

## Sustainability in Community-Based Forestry Management: A Case from Nepal

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**Abstract :** Community-based forestry is seen as a promising instrument for sustainable forest management (SFM) through the purposeful involvement of local communities. Globally, forest area managed by local communities is on the rise. However, transferring management responsibilities to forest users alone cannot guarantee the sustainability of forest management. A monitoring tool, that allows the local communities to track the progress of forest management towards the goal of sustainability, is essential. A case study, including six forest user groups (FUGs), two from each three community-based forestry models—community forestry (CF), buffer zone community forestry (BZCF), and collaborative forest management (CFM) representing three different physiographic regions, was conducted in Nepal. The study explores which community-based forest management model (CF, BZCF or CFM) is doing well in terms of sustainable forest management. The study assesses the overall performance of the three models towards SFM using locally developed criteria (four), indicators (26) and verifiers (60). This paper attempts to quantify the sustainability of the models using sustainability index for individual criteria (SIIC), and overall sustainability index (OSI). In addition, rating to the criteria and scoring of the verifiers by the FUGs were done. Among the four criteria, the FUGs ascribed the highest weightage to institutional framework and governance criterion; followed by economic and social benefits, forest management practices, and extent of forest resources. Similarly, the SIIC was found to be the highest for the institutional framework and governance criterion. The average values of OSI for CFM, CF, and BZCF were 0.48, 0.51 and 0.60 respectively; suggesting that buffer zone community forestry is the more sustainable model among the three. The study also suggested that the SIIC and OSI help local communities to quantify the overall progress of their forestry practices towards sustainability. The indices provided a clear picture of forest management practices to indicate the direction where they are heading in terms of sustainability; and informed the users on issues to pay attention to enhancing the sustainability of their forests.

**Keywords :** community forestry, collaborative management, overall sustainability, sustainability index for individual criteria

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