of biological diversity (species, habitat, and processes), there was no mention of this in the monitoring requirements of the Department of Forests (though species of value must be mentioned in the forest inventory, in the Operational Plan).

Figure 8.2: Community forestry and livelihoods – perspectives of local communities & professionals



It is important in any monitoring system that everybody knows the interests of other stakeholders, and local people should also know why outsiders are interested in biological diversity, as this will enable them to actively negotiate with outsiders. Local people themselves should have a chance to express their interests and values for biological diversity, and be able to place outsiders' interests in the context of their own. They can then appreciate the contributions that they are making to fulfilling other people's interests as well as their own.

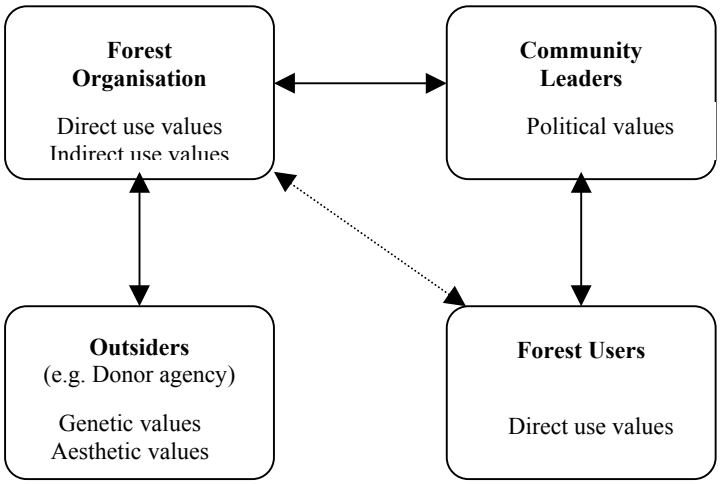
When considering the biological diversity of community forest resources in a village, there is also a need for some broad categorisation of stakeholders and their perceived values for biological diversity and the ways in which these compliment and/or contradict each other. Figure 8.3 indicates some areas of complementary interests in biological diversity.

An ordinary user of a community forest is generally interested in the direct use values of the forest and tree resources. The staff of a forest conservation organisation, such as the government's Forest Department, would be interested in both direct and indirect use values of the resource. The local community leaders, formal and/or informal, including the chairman and other key members of the FUG committee, see the forest from their political perspectives. In other words, these leaders adopt the values of others, for strategic reasons to enhance their own power. And finally, the 'outsiders', such as international communities and donor agencies, may be more interested to preserve forests from the perspective of genetic and aesthetic values of the resource.

It is important to recognise here that the values of these different stakeholders and their subsequent actions could contribute positively to biological diversity even if their action is not directly intended for the conservation of biological diversity. However, it is necessary to be aware of the fact that these perceived values may be affected by changes in the context. For example, an increased market orientation may lead to increased values for a smaller number of commercially valuable species.

Finally, there is no direct communication between the conservation organisation and ordinary forest users. The views of each other are known through local community leaders who are normally in contact of both stakeholders. Similarly, there is no direct link between 'outsiders' and the local communities, both community leaders and ordinary forest users. Conservation organisations usually help to communicate the views of these stakeholders.

Figure 8.3: Areas of complimentary interests in biological diversity



8.9 Summary

This section has looked at the issues facing monitoring systems of organisations operating at the Range Post level and has explored ways in which these might be addressed. At present, the monitoring system, especially the one used by government's Forest Department, is very top-down and rigid and the information collected will be of little use for the Range Post staff and FUGs in improving the forest management planning.

It is evident that not all the information collected is required or used by all the offices at different levels of the Forest Department. There is a need, therefore, to develop more relevant monitoring systems at different levels within the Forest Department offices. There is also a need to reconsider the ways in which the required information is collected and the form in which such information is put together and presented, as well as the cost of monitoring and evaluation on the FUGs.

There is also a need to match the perceptions of community forest resources as they relate to outsiders' perceptions of livelihoods and biological diversity.

Finally, it may be difficult for the Range Post staff to develop their own independent monitoring and impact assessment methods as long as the decision-making authority remains with the District Forest Office.

9 Lessons learned and conclusions

9.1 Introduction

Drawing on the findings of the intensive field investigations in five sites (4 FUGs and 1 Non-FUG) in the Kushmisera Range Post of Baglung district (West Nepal), this report describes:

- The ways in which stakeholders manage common property (forest) resources, and the ways they monitor the resource and the management regime, and identify the constraints to developing effective monitoring systems.
- The process or methodology used to develop forest users' monitoring systems, which pays attention to livelihood aspects and biological diversity (including an explaination of local values for the latter), and identify recommendations linked to specific local characteristics.
- The ways in which stakeholders at the Range Post Level can effectively monitor each other and themselves.

This section draws out some major conclusions and recommendations as they relate to the above three objectives of the research project, first presenting useful insights that the field research provided on community forestry processes and monitoring in general.

9.2 Assumptions about community forestry processes and monitoring

The recent rise in the perceived need for criteria and indicators to assess the management of forest resources (in Nepal), especially common property forests, are based on two main assumptions. One assumption is that local communities are firmly in control of their community forest resources, following the handover of forests to local communities, as outlined in the government's community forestry programme. What is therefore needed is to develop a set of criteria and indicators that helps to assess whether or not community forests are managed as specified in Operational (Management) Plans.

In reality, however, the majority of FUG members, including those belonging to the FUGs that were awarded prizes for being active FUGs in the district, were not aware of the objectives of the government's policy on community forestry. Apart from a few FUG committee members, mainly the chairmen and secretaries, very few people knew about the existence of Operational Plans. Some FUG members did not even know that they had a community forest. Under such a situation, it made little sense to talk about monitoring indicators. In fact, in two pilot sites, Pallo Pakho and Jana Chetana, the project team pressed hard for generating criteria and indicators. Although the workshop participants eventually did come up with some monitoring criteria and indicators, it was obvious that forest users would not use them for the assessment of their community forest management.

Instead, before even talking about monitoring indicators, the project team had to start by discussing with FUG members basic concept: the rationale for community forestry, the objectives of the government community forestry policy, the idea of forest user groups, the need for an Operational (Management) Plan and its contents, the role of forest users, FUG committees, and the Forest Department, etc. This demanded significantly more time than the project team had originally allocated for each site.

The other assumption relates to the perception and usage of the words 'monitoring', 'criteria', and 'indicators', in that everybody understands and uses these words (or their Nepali translation) in the same way. However, as explained in Section 4, these words mean different things to different people, or stakeholders. Nobody in the village uses the words 'anugaman' and 'suchak' - the literal translation of 'monitoring' and 'indicators' respectively, which are derived from Sanskrit and commonly used by the DFO and Range Post staff and field projects. Not only do the field staff find it difficult to explain, the word 'anugaman' is also

viewed rather negatively, especially by the Forest Guards. For them, 'anugaman' relates to seniors checking the work of junior staff. In the case of community forestry, Range Post staff use 'anugaman' to check the activities of FUGs.

In villages, the closest words or phrases, relating to monitoring, 'rekh-dekh' (keeping an eye on something), 'lekha-jokha' (weighing up and writing), 'khoj-bin' or 'chhan-bin' (investigation – but usually referring to investigating somebody). Not only do these words also have similar negative connotations, they are also of little help in developing a common understanding about monitoring process and indicators.

Instead, the project team was able to develop a better understanding when they described various actions that take place in monitoring. These include, for example, 'gareko kamlai pharkera herne' (reflect on the work already done), 'sikne' (learning) and 'yas anusar kam garne' (taking actions accordingly). These words proved very meaningful to the forest users, mainly because they described the context and need for monitoring. These words also reflect something which the forest users themselves do in a variety of situations, but can recognise the challenge of doing it as a group in relation to community forest management. Moreover, these words also contribute to the development of a positive image of a monitoring process and indicators.

9.3 Monitoring systems for use at different levels: by who, for what and how?

There remains a great deal of uncertainty about the ways in which criteria and indicators may be developed for monitoring common property forest management. Not only are a variety of stakeholders trying to influence the management of common property forest management, but also these stakeholders are operating at different levels. Offices of the government's Forest Department, FECOFUN and field project operating at the national, regional, district and Range Post levels, and FUGs operating at the grass root level.

At present, every one of these stakeholders seems to be attempting to collect almost the same kind of information and in all aspects of forest management. Yet, the main source of information for these different stakeholders, especially the government's Forest Department, field projects and FECOFUN is the DFO/RP, which, in turn, relies on forest user groups to provide most of the information. In other words, the burden of collecting information falls on the Range Post and FUGs. The Range Post is the least equipped of all Forest Department offices, whereas for FUGs, much of the information that is collected will not be relevant or helpful in the planning and management of their forest resources.

Therefore, there is a need for each stakeholder operating at different levels to work out:

- What exactly is it they wish to monitor and why;
- How much information will be needed;
- How often should it be collected;
- Who should collect the information; and how;
- What will be the cost, and who will bear it.

For this, there is a need first to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders in common property forest management and their relationships with one another. This will help to better identify the types of information they will need for planning and monitoring their forest management activities.

9.4 Variations in forest users situations and the challenge of group monitoring

In helping forest users to develop a monitoring system, it is important to understand the limitations and constraints imposed by differences in forest user groups' situations. There exists a wide range of variations in local situations in terms of the nature of forest resources,

local communities and the benefits that can be accrued from the forests. One needs to expect a wide range of variations in monitoring systems, criteria and indicators. The set of criteria and indicators developed to suit a particular situation may or may not be adopted by people in other areas. In other words, it will not be realistic to develop a standard set of criteria and indicators for use uniformly across the country. Rather than concentrating on criteria and indicators, it would be more realistic to focus on the process of developing such criteria and indicators.

Another issue relates to the processes of planning and monitoring within a forest user group. Each forest user group involves several households, ranging from 30 to over 200. There is a limit to how much one can expect these household members to participate actively in the group planning processes. It may simply not be possible for practical reasons to involve all the households, especially if the group is too large. Further, a FUG may be involved in a wide range of interests as it will have members who are well-off and others who are not so well-off. They may belong to different castes, ethnic or religious groups. Some may depend on community forests for forest products and some may have plenty of trees on their private lands. Some households may earn substantial income from off-farm employment, while others may rely solely on the farm for livelihoods.

To what extent are these various interests reflected and accommodated in the processes of group planning and monitoring in the research sites? In order to identify the various interest groups, there is a need for greater emphasis on the tole level discussion and planning and integrate this with the FUG overall planning process (e.g. tole representative workshops). The tole level meetings were used to raise the various issues and questions, which then formed the basis (or the main agenda) for discussion at the tole representative workshops. This, in turn, would demand a much longer time-frame.

9.5 Non-FUG site

Most field studies on the impact of community forestry concentrate on forests that have been handed over to local communities. The field work for this research project revealed that community forestry processes are also taking place in areas where there is no formally handed over community forest. Although only one of the five sites (Jyamire) represented non-FUG sites, the work provided some useful insights. There are very few instances, where a group level investigation into the potential benefits of community forestry has taken place that can inform their decision to form a FUG. The limitation of current legislative process is that until they decide to make a community forest they cannot obtain any benefits from their efforts, apart from dry wood and grass.

Developing group action and learning processes prior to any decision to make (or not to make) arrangements for community forestry will improve the relevance that community forestry can have to local people's livelihoods and biological diversity. These processes may help to ensure that the demand for community forestry comes from a broader base, rather the arbitrary decisions of one or two dominant members of the community and the Range Post.

Identifying a coherent group with which to undertake research is a fundamental question to address in the community forestry process as a whole. Owing to the short period of time of the project, a ward level conservation committee was selected for the research. Such institutions are useful starting points for research but ultimately, the research process would need to be flexible in terms of its inclusion of participants and its coverage of different forest patches. An essential characteristic of community forestry is that inclusion is based on needs, interests and ability to contribute, rather than political boundaries.

Further research is required to look at the role of NGOs, CBOs and field offices of the government organisations in this process.

Considering the situation of Jyamire, there are very few regular sources of income, and it is not easy to plan for income and expense projections without secure access to the forest resource. This also means that there is some reluctance to develop any basis for systematic distribution of funds within the group. In FUG situations wealth ranking has been a useful exercise and has enabled FUGs to organise the distribution of funds. However, in the non-FUG situation (as with forest product distribution), users may be content to distribute funds to the tole level representatives. Credit to individual households is negotiated in tole meetings, provided that the person is genuinely in need of funds for a particular income generating activity.

Consequently, a key research question in Jyamire was whether there are likely to be any significant benefits from the forest in the future to warrant forming a forest user groups. Given the poor condition of the forest and the few management options available to the users at the time, the Jyamire people felt that there was little need for detailed information on forest product requirements that would direct immediate silvicultural activities. Instead they felt that it would suffice to consult in tole meetings as to who needs how much, whenever firewood became available. Moreover, the fact that they did not have secure access to the forest meant that they were also unenthusiastic about any major information gathering activity, including wealth ranking.

Finally, comparing the FUG and non-FUG sites, it seems to be the case that the community forestry process has managed to raise the profile of women's roles in forest management. In non-FUG sites the facilitators may need to stress the importance of the involvement of women in forest management planning. Unless stated, women may not come to the tole meetings. Where there is a conservation committee, social mapping can be used to highlight any discrepancies in representation in the committee.

9.6 General conclusions

'Monitoring' and 'indicators' mean different things to different people. The literal Nepali translation of these words, commonly used by the Forest Department officials and field project staff, are hardly used by people in villages. Moreover, these words have more negative connotations.

An emphasis on 'indicators', rather than the 'process', may result in the development of a range of indicators. However, these indicators are less likely to be considered in actual forest management practice, particularly if they are seen in isolation, rather than an integral part of the forest management planning. Indicators, which seem to change over time as the level of common understanding among the forest users and the Range Post staff develops, may not necessarily be the only means of monitoring forest management planning. The outside facilitators should be open minded about different forms of monitoring, other than just indicators.

At the FUG level, a wide range of variations in monitoring systems should be expected, primarily because of the variations in local situations, including:

- The size, area and type of forests;
- Benefits that can be accrued from the resource; and
- Ways in which FUGs are formed and Operational Plans and FUG constitutions are developed.

9.7 Conclusions relating to the main project outputs

9.7.1 Current forest management planning practices and constraints to effective monitoring systems

There has been considerable development of detailed procedures for planning and monitoring in community forestry, and indeed attention has been given to encouraging participation of FUG members in planning. However, at present, procedures for planning forest management and monitoring are tailored to the requirements of the DFO, which almost has a monopoly in defining the way in which planning and monitoring is done. Moreover, the monitoring system is less focused towards self-assessment (impacts of DFO activities, rather than just general changes in FUGs), with a tendency to monitor the work of others rather than one's own work.

Within the FUG, procedures for planning are dominated by a few selected FUG committee officials, who may be more interested in the DFO's interests, rather than those of the forest users. Some of the most critical constraints to developing an effective monitoring system for use at the local level include:

- There is little understanding within the Department of Forests as a whole, of why particular monitoring information is being gathered, how it will be used and what their capacity will be to respond to that information. This point is crucial if the DFO is to increase its service orientation.
- At present, there is no mechanism in place for the various stakeholders to come together and discuss their interests and forest management objectives, methods and procedures for achieving the objectives, and ways in which to measure the progress made.
- The two stated functions of the Operational Plan, namely as a document to guide forest management, as well as a legally binding document for regulatory purposes, are difficult to reconcile with each other. In reality the regulatory function takes precedence, such that detailed management decisions are also scrutinised by the DFO.
- The forest management planning, especially Operational Plan preparation, are ultimately set by the human resource constraints of the DFO. This means that FUG members are forced to come to decisions in a very short space of time, and many of those decisions require far more investigation and negotiation. Consensus requires the recognition of a need to experiment with the unresolved issues and a containment of disagreement within certain parameters.
- The problem of monitoring at the Range Post level is that there is no monitoring system relevant to their own activities, nor do they have any decision-making authority. Not only the decisions for action at the Range Post level are all made at the District level or higher up, but such decisions are also based on the information available at the district level, rather than the information available at the Range Post level.
- The DFO/Range Post staffs currently devote most of their resources to planning the management of forest resources, handed over to local communities as community forests. There is no recognition of the many processes underway in non-FUGs that dictate subsequent community forestry arrangement. It is important that the basic decisions relating to forest management are undertaken from the beginning through the conscious involvement of all users, whether in a FUG or not.

9.7.2 Process for developing forest users' planning and monitoring systems

The research project has developed a systematic, generic methodology for enhancing forest users' on-going forest management planning and monitoring processes. Core elements of the methodology are very simple and replicable, and the process shows the major steps, in terms of what activities to be undertaken, when, how and by whom. It is hoped that once the system is in place, the concerned FUG members will be able to use the process on their own and adapt it to their local circumstances. Although initially some outside support will be required to help initiate and facilitate the process, it is intended that the involvement of outside

facilitators should be minimal in the future. The main features of the methodology are as follows:

- It enables the system to reach the majority of FUG members, beyond the FUG committee officials, and ensures that their views are taken into consideration.
- It provides a sequential framework for information collection and analysis, explaining the required actions and the objectives for each step or activity.
- It explains at what stage and how the concerns and interests of various interest groups and individuals should be brought together for discussion and negotiation.

The major role of the external facilitators can be summarised as follows:

- Defining the overall process of research and communication in terms of the sequence of meetings (in particular, tole meetings) – though the users set the timetable.
- Assisting in bringing together different issues, interests and perceptions in relation to group functioning and the forest resource (particularly where these conflict with each other), and help negotiate solutions,.
- Providing a broader picture of social, economic, environmental and political realities (in particular, equity, power relations and environmental degradation) that are global concerns. This will create a critical group awareness, and group level self-assessment, by relating these issues to their own social reality.
- Providing a standard set of information that gives a common basis for transparent decision-making in common property forest

9.7.3 Suggestions for improving monitoring systems at the Range Post level

The present monitoring system is very top-down and rigid. It is evident that not all the information collected is required or used by different levels of Forest Department offices. There is a need to develop more relevant monitoring systems for the Range Post level. There is also a need to match the perceptions of community forest resources as they relate to outsiders' perceptions of livelihoods and biological diversity. For this, the Range Post staff needs to have greater accountability and responsibility, rather than just collecting information for the DFO and offices higher up.

In overall, the project has considered monitoring issues in the context of the overall planning for the management of common property forest resources at the local level, rather than as a separate activity. The project findings will contribute to the goals of supporting Nepal's forest sector management, especially towards 'enhancing community forestry's contribution to sustainable rural livelihoods'. Not only has the project identified some of the major problems facing community forest management and monitoring in Nepal, it has developed a generic methodology (process), which appears to be able to address them. It is unlikely, however, for the process, in isolation, to achieve the goal of increasing the conscious participation of local communities in community forest management due to many prerequisite factors that affect the sustainability of a FUG as a whole. Whilst these factors were external to the scope of the field process, the project has produced recommendations to address them.

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