

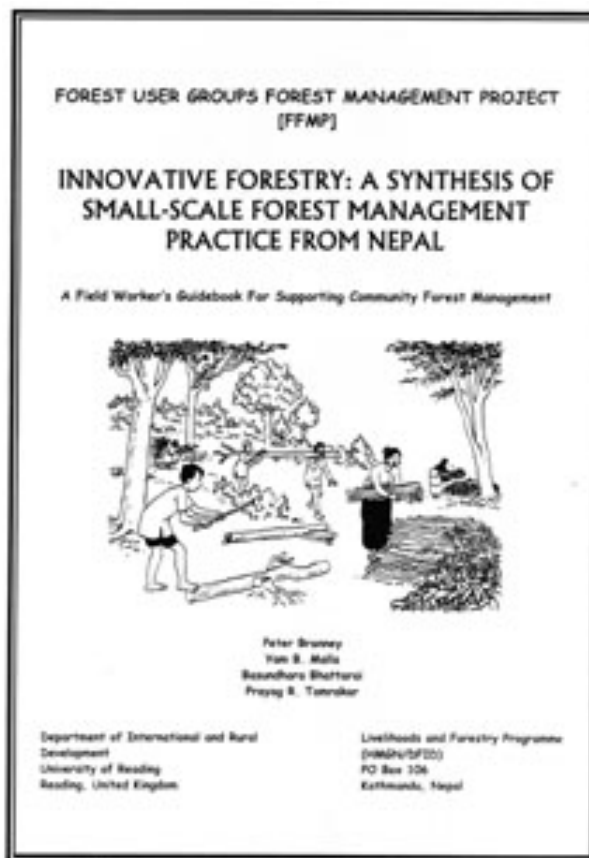
Innovative forestry: a synthesis of small-scale forest management practice from Nepal

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This guidebook is written by, Peter Branney, Yam Malla, Basundhara Bhattarai, and prayag Tamrakar, team members of the Forest User Groups Forest Management Project (FFMP).

This guidebook has been published at a time when there is a widespread recognition in Nepal that community forests are not being actively managed to realize their full potential. Whilst there are both institutional and technical solutions to this problem, the guidebook has clearly spelled out its position in addressing the technical issues of forest management in a way field workers can really understand and articulate while working with forest user groups.

Written by authors having substantial experiences in participatory forest management in Nepal, the guidebook is one of the highly innovative documents ever published to aid field forestry workers in Nepal, and the message of the book is relevant to a wide range of rural contexts where community participation is a strategy for forest management. The guidebook is targeted at front line extension workers such as rangers and forest officers, project personnel and NGOs workers. It builds on the need for productive forest management, and the authors' emphasis is on a content that promotes the use of forests in a sustainable way to provide products and benefits, which FUG members need.



The guidebook is an outcome of FMP which is a research project (R6918) funded by the UK Department for international Development (DFID) through its Forestry Research Programme. The project is implemented by the international and Rural Development Department (DIRD) of the University of Reading, UK in collaboration with Livelihoods and Forestry Programme (LFP), and its precursor Nepal UK Community Forestry project.

Three sources of information in which the guidebook is based are: a) numerous meetings, visits and discussions between the authors and the FUG members from many parts of Nepal, b) extensive literature that has been produced over the past 15 years, c) discussions with a range of government, project and NGO staff.

FFMP worked with a number of forest user groups (FUGs) in the hills of Nepal (mainly Myagdi and Parbat districts) using participatory action and learning approach as well as through specifically designed meetings and discussions. The project encouraged and supported a sample of FUGs to apply 'learning by doing approach' to developing and testing innovative silvicultural practices that could help address the issues of forest management. Although the project originally had an idea of producing a guidebook from professional perspective and distribute to FUGs, the project team realized that forest users across the country have great experiences in diverse situations, and these could be collated and described in a manner understandable to field practitioners assisting FUGs. " *We readily acknowledge that even as subject matter specialists, we often do not have precise or relevant answers to hand which will address the forest management issues being encountered by many different FUGs*" - this perspective of authors has created a unique format, content, style and focus of the book that is really accessible to people working at grassroots, and helps bridge the gap between traditionally trained foresters and local people who have discovered, nurtured and advanced traditional knowledge on forest management and silvicultural practices, thus enabling them to engage in more interactive process of action and learning.

The 82-page guidebook hopes to contribute to FUGs in sustainable and equitable management of community forests by highlighting and describing the innovative silvicultural practices across the middle hills. In this sense, the book highlights best practices, innovations and successful ideas being put into practice by FUGs in the field. Starting with a short overview (4 pages) on the contexts of community forest management in aspects of policy, legislation and institutional environment, the guidebook gives major part of its space to describe and illustrate forest management planning processes as well as a comprehensive list of forest operations that are useful for community forests.

In the 15 pages long **planning section**, the broad idea of planning forest management as well as specific issues such as mapping, resource assessment, blocking, needs assessment, growth and yield assessment, and monitoring are discussed. The message is that a good operational plan that is prepared with full participation of users, including women and the poor, is a key to successful achievement of forest management objectives. This section allows field workers and facilitators to understand and articulate legal, institutional, technical considerations of forest management planning as well as the process, steps and possible tools that can be of help. Insights as regards how facilitators may better articulate resource and social data to arrive at a plan with clear objectives, plans of actions and monitoring.

In the **forest operations section**, with 48 pages, 9 important areas (Protection, regeneration, harvesting, NTFP management, income generation, grass management, plantation management, bamboo management, leaf litter and fodder management) are discussed. Readers should be excited to get a systematic presentation and review of commonly experienced practices of forest management in various situations and contexts. Authors have taken special care to highlight practical aspects of forest operations, avoiding getting into a trap of telling things from their own perspective.

The forestry operations discussed go beyond classical tending operations designed to enhance timber production, and most of them are relevant in the context of generating a diversity of forest products that are needed by the poor and small-scale farmers in the hills of Nepal. The operations balance the protection, development and utilization aspects. Special coverage of non-timber forest products amidst a growing concern for their conservation and management would be of great use.

All discussions/presentations are highly reflective to the readers as they are enriched over 49 illustrations and figures, and contain key questions for consideration and decision-making, rather than becoming too prescriptive. Interestingly, the illustrations cover all aspects of conservation, utilization, protection and development of forest resources in the typical Nepali style. In every issue, there is often a table that suggests a range of options as well as their advantages and disadvantages. The usefulness of the book is further enriched through some of the most recent data on growth and yield of forest as well as socio-economic aspects.

Comments of heads of two institutions while giving a foreword to the guidebook are also noticeable as they indicate the usefulness of the book. Director General of Forest Department has congratulated the FFMP team for their efforts, and says *"This is a useful tool for Department of Forest staff as well as NGOs in their work with FUGs and for preparing operational plan"*. Likewise, the programme coordinator of the LFP says *"I am sure that the guidelines will provide a great source of useful ideas and information in moving FUGs to a more sustainable management of the resources under their control"*.

I feel that this guidebook should not be an end in itself; there should be a constant follow-up mechanism to collect reader's comments and new innovations in the practice of small-scale forest management in Nepal so that it could be revised and updated making it a useful reference in the changing contexts.

Overall, the document could be a good reference source for FUGs and for those people who are assisting them in managing forests.