

The Nexus of Decentralized Policy, social Heterogeneity and Poverty in Equitable Forest Benefit Sharing in the Lowland Community Forestry Program of Nepal

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Abstract : Decentralized policy and practices have largely concentrated on the transformation of decision-making authorities from central to local institutions (or people) in the developing world. Such policy and practices always aimed for the equitable and efficient management of resources in the line of poverty reduction. The transformation of forest decision-making autonomy has also glorified as the best forest management alternatives to maximize the forest benefits and improve the livelihood of local people living nearby the forests. However, social heterogeneity and poor decision-making capacity of local institutions (or people) pose a nexus while managing the resources and sharing the forest benefits among the user households despite the policy objectives. The situation is severe in the lowland of Nepal, where forest resources have higher economic potential and user households have heterogeneous socio-economic conditions. The study discovered that utilizing the power of decision-making autonomy, user households were putting low values of timber considering the equitable access of timber to all user households as it is the most valuable product of community forest. Being the society is heterogeneous by socio-economic conditions, households of better economic conditions were always taking higher amount of forest benefits. The low valuation of timber has negative consequences on equitable benefit sharing and poor support to livelihood improvement of user households. Moreover, low valuation has possibility to increase the local demands of timber and increase the human pressure on forests.

Keywords : decentralized forest policy, Nepal, poverty, social heterogeneity, Terai

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