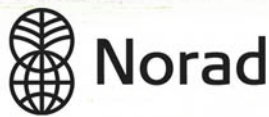


Grassroots issues and concerns regarding REDD+ in Nepal



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Acronyms

CBFM	Community Based Forest Management
CFUG	Community Forest User Groups
COP	Conference of Parties
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
D&D	Deforestation and Forest Degradation
DFO	District Forest Office
FCPF	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal
GHGs	Greenhouse Gases
IPs	Indigenous Peoples
MRV	Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization
NRs	Nepalese Rupees
OP	Operational Plan
RECOFTC	The Center for People and Forests
REDD Cell	REDD Forestry and Climate Change Cell
REDD +	Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
SFM	Scientific Forest Management

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Summary

Nepal embarked on REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) following the approval of the R-PIN (REDD Plan Idea Note) in 2008. In the course of REDD+ process, three institutional tiers – i) The Apex body, ii) The REDD working group, and iii) The REDD Implementation Center – were formed by the Government of Nepal. The REDD+ process involved consultations with diverse groups of stakeholders including women, Indigenous Peoples, Dalits, and forest user groups. Yet, grievances over the REDD+ process emerged at the latter stages of the REDD+ phase. While some of the concerns remained over the REDD+ policy process, on the other hand skepticism among the forest user groups that REDD+ would undermine the rights over forest has been observed. This booklet synthesizes the key issues and concerns of local communities, over the REDD+ process, in 18 districts of Nepal with grassroots capacity building on REDD+ implemented by the RECOFTC (Center for People and Forests) along with its partners.

The study involved review of project (Grassroots capacity building) reports, and was complemented by observations of the discussion during the consultation workshops, national dialogue and consultation meetings and training programs at all levels. Interviews were carried out with the local resource persons (LRPs) and participants from the local communities during the district and local level workshops. Interactions with partner organizations were held at several rounds in order to seek their views on the overall issues and concerns raised by the local communities across different regions. The findings show that the issues and concerns are mostly symptomatic in nature with a general perception that the REDD+ program would incur additional costs, result in reduced access to forests, bring issues of benefit sharing, and exclude people from the REDD+ policy process. Finally, the booklet presents recommendations in line to further investment on capacity building, strengthening tenure security, and ensuring equitable benefit sharing with simplified monitoring, reporting and verification process.

Introduction

The Government of Nepal embarked on the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programme following its submission of the REDD Plan Idea Note (RPIN) in March 2008 to the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) of the World Bank. This led to the establishment of the REDD Forest and Climate Change Cell (REDD Cell; now known as REDD Implementation Center) in 2009. The unit is responsible for coordinating all the REDD+ activities in Nepal and as a responsible institution, it submitted the REDD Preparation Proposal (RPP) to the FCPF, which was approved in October 2010.

Following the approval of the RPP, the government formed a three-tiered institutional framework: i) The Apex Body (inter-ministerial body); ii) REDD+ Working Group (A Multi-Stakeholder Body); and iii) The REDD+ Implementation Center (REDD IC). A number of consultations have been organized by the REDD IC with grassroots communities and different groups associated with the Indigenous People's (IPs), Dalits, and women on REDD+.

Yet, grievances over the involvement of stakeholders in REDD+ activities has emerged in the later stage of the REDD+ development. This booklet attempts to capture the issues and concerns of the grassroots communities on various aspects of REDD+ including its basic concept, benefit sharing, and cost and technicalities associated with its implementation among others. In doing so, certain questions have been considered in order to address the issues and concerns raised during the consultation and interviews with various stakeholders in course of this study. The questions include: i) Will REDD+ affect the access to and control of forest of local communities?; ii) What are the costs associated with REDD+ implementation?; iii) Will the existing practices of benefit sharing in community forestry work for REDD+?; iv) Was the REDD+ policy process inclusive? The significance of understanding the issues and concerns of grassroots is also backed up by the decisions made during the Conference of Parties (COP) 21 in Paris. Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreed on reducing the greenhouse gas (GHG) emission during the COP21 meeting in Paris in December 2015. A couple of important decisions made then, which

were already in debate since the previous COP meetings. It is agreed that around 15 percent of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are contributed through deforestation and forest degradation (D&D) (FCPF 2015). This is particularly important from the point of view of countries with heavy reliance on forests for livelihood sustenance of the forest-dependent people. In addition, the governments of REDD+ participating countries will be required to come up with a Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) framework. The former issue demands for the need to control D&D through participation of forest user groups. The latter requires preparing local forest user groups to have a better understanding of the technicalities and processes related to REDD+. It is therefore crucial to consider the issues and concerns of the local communities - particularly those dependent on forests - in order ensure their participation during REDD+ implementation.

Several capacity building initiatives in Nepal have been organized in order to gather lessons and information on the views and perspectives of local communities on REDD+. Among those was the initiative led by the RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests in partnership with the civil society organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Nepal to implement the ‘Grassroots Capacity Building for REDD+ in Asia’ project between 2009-2015. The capacity building activities were carried out across three ecological regions spanning the western Terai, mid-hills and Eastern region of the country. Different roles were assumed by the partners in order to implement the project. For instance, the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) and The Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI) Nepal were primarily responsible to carry out capacity building workshops and trainings at the district level. Likewise, ForestAction Nepal carried out the documentation and analysis of lessons learnt from the capacity building activities and provided recommendations for further improvement. In addition, media mobilization was a key to widely disseminate the knowledge and activities of REDD+ - mainly at the local level. The various approaches adopted in terms of providing training to the stakeholders, including the cascading approach from national to local level, helped towards empowering participants through knowledge and up-scaling their voices to the policy level.

This booklet synthesizes the key issues and concerns of grassroots communities captured during workshops and informal meetings carried out with the community members in the project districts.¹ The methodology adopted for this study involved a review of project (Grassroots capacity building) reports, complemented by observations of the discussion and concerns raised by participants during the consultation workshops, national dialogue and consultation meetings and training programs at all levels. Interviews were carried out with individuals who have attended and delivered trainings, for example local resource persons (LRPs) and participants from the local communities, who attended consultation meetings. Interactions with partner organizations were held at several rounds in order to seek their views on the overall issues and concerns raised by the local communities across different regions. In addition, discussion with the RECOFTC Nepal Country Program Team, based in Kathmandu was crucial in order to capture their knowledge and observations during their engagement in the REDD+ capacity building project.

Issues and concerns

This section synthesizes the issues and concerns of the grassroots communities on REDD+ raised during the consultation meetings, workshops and interviews. These issues and concerns are primarily based on the experiences with their current forest practices, for instance in community forestry. Based on those, there is a certain level of speculation among the grassroots communities that REDD+ would reinforce, rather than redress, the contested issues within community forestry, for instance elite capture, inequitable benefit sharing, high cost of documentation and forest guardianship, among others. Moreover, as REDD+ is in the first place a technical issue developed at the international level, absolute understanding by stakeholders at the local level is still very weak and a few occasional trainings and workshops may not ensure a complete understanding among everyone. Therefore, lack of clarity on the issue is more likely to create speculation among the grassroots communities on the actual impact of REDD+.

¹ The districts of intervention include Kanchanpur, Dadeldhura, Kailali, Banke, Bardiya, Surkhet, Dang, Rupandehi, Kapilvastu, Nawalparasi, Sindhupalchowk, Kavre, Bhaktapur, Sarlahi, Makwanpur, Ilam, Jhapa, and Morang.

Reduced access to and control of forests

One of the highly debated issues on the possible implications of REDD+ is the access to and control of local communities over the forest and its resources. This is particularly in the case of community forestry which has provided the local communities with the right to manage and sell forest products, though the ownership of the forestland still remains with the government. With this, the debate on who claims for the rights over the below-ground carbon in the forest is still prevalent.

In retrospect, certain government-level decisions have not gained much public support and acceptance from the stakeholders. For instance, a cabinet meeting held in December, 2009 in Kalapathar - base camp of Mt. Everest - resulted in a declaration to save mountains from the impact of climate change that actually did spread a positive message globally. However during the same event, with an aim to expand the protected areas for conservation objectives, the cabinet meeting declared three new protected areas in the country. Such decisions on declaring new protected areas were neither welcomed by the CSOs advocating for people's rights nor were they accepted by the local communities residing in close proximity to the protected areas. This was primarily because, the government did not carry out prior consultation with the local communities and Indigenous Peoples (IPs) who will directly be affected by the decision in terms of reduced access to forest resources. Likewise, declaration of the Rastrapati Chure conservation (Chure conservation henceforth) programme in 2010 by the government in 33 districts, covering 12.78 percent of the total land of Nepal (GoN 2016) was yet another issue of contestation. The region was allocated for strict conservation without prior consent of the local communities and forest user groups. In a more stringent approach, forest is categorized as per the slope of the land, based on which the concept of limited use has been introduced.² The existing

² As per the circulation published by the District Forest Office-Chitwan, the areas with more than 50 degrees slope vulnerable to land degradation and growing stock less than 50 cubic foot (cft) per hectare will be considered as highly sensitive zones; areas with 30-50 degrees slope, vulnerable to land degradation and growing stock less than 150 cft per hectare will be considered sensitive zones; areas less than 30 degrees slope, less vulnerable to land degradation and growing stock of 150 – 200 cft per hectare will be considered normal zones; plain land with no land degradation and growing stock of more than 200 cft per hectare are to be considered productive zones. As per the

legal framework also reserves the right of the government to declare protected areas if there be need (Paudel et al. 2012). Article 3.1 of the National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act 1973 (HMG/N 1973) spells.

His Majesty's Government may, if it deems necessary, declare an area as a national park or reserve or conservation area by publishing a notice in the Nepal Gazette and indicating the boundary thereof

Such decisions in the past show that a more conservation-oriented mindset has been dominant, thus allowing the government to take control of the forests. Thus, there exists a certain level of skepticism among the CSOs and local communities that REDD+ would be another of such conservation-oriented steps that would curtail the day-to-day engagement of people in the forest.

Considering the Government of Nepal's (GON) decisions on expansion of protected areas and declaration of the Chure conservation programme, the forest user groups remain skeptical towards the government on further handing over forests in the form of community-based forest management (CBFM) regimes. A general perception is that there would be no further handover of the forests to the communities in order to keep it under government control, which would allow the government to access the REDD+ funds. On the other hand, implementation of REDD+ implies that a stronger law enforcement and regulations need to be in place in order to abide by the conditions that might possibly be set by the buyers of the carbon. Such a situation may prove to be beneficial for forest management and carbon sequestration, but there are chances where livelihoods of the forest-dependent communities might be compromised due to restrained harvesting of forest products. Though illegal, people have been entering into the forests to harvest products like fuelwood, grass/fodder, food, and timber both for household use, as well as to sell it in the market. However, general grassroots perception holds that REDD+ would not allow any of such activities. Hemant Kumar Tharu, member of Ban Bardia CFUG, Bardia district expresses his concern as:

zoning, highly sensitive zones are banned for any forest use while sensitive and normal zones will be considered for limited uses of forest products.

I fetch fuelwood and grass from the forest for my daily use, as well as to sell it in the market - through which I make my livelihood and pay for my children's schooling. But I am afraid that REDD+ programme will not allow me to carry out such activities. I fear I might lose my livelihood option if REDD+ is implemented.

REDD+ oriented OPs

The CBFM and community forests in particular, are required to prepare an operational plan (OP) and the constitution of the user groups, which serves both as a legal contract with the District Forest Office (DFO) and a forest management document. All the provisions related to these two aspects should be clearly spelt out in the OP, without which they are deemed illegal. In the current scenario of multiple development interventions in the community forests, for instance local climate adaptation plans, and scientific forest management³ provisions among others, the forest user groups already face the burden of complying with scientific interventions pertaining to forestry. So, any future REDD+ related provisions⁴ will need to be incorporated within the OPs, thus influencing their daily utilization of forest products.

The current debate on introducing scientific forest management in all forests in Nepal invited contestations between the CSOs like FECOFUN and the government. The former argue that scientific forest management is an indirect way of bureaucratizing forest management by introducing technology and skills beyond the capacities of CFUGs. Ultimately, this would increase the reliance of the CFUGs on external consultants/experts. Similar concerns exist among local forest-dependent communities regarding the REDD+ provisions, where more focus on carbon-oriented interventions would undermine the cultural affairs with the forests. For example, certain indigenous groups in Nepal practice cremation within the forest. So, any strict provisions that might arise as a result of REDD+ implementation to ban such practices would displace their cultural affairs with the forest. Strict protection in-itself

³ The United Nations has described Sustainable or Scientific Forest Management as “a dynamic and evolving concept that aims to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental values of all types of forests, for the benefit of present and future generations” (FAO, 2016).

⁴ This is in the case if REDD+ is formally agreed upon and implemented globally and Nepal takes part in it.

may not sound problematic; however it will have direct consequences on the livelihoods of poor, forest-dependent people. One of the participants of the consultation workshop held in Birtamod, Jhapa opined:

If REDD+ is implemented it can have impacts on the marginalized and pro-poor community. About 20 percent of the population here are dependent on forest resources and do not have any other alternatives for survival.

This clearly explains the fact that the imposition of strict measures on forest protection can deprive local forest-dependent communities from enjoying their only source of livelihood. The forest user groups have a day-to-day relation with the forest in terms of extracting fuelwood for energy, Non-timber Forest Products (NTFPs) for food and medicines, grass/fodder to feed their livestock, and timber to construct houses and other infrastructures. Any strict measures on forest product harvesting will have direct impacts, especially on women, the poor, and other marginalized groups. The curtailing of such rights will force them to search for alternatives, but considering their capacities and current economic situations, this may not be easy for them.

Another issue closely related to forest management is the gap between required services like renewal of OPs and forest inventorying versus actual services provided by the DFO to community forests. As a result, backlog of the OPs in community forests has seriously affected forest management activities. For example in the Kavre district alone, there are 559 community forests (DFO Kavre 2015) that seek support from the DFO to renew their OPs. The DFO is capacitated with only 37 officials, in addition to 32 forest guards at the range-post level, out of which merely half could actually provide direct support to the CFUGs. Therefore, there is a huge gap in terms of the support that a single staff can provide in a year to community forests.

In the current scenario, the CFUGs have been applying the basic level of forest management techniques including thinning, pruning, and felling, among others. However, carrying out a forest inventory and preparing OPs requires external support. In this context, the need for carbon measurement, documentation and monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) to ensure

proper implementation of REDD+ activities will be added requirements, and therefore additional human resources, which are beyond the current capacity of CFUGs and DFOs.

The apprehension among the user groups that a rather technical human resource would dictate their forest management beyond their comprehension still exists (See box 1).

Box 1: Complex Documentation Process

Ms. Sita Chaudhary, Secretary of “Chetana Womens’ CFUG”, Atariya municipality-13, Kailali, has been involved in community forestry for last 15 years. She has been engaged in various tasks in her community forest and shares her experience around the documentation process of operation plans. She opines, “As the documentation process for OP was too technical, a consultant was hired to prepare the OP. The CFUG had to pay NRs. 1,00,000/- for the preparation of the document but we had no choice.” She adds, “Even for a document like the OP which is recognized by the DoF, we seek consultants because user groups do not possess a clear understanding about the technical aspects associated with formulating an OP. When asked about the carbon inventory process and the need for keeping records if/when REDD+ scheme is introduced, she expresses “I am afraid that REDD+ may incur even higher consultancy fees. I understand that, REDD+ is a result-based payment scheme. Then, how can an illiterate user fill up all the documentation requirements and claim for rewards? My understanding is that this mechanism will benefit others but not CFUGs.”

Chairperson of Nawalparasi FECOFUN, Mr. Thakur Pandey, shared that most of the OPs have not been revised and reviewed by the DFO. He said that when such requests are put forth to the DFOs, they point towards financial constraints, and lack of adequate and qualified human resource to carry out the activity.

The handing over of community forests to local communities gained momentum in the last 20 years or so. This was carried out considering the success of community forests in terms of better forest management and livelihood support to the forest user groups. However, in the course of the REDD+ debate, ownership of forests has been a major contention in terms of who owns the forest and who the beneficiaries of the REDD+ payment will be. The Forest Act 1993 allows the CFUGs to manage, sell and utilize the

forest products, though the ownership of the forest land remains with the government. This is the case with all community-based forest management initiatives (e.g. leasehold, collaborative forest management) where local communities have the rights to utilize and manage the forest in addition to access to the benefits from the sale of the forest products. Therefore, in the context of REDD+ implementation, questions on land rights exists among the right-holders.

Cost of REDD+ implementation

The implementation of REDD+, for the general public basically means payment to the countries or communities for managing and protecting their forests. However, there are several costs that the recipient country or communities incur in order to attain funds from REDD+. There are basically three costs associated with REDD+: implementation cost, transaction cost, and opportunity costs (Streck and Parker 2012). The cost for implementation is associated with the costs incurred to stop D&D and enhance forest carbon, while transaction cost includes management, monitoring, and verification aspects (Ibid). The opportunity costs will result from the forgone economic opportunities by adopting REDD+. Table 1 below compares the cost under the current community forestry practice against the REDD+ scenario.

Table 1 : Perceived cost for local forestry groups under REDD+

		Under REDD+ Scenario
Cost	Transaction Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Revision of OPs ● Coordination with govt. officials ● Awareness raising ● Baseline assessment ● Training human resources
	Implementation Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Forest management ● Measurement of carbon ● Addressing D&D (e.g. law enforcement, control grazing, forest fire, etc.) ● Documenting progress

	Monitoring Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Documentation on the progress ● MRV ● Measurement of Non-carbon elements
	Opportunity Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Income from timber, fuelwood, NTFP sale ● Land use change (e.g. agriculture)

Though the costs presented in Table 1 are all perceived costs on REDD+, this might differ in the actual implementation scenario. There were several issues raised among grassroots communities regarding REDD+ in terms of monetary, as well as non-monetary, cost for its implementation.

REDD+ will require better protection of the forest in order to control D&D. One of the major activities to ensure this will be addressing forest land encroachment. Encroachment is a major driver of D&D and is widespread especially across the Terai region, where the bulk of the country's valuable forests lie. A huge investment is necessary to address the problem of D&D across the country. Data shows that nearly six billion Nepalese Rupees (NRs) have already been invested in evictions of people from the forest areas in order to control encroachment (see Table 2).

Table 2 : Some facts on encroachment in Nepal

Forest land under encroachment	97,000 ha
Number of landless in Nepal	4,50,000 households
No. of land commissions formed in the last 40 years and land distributed	21 commissions and 140 thousand ha
Estimated cost of eviction for next five years	NRs 6 billion

Source: CNRM (2010); DoF (2011)

As one of the measures to address D&D, government in the past has evicted illegal settlers from the forest land. Yet, the problem still persists and will be costly for the government to carry out eviction throughout the country. Thus an additional financing will be needed in order to address the problem of forest encroachment.

Similarly, MRV will be necessary in order to ensure accountability of the REDD+ activities. For this, there will be a need to enhance the existing capacities of the government officials and local communities. Box 2 shows a case of different costs associated with the implementation of REDD+ in one of the pilot sites in Nepal.

Box 2: Benefits and liabilities in REDD+

Under the REDD+ framework, the forest user groups will receive money through carbon increment as a result of protecting their forest. However, there are liabilities associated with the payment. An experience from Janapragati community forest, one of the REDD+ pilot project sites in Khayarkhola watershed of Chitwan district shows that the income from regular community forest channel actually exceeded the payment that the group received from REDD+. The average payment, the group received from REDD+ in three years period accounted to NRs 2,94,000 whereas the total average CFUG income in through tourism in 5 years period was NRs 14,00,000, a visible difference of NRs 11,00,000. This shows the fact that the payment from REDD+ made a small difference in their annual income. Out of the REDD+ fund, NRs 200,000 were spent under different livelihoods support activities, mainly pig farming, buffalo rearing and vegetable farming. The money to group was directly deposited in the CFUG account in Triveni Development Bank, though a bank account already existed in National Banijya Bank.

Despite this small fund, the CFUG had to comply with new conditionality. Collection of fuelwood was restricted in certain forest plots. The measurement of carbon was beyond the capacity of the CFUGs and was outsourced to an expert. Lekh Babadur Thapa, former chairperson of Janapragati community forest opined 'carbon measurement in trees is outside our capacity. There was a consultant hired for this purpose, though the money paid to him was not deducted from our REDD+ payment, in the future scenario, we might have to pay to those experts from our own fund, which is not really cheap.' There was additional effort required during the 3 years period. Several separate meetings to address REDD+ related matters were organized which required separate meeting minutes. Likewise, community monitoring forms were to be filled up every year. Other than that, the CFUG members had to spare their time to respond to the visitors and researchers, many of them international ones, on questions of their interest. About 300 individuals visited Janapragati for research/study purposes from the start of the piloting till date.

Another cost, significant to the grassroots communities, is the opportunity cost of strict conservation approaches like protected areas. For example, all protected areas ban developmental activities within the core forest area. This is of primary interest to the government for ensuring the wildlife conservation and therefore any developmental activities within the core forest area are deemed illegal. Though infrastructure development within and nearby forest areas have triggered D&D in other cases, avoiding it would be beneficial in terms of forest protection. However, construction of infrastructure like roads, health posts and schools would be of utmost interest to local communities. Local communities fear that such activities will cease with the introduction of REDD+ and thus deprive them of basic facilities near their vicinity.

Payments and benefits from REDD+

REDD+ in general is perceived to benefit the environment by reducing GHG emissions and increasing non-carbon benefits as a result of conservation of forests, protection of biodiversity, and enhanced ecosystem services. Conceptually, REDD+ will also offer financial flows to the particular REDD+ country and its forest user groups for protecting its forests. While various channels and mechanisms for REDD+ payment are being discussed at the global and national scale, there is a certain level of disagreement among the forest user groups on the scale and level of payment and benefit sharing.

The benefit sharing mechanism for community forestry revenue is a case of how funds are distributed across different socioeconomic classes. The practice of sharing benefits, including forest products based on well-being ranking, considers equity among the different groups. Despite such practices, there are grievances of inequity in some cases. The disparities between elite versus the marginalized, men versus women, and rich versus poor - have been key determinants of who receives more benefits in community forestry. This concern extends to the benefit sharing in REDD+, as well (See Box 3). The primary concern that local user groups have expressed is in terms of the elite capture and the channel and level of payments. Skepticism remains over the replication of the current inequitable benefit sharing practice in community forestry through REDD+. For instance, though wellbeing ranking is being practiced for sharing of the community forest benefits, still few marginalized groups like Dalits, are deprived of required forest products due mainly to the

imposition of strict rules targeted to conserve the forest. In addition, concerns remain over the REDD+ payment from national level to the local communities through different government tiers, i.e. national, sub-national, and local. This would simply add too many layers of administration, thus increasing the transaction cost. This in turn means that far less money would reach to the local communities while much would be withheld for administrative purposes by the government. Apart from this, the existing mistrust towards government agencies results in a lack of confidence among local forest user groups on actually receiving the REDD+ money they expect.

Box 3: Benefit-Sharing in REDD+

Ms. Khuma Devi Paudel from Tribeni CFUG Letang, Morang questioned, "What will REDD+'s implementation mean for the marginalized and forest-dependent poor community? As far as I know, more than 20 percent of the population that is forest-dependent and do not have any other alternative for survival. Thus, alternative sources of livelihood such as agriculture, livestock farming etc. must be developed if REDD+ is to be implemented. But in practice, this is not happening. Then how can REDD+ be equitable and benefit mechanism will be effective in our CFUG.

The issue of benefit sharing is not an entirely new thing in the context of community forestry in Nepal. A farmer and a forest user from Makwanpur district shared his experience: "CF leaders do not care about the forest and its management, and community development activities as much as they care about their vested self-interests. Forest development is being overshadowed by focus on infrastructure development. They do not focus on developing income generating activities for the poor and marginalized groups. Rather, their priorities lie somewhere else." Moreover, Ms. Laxmi KC from Kailali bemoans of lack of participatory decision-making in CF models, and the possibility of the same in REDD+ projects. She said "I have been involved in CF for a long period of time and what my experience tells me is that in most of the cases, decision making related to issues concerning fund and resources allocation is dominated by men and elites of the community. Women and other marginalized groups are simply sidelined. I am not very optimistic or sure about how implementation of REDD+ will change all of this."

For all stakeholders to support REDD+ and the final benefit-sharing mechanism, the legitimacy of the process of designing the mechanism is critical. A well-designed benefit-sharing mechanism can also support the effectiveness of forest management and increase the efficiency of REDD+ programs.

In the current scenario, much of the debate in REDD+ has supported performance-based payment. In other words, the communities will receive the money only after exhibiting the increment in forest carbon. However, it is highly likely that the forest user groups will have to reduce the daily utilization of forest products like timber and fuelwood to ensure that the carbon is retained in the forest. This will definitely demand some time for the money to reach the communities in order to compensate their forest product utilization. This might place certain groups of people, who are fully dependent on forest, at risk of losing their livelihood option.

The REDD+ payment is purely perceived to be in the form of cash. However, this may not be the only case. Payment could also be in the form of development benefits like roads, schools, and hospitals. In this sense, there are diverse interests and expectations of collective or individual benefits among the forest user groups. Though understanding people's choice of the benefits was out of the scope of this study, there were individuals raising such concerns during our investigation. Some individuals preferred direct cash payment as the choice of REDD+ benefits, while others chose benefits of collective interest, which were mostly developmental in nature. According to a CFUG member of Dhuseri community forest, Nawalparasi,

People in my community forest with alternative livelihoods prefer to have in kind payment, in the form of developmental activities, whereas marginalized forest-dependent people, with no income source, choose payments in cash. So there is a difference among the people's choice on the prospective payment from REDD+.

Once the money reaches the community level (or local level), clarification is still necessary to determine the designated beneficiaries. Some argue that those who manage the forest should get the payment, while others stress equity as one of the factors for sharing the benefits. The latter is crucial in order to ensure that the poor, the marginalized, and women are adequately compensated based of their economic status and role in forest management. Another point of view that has come up strongly in the debate is the economy of scale for the forests. Community forests, especially in the hills, vary in terms of the area. The size of each forest determines the scale of the payment, with productive tropical forests in the Terai getting more payment

for the carbon stored and vice versa. Purely performance-based payment may not have justice in terms of payment. In other words, there are equity concerns within community forests where certain marginalized groups, despite their role in forest management, are deprived of benefits. There are also certain discourses at the policy level on bundling small forests (especially community forests) in order to maintain certain forest areas to ensure decent REDD+ payment. However, there is a different, yet conflicting, view among the grassroots communities. The bundling would simply undermine CFUGs autonomy that they would otherwise enjoy if they were able to claim certain boundaries of the forest as their own. Likewise, there is a likelihood of conflict among adjacent community forests in terms of their access to the forest area. Reconciliation of this would otherwise be simple if they are divided with delineation of forest boundary.

Most of the discussions in REDD+ have been around government and community based forest management. Though private forests also hold some stake during international negotiations, little attention has been given to such forests in Nepal. In other words, in the context of REDD+ payment, whether private forests are eligible to claim the benefits is still uncertain. In fact, people are still questioning whether private forests will be a part of the REDD+ scheme. Ram Prasad Giri, a private forest owner from Dahidada of Jhapa expressed his concern:

I have 10 ropanies (0.5 ha) of private forest in Dahidada that I inherited from my father which has been registered at the DFO. I have come to know that forest user groups will be the beneficiaries of REDD+ payments. So, my concern is how I could be compensated for my role in protecting my forest from REDD+.

The REDD+ readiness phase

The inception of the REDD+ readiness process witnessed consultations at various levels in Nepal. There was an attempt to involve diverse social groups (Dalits, women, marginalized and IPs) across various ecological regions of the country during the consultation. The consultations included sensitizing the grassroots communities on the basic concepts of REDD+. They were primarily organized by NGOs with support from the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and donor agencies, though some

were initiated by the REDD IC. Implementation of the REDD+ readiness process has resulted in several positive achievements in terms of informing grassroots campaigns - mainly CFUGs - on the concept and technicalities of REDD+. Yet, grievances over the process, particularly consultations and production of knowledge products, still prevail.

The REDD+ readiness consultation process has attempted to garner the voices of diverse social groups. Nevertheless, a big question among those included in the consultation was 'where did our voices go?' In other words, no assurance was provided that local community voices would be considered during REDD+ policy development. Moreover, a linear consultation approach was adopted and no further efforts were laid towards garnering feedback from the local communities. Another shortcoming of the consultation process was on the exclusion of the landless and many other groups. Since most of the sensitization programmes involved CBFM groups, other groups like the landless were excluded during the consultations.

Consultations and discussions under the grassroots capacity building for REDD+ project at the sub-national and local level have created a platform for the grassroots communities to raise their issues and concerns on REDD+. Most of the issues raised are exclusively on REDD+, while others address access to and benefits from forest resources. However, there is certain skepticism if the issues and concerns raised will ever reach the concerned agency to be considered for further action (See case in Box 4). In addition, the discussions that take place are usually in formal settings with participation from various organizations including the DFO. This usually creates an awkward situation for most of the CFUGs to openly express their voices and concerns. Despite the importance of local level discussions, policy level discussions occur at the national level. Seldom does new information reach back to the local level, particularly because discussions are dominated by experts using technical jargon, mostly in English.

Box 4: Inadequacies of REDD Readiness Process

The REDD-IC under the MoFSC is the principal institution that is in-charge of undertaking REDD+ readiness activities in Nepal. The REDD+ readiness activities for Nepal are guided by the R-PP which was approved by the FCPF in 2010. In the course of REDD+ readiness, engagement of diverse stakeholders at different levels have been organized in order to sensitize people on the issue. But, there are still grievances of people in terms of inclusiveness.

When enquired about the level of participation of the of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, Dalits, and forest dependent poor throughout the REDD+ readiness process during a consultation meeting, Mr. Juddha Prakash Rai of NEFIN Jhapa said, “I feel that the entire REDD+ planning structure is completely dominated by techno-bureaucratic top-down practices representing government interests and international donors’ requirements, while communities like ours are merely used to legitimize the policy process rather than to actively shape it.” A Dalit woman in the same meeting agreed with Mr. Rai on the issue of meaningful participation by adding, “Considerable share of policy preparations is left to the outsourced experts, and the multi-stakeholder consultation meetings have proven to be ineffective to bring the weak actors’ perspectives that actually participate in those meetings. Consultations are controlled by dominant actors. We are mere tools that are used to legitimize the process but in reality, our issues are seldom addressed.”

Concerns were also raised regarding interests of institutions and groups that represent Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, Dalits, and forest dependent poor at the national level discussions. Mr. Hom Bahadur Gurung, Secretary of Chisapani CFUG, Nawalparasi said, “Although there is participation of FECOFUN and NEFIN as members in the REDD Working Group, I don’t know whether they are actually representing grassroots users’ and IPs’ issues and concerns, or are deviated by their narrow personal and group interests.”

Nevertheless, the REDD+ readiness phase has seen progress in terms of policy process, along with preparation of several documents including the REDD+ strategy. These documents primarily target donor agencies in order to seek funding that will prepare Nepal for full-fledged implementation of REDD+. The documents, though prepared through a rigorous consultation process across the country, finally ended up 200 pages in length, written in English. It was not verified with the local communities and was rather posted on the website of the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MoFSC).

Though a Nepali version of the strategy was prepared, it has hardly reached the grassroots communities. In fact, most of the REDD+ documents have not reached the local level, while very little information has been shared during discussions and workshops on REDD+. And those that have actually reached the local level merely highlight the basic concept of REDD+, thus missing information on the policy level dynamics of REDD+.

Discussion

The advent of CBFM globally witnessed a decentralized system in managing forest resources. The transformation from centralized control of forest to community centered approaches actually resulted in multiple positive results ranging from contributions to livelihoods of poor forest user groups to protection of forests and biodiversity (Pokhrel et al. 2007; Shrestha et al. 2010). The introduction of REDD+ also has been perceived to support the benefits that individuals have been reaping from forests. However, there is likelihood of a centralized mechanism, especially to maintain baseline data; Monitoring, Reporting and Verification; and carbon-oriented forest management plans, among others (Phelps et al. 2010). This is primarily due to the reason that a decentralized mechanism might increase the transaction cost. Furthermore, the government might claim to be more capable than local communities at maintaining schemes of national interest, and thus attempt to recentralize the control of forests (Phelps et al. 2010). Although ‘participatory approach’ might be a buzz word in the REDD+ process, it may not be effective if right-holders are not engaged from the start.

The fact that all the forestlands in Nepal belong to the government is critical while distinguishing the carbon rights stored in trees and belowground biomass. Clarity as to who owns the carbon, however, has not been well established (Agrawal and Angelsen 2012). As clarity on carbon rights is yet to be defined, it is mostly assumed that the existing tenure provisions will prevail in terms of delineating carbon rights in order to make payments on REDD+ (Cotula and Mayers 2009). This is critical because the existing laws still identifies the government as the owner of the forest land. This also implies that the right to make decisions is vested in the government allowing them to work in their own favor. The declaration of Chure conservation area and expansion of protected areas are manifestations of such perception.

Historically, establishment of protected areas has often been contested where locals and civil society have gone against such decisions (Holmes 2007). Not only have the establishment of such areas displaced the local communities from their lands, but they are not allowed to enjoy any products from the forests and are usually barred from entering the forests. These issues pose legitimate concerns with the uncertainties that REDD+ might bring in terms of community access to the forest.

Another concern on REDD+ is the cost of implementation which is mainly associated with addressing the D&D. However to ensure that the targets are met, it is important to build cooperation between the state and local communities. That will require participation of the local communities, and motivation to stop conversion of current land uses (Sylvander 2010).

In the REDD+ scenario, the concern of additional costs is obvious in the sense that there will be additional activities like carbon measurement and documentation work to be fulfilled. During the REDD+ piloting phase, it was evident that the CFUGs certainly had additional costs to cover under the REDD+ activity. However, the cost of controlling D&D would be of utmost importance, which will determine the payment that CFUGs receive from REDD+. Controlling D&D is a multidimensional issue and it may not be enough merely imposing stringent law enforcement measures. Moreover, it will engage actors at various levels from national to sub-national to local level; thus the implications on the cost associated with controlling D&D will exist at different levels of governance. Moreover, the total cost for avoided deforestation and forest degradation will actually be determined by summing up the opportunity costs, implementation costs and transaction costs (Streck and Parker 2012).

REDD+ has been compared with the conventional forest protection, providing a win-win scenario in terms of forest protection and enhanced livelihoods of poor forest-dependent communities (Resosudarmo et al. 2012). A study carried out in nine REDD+ projects (Resosudarmo et al. 2012) shows that REDD+ among the local people is primarily about income through forest protection. However, concern about the time taken for the REDD+ payment to reach the local level seems obvious due to the fact that forests take time to grow, implying that payment would be as much as it would take time for the trees to grow.

In addition, the REDD+ payment can differ depending on fluctuations in the global carbon rate (Agrawal and Angelsen 2012). That means there could be payment adequate enough to compensate the local communities, while on the other hand, the payment might fall short of maintaining subsistence levels, especially affecting poor families. That would require the country to create a buffer mechanism, perhaps through a national REDD+ fund to compensate the difference (Agrawal and Angelsen 2012).

Concerns regarding the transaction cost as a result of different governance level for payment and the form of payment that right-holders will receive are crucial in terms of determining the actual benefits received. Passing through various levels from national to sub-national to local government and ultimately to the grassroots level will incur high transaction cost. This implies that the money that grassroots communities would actually receive will be retained with the agencies at different levels as administrative cost. Likewise, the form of payment will be crucial to determine whether the payment that an individual receives addresses his or her needs. This is particularly important from the standpoint of an individual's economic status. For instance, a decision to construct a hospital from the REDD+ payment might be beneficial for all in terms of health service, but it might not mean much for a poor family who is in dire need of money to maintain their daily livelihood. Therefore, the benefits from REDD+ will actually be determined by meeting the differentiated expectations and needs of the communities.

While community forestry in Nepal has taken some measures to ensure equitable benefit sharing, few initiatives are in place to incentivize individuals with weak economic and social status in terms of resource sharing. Likewise, in some CFUGs, there are provisions in place to maintain transparency of income and expenditure of community forestry revenue. However, though these provisions exist, there are still issues of inequity, lack of access for certain groups in decision-making processes, dominance of elite groups in decision-making, among others). The voices of poor and marginalized are either not heard or are neglected (Thoms 2008). Moreover, the decision to spend the revenue from community forestry is usually made by the elites, thus undermining the needs of the poor and marginalized. There is also an issue of lack of prior consultation in deciding the sharing of the benefits

among the user group members. Not limited to the grassroots level, involving diverse actors and stakeholders in policy making process too is not much acknowledged by wider groups beyond the bureaucracy.

Historically, the culture of policy-making, especially within the forestry sector in Nepal, has not been much appreciated by stakeholders due mainly to the fact that they do not adopt a participatory approach. REDD+ process in the later stage of readiness phase too has been criticized for being non-participatory (Khatri et al. 2016). As most of the focus of the REDD IC was towards developing technical reports and preparing for the next phase of REDD+, participation was merely limited to some experts, government officials and few representatives of the civil society (Khatri et al. 2016).

Conclusion and recommendations

This report highlights the key issues and concerns of grassroots communities participating in the REDD+ capacity building programme. The issues and concerns about REDD+ are not merely based on assumptions of the grassroots communities but are actually grounded on the existing practices in community forestry and are linked with the possible future REDD+ scenario. The issues and concerns on REDD+ have been primarily raised around four areas - access and rights to forest, cost of REDD+ implementation, payments and benefits, and REDD+ policy process. Most of the issues and concerns raised are symptomatic in nature with a general perception that the REDD+ program would incur additional costs, result in reduced access to forests, bring issues of benefit sharing, and exclude people from the REDD+ policy process. The following recommendations are made in order to address the issues and concerns of grassroots groups on REDD+ in Nepal

Invest in capacity building for grassroots groups and other stakeholders: Capacity building for forest communities, especially the forest dependent poor, women, Janajati, Madhesi and Dalits, help to ensure active community participation in REDD+. It ultimately helps democratize the REDD+ process, supporting a successful scheme for reducing emission. Likewise, there is a low understanding of and engagement in REDD+ among government agencies, mainly DFOs, in districts without REDD+ capacity building

projects. This has resulted in low enthusiasm among the government agencies and facilitators in the forestry sector who might otherwise prioritize REDD+ in their agenda. Therefore capacity building programs such as workshops, interactive programs and grassroot and government institution mobilization in REDD+ activities will be useful in clarifying some of the speculative concerns.

Strengthen tenure security: While community forests and other management modalities have received a strong legal backing, the existing regulatory provisions, institutional practices and vacillating policies have undermined the autonomy of the local forestry groups. These issues could be corrected by a more transparent and predictable policy process, full adherence to the Forest Act 1993 and supportive institutional practices. In turn such would assure the required support for the successful implementation of REDD+. Moreover, landless people should also be made a part of REDD+ sensitization programs in order to ensure their full participation during REDD+ implementation.

Simplify the monitoring and MRV process: The technical reports for forest monitoring and the MRV process should be prepared with simple language to ensure that it is comprehended at all levels including the grassroots. Moreover, designing MRV with simple techniques and processes will be crucial to ensure participation of the local communities. Along with training programs, documents should be prepared in the local language and where needed, use local terms to avoid confusion from the use of excessive jargon.

Ensure transparent and equitable benefit sharing: The existing grievance mechanisms within community forestry and other forest management groups should be strengthened to ensure a fair, transparent and accessible benefit sharing arrangement. Moreover, incentive mechanisms should be sought so as to address the differentiated needs of the individuals even within a single community. For example there is a need to develop more widely accepted considerations regarding variances in economic status, geographical location, and access to facilities provided by the state, among others, for payment to the institutions and the individual households. If allocated benefits fund infrastructure and development activities, it will be imperative that these particular interventions benefit the most marginalized groups of the society.

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