

Whether Buffer Zone Community Forests' Benefits Are Distributed Fairly to Low-Income Users: Reflection From the Buffer Zone Community Forests in Bardia National Park, Nepal

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Abstract : Buffer zones, the peripheral areas around the national parks and wildlife reserves, are available for the purpose of benefitting the local inhabitants by providing forest products for subsistence needs of basic forest products outside the protected areas. The forest area within the buffer zone has been managed as a buffer zone community forest (BZCF) for the last 25 years after the approval of the buffer zone management regulation 1996. With a case study of select BZCF in Bardia National Park, this study aims to analyze whether the benefit provided by BZCF is equally available to poor users among other socioeconomic classes of the users. The findings are based on the analysis of cross-sectional data involving household surveys (n=305) and key informants' interviews (n=10) as well as office records available at different 5 buffer zone community forest user groups offices. Results indicate that despite the provisions of subsidized rates for poor; poor households were more deprived due to higher forest products price particularly, the timber price in buffer zone. Evidence also indicate that due to the increased forest coverage, the incidence of wildlife damage has also increased and impacted the poor more due to lack of land ownership as well as limited alternatives. Clear community forest management guidelines with equitable benefit sharing and compensatory mechanisms to the users of poor socioeconomic class have been identified as a solution to increase the benefit to poor users in BZCFUGs.

Keywords : crop depredation, forest products, users, wellbeing ranking

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