Buffer Zones: New Frontiers for Participatory Conservation?

Naya S. Paudel*, Prabhu Budhathoki and Uday R. Sharma*****
* ForestAction Nepal, Kathmandu
** IUCN Nepal, Kathmandu
*** Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation, Nepal
Corresponding author: nsp@forestaction.wlink.com.np

Abstract: This paper draws on the experiences of the buffer zone management programme in Nepal. Although the programme is the result of changing international conservation discourses, it has evolved in Nepal's unique socio-political and environmental contexts as a response to continued resource conflict in and around protected areas. The implementation process and the outcomes of the programme have been mediated by a wide array of social actors, resulting in gaps in policy intent and outcomes. The experiences show that important achievements have been gained, mainly in contributing to resource regeneration, community development and facilitating local institutional strengthening for participatory conservation. This paper discusses the links between policy, strategies and specific outcomes of the programme. This is followed by a discussion of the emerging issues and challenges and the strategies taken to address them. Finally, the paper draws some key lessons from the programme and suggests a way forward to better realise conservation with livelihoods.

Key words: buffer zone, conservation, livelihoods, participation, policy

INTRODUCTION

The buffer zone (BZ) programme[1] (hereafter 'the programme') is the latest participatory policy intervention in Nepal's protected area (PA) management to link conservation with livelihoods. While the purpose of PA management was traditionally limited to the protection of flora and fauna, introduction of the BZ programme has brought social responsibility to the fore. The programme has opened space for local participation in conservation initiatives and new avenues for constructive dialogue between park authorities and local people. This has indicated a potential shift from historically hostile park-people relations towards collaborative management of PAs. In fact, the programme has become a major issue in contemporary discourse in PA management in Nepal.

This paper discusses the issues that have emerged through the decade-long implementation of the BZ programme in Nepal. Part of the enquiry relates to the contextual evolution of the programme such as to what extent Nepal's specific social and ecological contexts necessitated the introduction of the programme and how the programme approaches evolved to respond to the widespread park-people conflict. Others are related to policy processes such as how policies have been formulated (what approaches and strategies have been adopted) and to what extent the policy and legal frameworks have envisioned space for local people's autonomy to shape and implement environmental and developmental agendas. Questions related to the actors and their influences in shaping the programme outcomes are also discussed. Furthermore, the paper outlines the lessons on policy processes and programme strategies to enhance collaboration in conservation and livelihoods in buffer zones. In the current context of restructuring of the state and creating 'New Nepal', this paper informs the debate on democratisation of PA governance in Nepal.

The paper is divided into six sections. The second section briefly discusses Nepal's socio-political and environmental policy contexts in which the BZ policy was introduced. The third section discusses the policy and practices of the programme in Nepal. The fourth section assesses the social, economic and environmental outcomes. The fifth section highlights the emerging issues and lessons, followed by conclusion.

SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXTS AND BUFFER ZONE PROGRAMME

Nepal's BZ programme should be understood in the broader context of socio-ecological dynamics, within which the establishment and expansion of PAs took place. Although the expansion of PAs during the seventies was a global phenomenon, there were three specific additional factors that induced the establishment of PAs in Nepal. First, the royal family, particularly Late King Mahendra, 'a hunter-turned-conservationist', saw his last hunting paradise disappearing and took initiative to establish PAs across the country. Initially, PAs were designated as hunting reserves aimed at protecting game species, including the rhinoceros and the tiger. Second, a dominant environmental narrative of the time, the Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation, projected Nepal's hills facing an unprecedented rate of environmental degradation, requiring urgent attention. Third, Nepal's geopolitical sensitivity during the cold war era, induced the world powers to engage in Nepal through politically less sensitive environmental aid. During this time, forest protection was emphasised as an immediate measure to halt the severe environmental degradation; several western conservationists highlighted the issue and convinced the King to establish PAs. Not surprisingly, Nepal received generous international financial and technical support for establishing PAs and subsequently consolidating them during this period.

The early PAs were centrally established with little consultation with local people living in and around the PAs, thus ignoring their concerns (Mishra 1984; Ghimire 1994; Heinen and Yonzon 1994; Heinen and Mehta 1999). Local residents were either physically displaced (Furer-Haimendorf 1986; Thapa 2001; McLean and Straedes 2003) or were denied their customary use rights. Besides, in many cases they continue to suffer from increased wildlife depredation, including human causalities. As a result, park-people conflicts became widespread in several PAs (Basnet 1992; Budhathoki 2005; Paudel 2005a). These conflicts were relatively intense, particularly in the Terai, due to its fertile land and fast-growing population on the one hand and rich biodiversity with mega fauna on the other (Ghimire 1992; Shrestha and Conway 1996; Brown 1997; Shrestha 2001). A recent study[2] of some forest-dependent communities indicates such conflicts in all PAs, especially in the Terai. Notwithstanding these conflicts, until the nineties, the conservation authorities showed little consideration to any public resistance against environmental interventions due primarily to the existing unequal power relations between the Nepalese state and its citizens until 1990 (Campbell 2003; Nightingale 2003).

During the nineties, two major shifts were observed in Nepal's conservation efforts. First, participatory and people-oriented approaches to conservation became the mainstream conservation discourse. Various participatory initiatives were introduced, particularly in the mountain PAs, including the Annapurna Conservation Area (see Bajracharya et al. in this issue). Lessons from these initiatives were gradually translated into practice in other PAs. Consequently, Nepal's conservation policies began to be regarded as progressive among the developing countries (Heinen and Yonzon 1994). Second, the conservation agenda was gradually broadened from a narrow focus on species to biodiversity, ecosystem and then to wider landscapes. The inadequacy of small discrete PAs for conserving viable populations of many species, especially large mammals, was recognised during the eighties (Newmark 1996). Furthermore, the negative consequences of habitat fragmentation were gradually realised (Davies *et al.* 2001) and conservation planning began to consider expanding the areas into larger geographical scales (Noss 2002). Studies of the gaps in conservation initiatives in the Himalayan region further strengthened the concern for the ecosystems and species outside the existing PAs and helped change conservation policies towards larger landscape management (Wikramanayake *et al.* 1998). Introduction of the BZ programme in Nepal is a testimony to increased realisation of the participatory approaches and emerging understanding of landscape management approaches (Budhathoki 2003).

The National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act 1973 (fourth amendment in 1993), Buffer Zone Regulations 1996 and Buffer Zone Guidelines 1999 provide policy and legal frameworks for the programme. The main regulatory arrangement is that certain areas around the existing PAs can be designated as buffer zones and brought under the PA authorities' jurisdiction. The rationale here is that the single management unit would facilitate coordinated approach to conservation and development efforts both in the park and its buffer zone.

The first buffer zone was the one around the Chitwan National Park and was established in 1996. By the middle of 2007, 11 national parks are surrounded by formally established buffer zones in Nepal. The programme has established a three-tier community-based institutional model that includes user groups (UGs), user committees (UCs) and a buffer zone management council (hereafter the Council). UG comprises representatives from all households, UC comprises chairpersons and secretaries from the UGs of particular villages and the Council comprises all UC chairpersons of the PA concerned.

The programme has two major components: natural resource management and socioeconomic development of local communities. Natural resource management in the buffer zone is decentralised to UCs and UGs. Many forest patches have been handed over as community forests under a tripartite agreement between the park authorities, UCs and community forest user groups (one of the several types of UGs that are formed in buffer zones). Besides, specific provisions are made for the collection of soil, stones, sand and flood drift wood in the area. For local socioeconomic development, 30-50% of the PA income (income made through tourism, sale of forest products, fines and others) is being shared with local communities through the Council. The funds are used to support projects for improving local infrastructure, energy saving technologies, educational programmes, income-generating activities, and the like. In addition, there are schemes for compensation against the loss of property and human causalities caused by wildlife. The Council allocates available development funds to each UC. UCs can plan and disburse the available funds within the budget ceiling defined by the Buffer Zone Guidelines 1999 to ensure a balanced investment in various aspects of development.[3]

THE DYNAMICS OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Unlike the management of core zones, in which ecological concerns surpass local socio-cultural interests, the BZ programme goes beyond the techno-bureaucratic domain and seeks to accommodate prevailing socio-political interests. Indeed, this programme is part of the larger processes in which a multiplicity of actors, institutions and discourses define, contest, (re)-interpret and enforce claims over resources. Policy reinterpretation by each actor according to its own understanding and interests makes it a complex political process. The simplified 'park-people' dichotomy created by the dominant discourses may limit analytical understanding of the complex picture of local and national dynamics. In Nepal, the BZ communities are characterised by social inequalities, in terms of class, caste and ethnicity, sustaining impoverishment and vulnerability of marginalised groups (Ghimire 1992; Guneratne 1998; Muller-Boker 1999). While trying to provide a broad picture of the policy innovation in buffer zones, this paper has put much of the effort in exploring internal social differentiation and local dynamics of the implementation of the programme.

Three major sets of actors can be conceived of in the context of the programme, albeit at the risk of over-generalisation: PA authorities, leaders of BZ institutions and marginalised citizens. The park authorities generally represent the interests of conservationists and environmentalists, both nationally and internationally as key actors. They garner support from buffer zone leaders to increase the visibility of 'participatory conservation' across the wider global audiences, including donors, to attract international support for conservation. Buffer zone leaders, who are

represented in Councils, UCs and UGs are often members of better-off groups and 'upper caste' males who often control local social and political institutions (Budhathoki 2003; Paudel 2005a). They often share similar views with park officials on the environment and development, and favour conventional development agenda such as road, electrification or other physical infrastructure. They are the key actors on whom PA officials rely for the 'successful implementation' of the programme. In the third group are the indigenous communities, *dalits*, landless, the poor and women, who have very weak influence in shaping local social and political affairs. They often rely more on park resources and are not in a position to benefit from many conventional development activities. Most of the members of these groups are actively engaged in various resistance movements such as fishermen's struggle for fishing rights, landless people's struggle to secure access to land, farmers' struggles against wildlife depredation, and so on.

Promoting collective initiatives in conservation is one of the stated objectives of the BZ programme. However, since the environmental concerns have often overshadowed the local livelihoods rights, there are several restrictions on community forest management, collection of driftwood and establishment of forest-based enterprises. Sale of biomass outside the buffer zone is prohibited. It is argued that such restriction is necessary to control draining out of forest resources from buffer zones (Bajimaya 2003). While these restrictions are expected to ensure sustainable resource use practices, they have discouraged local resource management initiatives. This policy, however, has resulted in a paradox in the conservation policy in buffer zones. On one hand, it recognises local people's active role in conservation and, on the other hand, it shows persistent mistrust and fear that full autonomy for local people may lead to overexploitation of resources.

Unlike these restrictions on resource management, socioeconomic development programmes have, however, created ample opportunities for local initiatives. In the Chitwan National Park buffer zone, a large number of local people have been participating in improving and constructing local physical infrastructure, educational programmes, and income-generating and savings and credit schemes. These activities have directly addressed the development needs of many local communities and there are no inherent conflicts within the conservation agenda. Increased local participation in development activities is often interpreted as increased support for conservation programmes, which is not always true.

There are, however, concerns that there is poor participation of the groups of the poor and marginalised in these programmes (Budhathoki 2004; Paudel 2005a). Many such groups have constantly opposed the programme and have not shown their interest in it. The fact that they have recently created a national network of PA-affected people called 'Protected Area People's Rights Federation' and have planned a series of protests against the PA policy indicates the exclusion of these groups by the BZ programme. The resistance and rebellion of these groups against the programme may create a crisis for the programme legitimacy (Paudel 2005a).

Similarly, stakeholders such as nongovernmental organisations, private agencies and local governments such as District Development Committees (DDCs) and Village Development Committees (VDCs) often complain that they are not given adequate spaces to contribute to the programme. Although the programme ideally talks about coordination with local government bodies, coordination is hardly sought in practice unless the same person represents both UCs and the local government body.

The park authorities, who are the key actors in the programme, have not been able to deliver the required services. Many buffer zone communities that have submitted their application for handing over community forests have become frustrated by the slow response of the authorities.[4] Several UC leaders have been frustrated by bureaucratic hassles and the transaction costs involved in the clearance of disbursed funds. For

example, some UCs in the Chitwan National Park BZ have been unable to spend even 20% of the allocated buffer zone funds (UNDP 2004). The lack of timely and quality service can be linked to the lead role given to the PA authorities, which are already loaded beyond their capacities to provide services required by the local communities. In fact, there is a serious lack of human and other resources to support the programme in the field. Moreover, the bureaucracy in PA authorities, which are historically trained in protecting the integrity of the PAs, is yet to be fully reoriented to facilitate the socioeconomic development in and around the PAs.

The gap between the legal mandate and the actual role played by the Councils provides avenues for policy learning. According to the Buffer Zone Regulations 1996, the role of Councils is limited to dividing the allocated money between the UCs within a buffer zone. In practice, however, the Councils have actively contributed to planning, monitoring and capacity building of UCs and UGs. Furthermore, they have made important policy decisions, some of which demand revision of the policy and legal aspects.

The programme appears dynamic and flexible in learning from implementation experiences and feeding the lessons back for policy improvement. For example, UCs gave undue emphasis to infrastructure development, often at the cost of other livelihood support during the early phase of the programme. The authorities then developed provision of budget ceiling on key activity areas (described earlier). Later, this became the norm for the investment of BZ funds. Similarly, the exclusion of the poor and marginalised, who should be the primary target, is being gradually realised. They were later labelled Specially Target Group (STG) and attempts have been made to address their concerns. The actual outcome of this change is yet to be realised by these groups. Similarly, there is a constant revision of the compensation policy such as the process of evaluation of loss, amount to be compensated and procedure for making a claim.

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES

The programme's outcomes can broadly be observed and summarised into four major areas: a) policy and institutional development; b) partnership in conservation; c) socioeconomic enhancement; and d) resource conservation and habitat restoration outside PAs. Development of a comprehensive set of policy documents and a range of institutions can be regarded as an important outcome of the programme. The programme has become instrumental in revising the policy and institutional frameworks for participatory conservation and collaborative management of buffer zones. It has established a norm for revenue-sharing with the local community, which contributes to the local socioeconomic development and supports compensation schemes for wildlife damage to human life and property.

The Buffer Zone Management Regulations 1996 and the Buffer Zone Management Guidelines 1999 were in the process of review at the time of writing this article. The review is expected to provide more power to the local people's institutions. According to the new provision, buffer zone community forests can be handed over to UGs; current restrictions on management and use of biomass, particularly drift wood, are likely to be relaxed; and the role of the Council will be further clarified and elaborated. However, as these review exercises are largely limited within the techno-bureaucratic policy-making circle, without meaningful access to wider stakeholder groups, this is less likely to bring any desirable change in the fundamental relations between the PA authorities and the local communities. While the efforts of people-oriented conservationists are appreciated, the policy process is still out of the reach of the local people, particularly the disadvantaged groups. However, in the context of growing local voice through citizens' networks,[5] rights activists and other civil society organisations, people's interests are expected to be better reflected in the ongoing debate on reviews of the buffer zone policy.

Development of partnership for nature conservation between the PA authorities and the local communities is the second major outcome of the programme. The partnership is evident in sharing park incomes, in the management of buffer zone forests, and in controlling poaching and other illegal activities in PAs. As per the legal provision of allocating half of the PA income, a sum of NRs. 98.37 million was disbursed from four PAs (Chitwan, Bardia, Langtang and Sagarmatha) in fiscal year 2003/04 (DNPWC 2005:59). Recently a provision has been made to allocate a minimum of 10% of this amount as compensation for wildlife damage (e.g. NRs. 25,000 for the loss of human life, 25% of the real cost for the loss of livestock and an amount equal to the cost of seeds in case of crop damage). Given the large-scale damage from wildlife depredation, including human causalities, the amount is too small, and local people have complained of false promises made by the programme. Responding to the widespread opposition from local communities, the Council of Chitwan National Park has recently doubled the amount of compensation.[6] For most other PAs, however, there is a severe resource constraint to compensate for losses. External financial support to top up the internally generated funds may help better compensate these losses.

Increased partnership between PA authorities and the local people is observed in anti-poaching campaigns. For example, groups of local youth have been supported to launch anti-poaching awareness campaigns in the buffer zone of Chitwan National Park. In addition, external support agencies have found favourable policy and legal frameworks for collaborative conservation initiatives and have been involved in the capacity-building of BZ institutions, supporting not only community forestry but also income-generating and rural development activities in buffer zones. The partnership with local governments, however, is not very promising as they do not realise their complementary roles.

Enhanced socioeconomic condition of the local people is the third outcome of the programme. The programme trained local people in leadership skills and income-generating activities and as nature guide. In some cases, women and ethnic minorities have also benefited from the programme (UNDP 2004). Local peoples' access to financial resources has been increased through mobilisation of funds by savings and credit groups. Community savings in seven buffer zones was almost Rs.80 million in 2005 (DNPWC 2005:60). The mobilisation of savings has helped reduce dependence on local moneylenders who charge very high interest rates. Over 60% of the households in these buffer zones have benefited from this scheme (UNDP 2004:24). There are, however, two major issues: i) sustainability of such schemes; and ii) proper investment of these savings to maximise returns.

Improved ecological condition of the area outside PAs can be regarded as the fourth outcome of the programme. Buffer zone forest cover has increased as a result of community forestry, private plantation, wetland management and soil conservation, habitat protection, stall-feeding promotion, etc. Moreover, promotion of biogas installation and improved stoves has successfully been launched in Chitwan and Bardia with installation of almost 3,500 biogas plants between 1996 and 2003. These plants have reduced over 80% of fuelwood consumption of the involved households. While biogas beneficiaries are large or middle class farmers, support for the improved cooking stove, which saves one-third of fuelwood use, is popular among poor households (CARE/Nepal 2003). As many conservationists have for long been advocating for moving away from the existing narrow conception of PA management to landscape conservation (Budhathoki 2003), the programme has been successful in expanding the conservation agenda beyond the PA boundaries. It has been successful in promoting the discourse that conservation and development should, and could, go together. The BZ institutions and their leaders now appreciate the link between conservation and development and have shown their willingness and commitment to conservation activities.

EMERGING ISSUES AND LESSONS LEARNT

During last ten years of the implementation of the BZ programme plan, some pertinent issues have emerged, especially in the area of policy and institutional arrangements, social inclusion, development priorities, forest management and revenue sharing. First, BZ institutions are neither legally empowered nor professionally well equipped. The responsibilities delegated to UGs, UCs and Councils are often not complemented by enough rights. Similarly, their capacities for planning, implementation and monitoring development activities have not been adequately built up. This is particularly crucial in the context of cumbersome bureaucratic procedures and demand for standard documents by the authorities, which often has a disempowering effect on local communities. In fact, there lies a huge challenge of transforming these institutions from state-sponsored, PA authority-dependent and passive recipient to more autonomous, professionally competent and proactive institutions. The recent initiative to revise the buffer zone regulations is expected to address some of these issues.

Second, the programme has largely failed to benefit the poor and marginalised. The indigenous people, *dalits*, the poor and women are inadequately represented in BZ institutions. A study of four PAs in the Terai shows that over 30% *dalits*, 10% ethnic groups and 5% other caste groups are still excluded from user groups (UNDP 2004:25). The scenario deteriorates along with the institutional hierarchy, particularly in UCs and Councils. There are only one woman and one *dalit* members out of the 144 members of Councils in four Terai PAs. The poor and *dalits* are marginalised even in mobilising community funds. There are contested interpretations of this marginalisation. Some argue that the elite capture, as argued by Johnson (2001), is a common feature in rural development programmes. The programme, and even the creation of PAs, has nothing to do with the widespread social inequalities and marginalisation of the poor, indigenous peoples and *dalits*. Instead, these social disparities are the products of the wider socioeconomic and political processes, which are beyond the control of the programme. Others, however, argue that PAs (and buffer zones for this matter) have contributed to aggravating inequalities (Paudel 2005b). In case of the programme, the strategic mobilisation of BZ institutions and PAs' funds in garnering local support for conservation may have resulted in inadequate attention to the issue of elite capture. Persistent marginalisation of resource-poor groups from the benefits of conservation is a challenge to reduce park-people conflict in the long term.

Third, contrary to the essence of the idea of the Integrated Conservation and Development Programme, the BZ programme, particularly in its early phase, adopted the conventional Integrated Rural Development Programme model. For example, an analysis of fund disbursement in Chitwan between 1996 and 2003 shows that over 73% of the funds went to physical infrastructure while only 3.3% went to skill development and income generation-related activities (UNDP 2004:35). However, the investment in road, electrification or construction of buildings has neither directly supported poor people's livelihoods nor contributed to forest resource regeneration in buffer zones. Similarly, PAs with minimal flow of tourists, and therefore with little income, have not been able to support these activities.

Finally, the community forestry programme in buffer zones is facing a paradox. On the one hand, the slow response to pending applications of community forestry has discouraged many local communities. Furthermore, the legal and institutional provisions of community forestry are not strong enough for local institutions to function as autonomous and perpetual local institutions for managing community forests. On the other hand, wildlife-related incidents have increased due to good regeneration and extended habitat in areas where community forests are being managed.

LESSONS LEARNT

Three major lessons can be drawn from Nepal's BZ programme. First, Nepal's conservation policies and practices have an inbuilt adaptive approach, i.e. learning and improvement. Despite the tendency to follow the top-down approach to policy process, a number of issues have been addressed in the course of implementation. These include the concept of STG to specifically target disadvantaged groups; provide a budget ceiling to better address the priority areas and change in the UC formation process to establish better links between the BZ institutions. Learning from the field-based implementation experiences and feeding them into policy responses to any emerging issues is the key to any successful programme.

Second, this case compels us to question the traditional emphasis on policy statements. Instead, we emphasise that the policy process is an inherently political process, which influential actors often misinterpret to modify the conservation outcomes in their own favour. The promotion of community forestry, power enjoyed by the Councils and expenditure ceiling under different headings by PA wardens and UC leaders show that policy statement is a weak determinant of conservation outcomes. In all these instances there have been constant challenges and negotiations with the techno-bureaucratic domination in the programme. This case indicates that, having good policy provision is not sufficient in itself and emphasis must be given to the relative influence of actors during the promotion of particular interests, reinterpretation and negotiation.

Third, the experience of Nepal's BZ programme shows the fallacy of the participatory approach, which warns us of the danger of hiding huge inequalities in the ability, resources and opportunities of different groups under the rubric of participatory conservation. The 'participatory process' in decision-making, by encouraging group consensus, has the subtle effect of hindering any opposition voices. The elite capture of the programme and poor participation of marginalised groups in the programme can be attributed to the ignorance of local social differentiation on the part of the programme. However, the differentiation in terms of class, caste, ethnicity and gender is gradually being recognised. The policy has now clearly identified poor and indigenous peoples as STGs and additional consideration have been given to support their livelihoods.

CONCLUSION

The BZ programme is an important intervention in Nepal's journey towards participatory conservation. The sharing of PA income with the BZ communities, provision of decentralised resource management by BZ institutions, and focus on integrated conservation and development can be conceptualised as co-management of buffer zones. The programme has opened up spaces for local people to participate in conservation activities through a range of institutional arrangements such as UGs, UCs and Councils. Neighbouring communities in and around PAs are engaged in various integrated conservation and development activities through BZ institutions.

Conservation benefits have been shared with local communities by redistributing 50% of the PA income in buffer zone areas. The funds are being used to support projects for socioeconomic development, compensating against loss of life and property caused by wildlife, and for conservation activities. As the paper has shown, the programme has made an important achievement in areas such as local infrastructure improvement, savings with the local groups, etc. Similarly, availability of grass, fodder and fuelwood has also improved due to effective management of forests and other natural resources in buffer zones.

In spite of these important achievements, the programme shares some shortcomings such as elite capture, poor participation of marginalised groups, undue focus on infrastructure, and little improvement in income and employment of the poor. The programme has, however, shown a learning-based approach and several strategies have

been changed in the course of implementation. Similarly, the programme has developed specific responses to some of the identified problems such as exclusion of the poor and marginalised, and over-emphasis on infrastructure.

One of the key features of the programme is that it was developed and implemented by the conservationists primarily working for the government. While it is an important step for seeking local participation in conservation, it has not resolved the existing unequal power relations of between park authorities and local communities. Much of the recent debate on restructuring the PA management are in fact around the issue of fair distribution of roles, responsibilities and authority between these key stakeholders of BZ management. The framework of partnership brought by the BZ programme can be expanded and modified to address many of the problems associated with PA management.

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[1] Nepal's buffer zones (BZs) are conceived as sustainable development zones, co-managed by protected area (PA) authorities and local communities to ensure sustained flow of biomass to meet local needs and to enhance local livelihoods so that it ultimately reduces pressure on PA (Sharma and Shaw 1996). They are legally defined as the 'areas surrounding parks or wildlife reserves' (HMGN 1993) and include forestlands, wetlands, pasturelands, human settlements, and farmlands (Budhathoki 2004).

[2] A series of focused group discussions (FGD) were organised as part of situation analysis by the Sustainable Forest Management Task Force formed by the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation in early 2007. Some of these FGD revealed ongoing physical, mental and even sexual harassment by officials, mainly by the Army around the PAs.

[3] The headings include community development activities (30%), conservation programme (20%), income generation and skill development (20%), conservation education (10%) and administration (10%).

[4] Personal communication with Bishnu Lamsal, chairperson of the *ad hock* committee of proposed buffer zone community forests in Nawalparasi district (Kawasoti March, 2006).

[5] Recently, local people around some protected areas have formed a national network called 'protected area people's federation' to express their concerns and promote their interests within the conservation programme.

[6] Personal communication with Krishna Bhurtel, chairperson of buffer zone council, Chitwan National Park, Nepal.