

## **O23 Case Study Report**

# **Sansaridanda CFUG**

## **Chautara Sangachokgadhi- 8, Sindhupalchok**

### **Objective 2 (EnLift 2)**

Shyam Bhandari  
Sarada Tiwari  
Maniram Banjade  
Krishna K Shrestha  
Shrabya Timsina

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## Executive Summary/Abstract

Community Forestry (CF) in Nepal has received global attention for its improvement of legal frameworks concerning the decentralization of planning, governance and inclusion in forest management. However, the knowledge, realization, acceptance and effective implementation of opportunities for decentralisation differs among individual community forests and their governing bodies in Nepal. Proper understanding of the existing practices and progress achieved by the governing bodies of CF, in compliance with national policies and acts, is crucial to the comprehension of issues and room for improvement in the governance and management of participatory forests. Recognizing this significance, this case study has been prepared to provide insights into the situation and advancements happening in Sansaridanda Community Forest Users' Group (CFUG) of Sindhupalchok district, a research site of the EnLiFT 2 project. This report is based on primary information collected through field visits, observation of meetings and general assembly, 9 Key Informant Interviews (KII), 1 cluster meeting including local governments and 1 interaction with representatives of the Executive Committee (EC) (including all its female members). Secondary information sources include the CFUG's Constitution, Operational Plan, audit reports and meeting minutes.

Sansaridanda CF, with an area of 96.59ha, was handed over to the community in 2059/08/05. The major species featured are *Pinus patula*, *P.roxburghii* and *Schima wallichii*. Forest management activities like thinning, bush cleaning, pruning, forest fire maintenance and weeding are carried out according to the CF's Operational Plan (OP). No activities other than those mentioned in the OP can be conducted. The current OP of Sansaridanda CF was prepared after reviewing the prior OP and identifying issues and opportunities with a group of local leaders. It has a validity of 10 years. The revised OP follows the Thinning Guideline of Pine (2064), adopting selection and shelterwood silvicultural systems for forest management. It is clearer and more detailed in terms of information on forest condition, management and benefit-sharing system, with provisions for forest fire management, biodiversity conservation and water source protection activities. In addition, the OP has provisions for community development activities, pro-poor and women-oriented activities for income-generation and skill-development as well as subsidies in timber and forest products for the poor. The OP also includes information on the number of households belonging to different well-being ranks. Even though the Constitution is supposed to contain details of the well-being ranks of every household in the CFUG, this vital information is missing. The EC didn't notice this during the approval of the revised Constitution. However, it does include other socio-economic information of users along with the roles and responsibilities of the EC, regular events of CF and do's and don'ts in the forest.

Agriculture and livestock rearing are the main sources of income for the users. Some of them also sell home-made alcohol and receive remittance income from household members that have migrated away for work. They collect timber, firewood, fodder, grass, leaf litter and charcoal from the forest. However, the dependency of users on forest has decreased these days in comparison to the past. People have started using LPG gas for cooking instead of firewood. Furthermore, the demand for firewood for the preparation of alcohol and cattle-feed is increasingly fulfilled by trees on their private lands. The convenience and efficiency of hand-driven tractors has reduced the rearing of cattle in the community leading to reduced dependency on grass, fodder and leaf litter from the forest. However, the forest has become the ultimate resource to depend on during disasters such as the 2015 earthquake, after which the demand of timber was high because of reconstruction activity.

The EC is the governing and decision-making body of the CFUG. The EC of Sansaridanda CFUG is composed of 11 representatives with 45% representation of women. It consists of representatives from Chhetri, Janajati and Dalit groups. However, there are few men members educated in the EC and they have been engaged in EC since long. This seems to be due to the low interest of educated youths on CF and their migration to urban areas for education and work. Conducting regular meetings is one of the major responsibilities of the EC. However, there seems to be a fluctuation in the frequency of meeting events of Sansaridanda CFUG, ranging from up to 8 meetings within a period of 5 months to no meetings at all for 8 straight months during the COVID-19 crisis. Meetings were more frequently conducted during the time of timber sales. Similarly, the GA of Sansaridanda CFUG was found to be inclusive, as demonstrated by the participation of more than 51% of HHs. The GA is conducted with the participation of various other stakeholders (DFO, Local Government, neighbour CFUGs, and others). Financial transactions are made transparent by sharing audit reports in the GA. Also, the revision of the OP and constitution, preparation of harvest plans and annual activity plans, and budget allocation are done during the GA. The budget was systematically allocated: 25% for CF development, 30% for community infrastructure development, 35% for pro-poor activities and 10% for institutional development by the CFUG. The performance of the 5-membered tole committees formed in 2064 were deemed passive, and ineffective in connecting the CF users to the EC. Therefore, the committees have been reduced to 3 representatives, with the expectation that they participate in the EC meetings in order to convey the issues brought up by users and to share the decisions of the EC among users. The annual activity plans of Sansaridanda CFUG are not systematic and detailed. After orientation and support by EnLiFT 2, there was some improvement in the activity plans, such as the inclusion of budget allocation, though they still lack detail. However, the activities were not implemented due to the prolonged COVID-19 lockdown.

The CFUG has been receiving technical support from the DFO in the preparation/revision of the OP and Constitution. Other than this, they also support the preparation of annual plans and participate in CF-related events and the GA. Similarly, the local government has been providing support in decision-making and attempting to collaborate in development activities. However, due to time differences in planning cycles and a lack of matching funds, there is no cooperation between CFUG and LG during planning. FECOFUN connects the CFUG to national campaigns and other events. Finally, the EnLiFT 2 project is supporting the CFUG through the establishment of silvicultural research plot, preparation of harvest plans, and orientations and workshops for visioning and planning.

The CF has played crucial role in easing the household work of women compared to the past, due to the easy supply of forest products near the house. However, their interest towards CF-related matters, be it financial or others, seems to be low, along with their meaningful engagement in planning and decision making. Though the EC is close to meeting the provision set by Community Forestry Guideline 2014, i.e., 50% representation of women in the EC, its importance has not been well understood by the women representatives themselves. The EC consists of 45.5% of women representatives but they have less knowledge about the financial transactions of CF, procedures during timber sales and other matters of CF. The decisions of the EC seem to be male-dominated because of the passive participation of women, despite opportunities and encouragement from others. Illiteracy, household workload, lack of support in the house and lack of confidence are the main reasons for their low participation.

# Table of Contents

1.	Introduction.....	4
2.	Historical background of CFUG .....	5
3.	Operational Plan and Constitution of the CFUG .....	6
4.	Livelihood of users .....	6
5.	Forest and people relationship .....	7
6.	Existing CFUG planning and governance: Issues and opportunities.....	7
	6.1 Governing structures and their functions .....	7
	6.2 CFUG planning process .....	10
	6.3 Stakeholders role in deliberative planning.....	11
7.	Women participation and voice in CF planning .....	14
	7.1 Participation in CF Management and decision-making process .....	14
	7.2 Autonomy in HH decisions in forest governance.....	15
	7.3 Influence in Decision.....	15
	7.4 Access to and control over CF products (distribution and sale) .....	16
	7.5 Income .....	16
	7.6 Leadership.....	17
	7.7 Time .....	17
8.	Challenges and opportunities of CF planning and governance.....	18

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this case study report is to provide background information on community forestry planning and governance in Sansaridanda CFUG, as well as to identify issues and opportunities for improvement. This report forms an integral part of the activities and reporting conducted under the Planning Studio at the CFUG level, according to Objective 2 of EnLift 2. The report is prepared based on various field visits, interaction with Executive committee, women and mix group, observation of meetings and General Assembly, Key informant interviews (KII) with EC members, gender study focused KII, EnLiFT's interventions, interviews with stakeholders, and formal and informal talk with various stakeholders. We also reviewed secondary source of data such as Constitution, Operational plan, audit reports and meeting minutes of CFUG.

Sansaridanda CFUG lies in Chautara Sangachowkgadhi Municipality, Ward no. 8, occupying 96.59 hectares of forest, handed over to the community on B.S. 2059/08/05 (18 years ago). The major species include Pate salla (*P.patula*), Khote Salla (*P. Roxburghii*) and Chilaune (*Schima wallichii*). The forest is surrounded by roads from all sides, i.e., Chautara highway lies in the east side, Thulo Siruwari (Chautara-13) road lies in the south side and another road on west side of forest that runs through the villages from Irkhu and join to Thulo siruwari road at Office building of Shreechhap CFUG (see Figure 1). The forest features southern, eastern and western aspects, with slopes ranging between 15-35 degrees. This currently green and mature forest was once a denuded barren hill, restored through plantation efforts supported by the Australian Forestry Project almost 35 years ago. While most of the forest is dominated by planted pines, the west side features more of a natural mixed species composition. Broad leaved species, such as Chilaune, are also regenerating naturally underneath the Pine stands.

Currently, there are 213 households (HHs) with a total population of 1301 individuals, among which 633 are women and 668 are men. The well-being ranking status of the users of the CF shows that the majority of HHs are of medium ranking (183), while 4 HHs are rich, 13 are poor and 13 are ultra-poor. Tamang, Newar (Shrestha) and Dalits are the major ethnic groups residing in the communities. Almost 673 individuals are illiterate and the rest are literate, while an even smaller proportion are university-level graduates.

Basic facilities like primary school, local market and highway, are available within half an hour walking distance from the center of this community while other services like college, hospital, bank and district level government offices are located approximately 7 Kilometers away in Chautara, the headquarter of the district (see Map 1).



### **3. Operational Plan and Constitution of the CFUG**

The operational plan and constitution of the CFUG has been approved 4 years ago in Ashad 2074 B.S. The map of the CF area has been updated by using a GPS/GIS system and forest is divided into blocks for systematic forest management. The previous OP was valid for 5 years while the current OP has a validity of 10 years. It is written in more detail than in the past, including information on forest condition, forest management and the benefit distribution system in place. Current OP follows the Thinning Guideline of Pine (2064) for forest management. Income generation and community development activities are included in the plan to a greater extent than a traditional OP. The major objectives of the OP are

- i) Improve the condition of forest through sustainable management,
- ii) sustainable and easy supply of forest products
- iii) increase employment opportunity and reduce poverty
- iv) convert pine forest into mixed broadleaved forest.

The OP has adopted selection and shelterwood as the major forest silviculture systems for sustainable forest management. Thinning, bush cleaning and weeding are the major tending operations while forest fire management, biodiversity conservation, water source protection activities are also provisioned in the OP. The OP has envisioned pro-poor and women-oriented programs such as income generating/livelihood support, skill development (tailoring, aaran sudhar, livestock rearing, etc.) and financial or scholarship support. There are certain provisions for subsidies to poor users in timber and other forest products. Annual fee for firewood collection is Rs 50 per HH. Dry firewood collection is free while additional firewood demand, firewood from bush cleaning and timber harvest is charged at Rs 5/bhari. Water pond, drinking water and tank construction, road, school, electricity are major community development activities included in the OP. The OP was reviewed, and issues and opportunities identified with the leadership of few social elites within the community, mirroring the mechanism adopted when the CFUG was first developed.

The constitution of the CFUG is similar to most other CFUGs. It includes the roles and responsibilities of the Executive Committee (EC), monthly meetings, annual General Assembly, do's and don't in the forest, fines and penalties, and detailed socio-economic information of users. But it lacks the segregation of well-being ranking by HHs which is summarized in the OP (only class wise but not in detail). When asked why they don't have the wellbeing ranking segregation in the Constitution, they said that the Consultant who came to help developing the Constitution missed it and they didn't notice it while undertaking an approval process.

### **4. Livelihood of users**

The majority of households depends on agriculture and livestock rearing as part of their livelihoods, along with foreign remittance and selling home-made alcohol. Some of the youth are engaged in transportation/travel sector as drivers or helpers. Few people are engaged in business and service (job) sectors. Livelihoods have changed over the past decade, as people are increasingly interested in cash and hybrid crops, foreign employment

and travel sector work (increase in number of bus, micro bus and tipper drivers). From conversations and observations, it is clear that people are shifting toward cash and commercial economy from subsistence farming and forest-dependent livelihoods.

## **5. Forest and people relationship**

The major forest products from the CF are timber, firewood, fodder and grass, leaf litter, charcoal and agricultural instruments. The use of forest has significantly changed than in past. Nowadays, most of the households use LPG gas for cooking, therefore, they don't go for firewood collection on a regular basis. People use firewood for cooking khole (a kind of feed for cattle) and making local alcohol, which most people can sufficiently extract from their private lands. "We use LPG gas for cooking while firewood is used only for preparing khole and raksi (alcohol), so our dependency has been decreased than in past", a group of women said in unison. They added "We need to pay money, and need to labor or spend our time, to cut and collect firewood, which is more expensive than the cost of LPG. Once we buy LPG for Rs 1500/- it lasts for 3 months which is cheaper, cleaner and easier for us". Post earthquake, the demand for timber had increased due to reconstruction activity, but now there is low demand. Nowadays, rich households buy Sal timber for windows/door-frames from Kathmandu or local markets, while other people use timber from their own private lands as well. Due to the availability of hand-driven tractors, cattle rearing has also declined. Changed livelihoods, decreased cattle rearing, migration, foreign employment, lack of work force, increased income and availability of modern facilities has had a direct impact on forest use patterns.

## **6. Existing CFUG planning and governance: Issues and opportunities**

The Executive committee and General Assembly are the major decision-making forums of Sansari CFUG. Besides these, they have organised tole level forums in order to decentralize and ease CFUG activities. CF operational plan, constitution, annual plan, General Assembly and meeting minutes are the documents related to CF Planning.

### **6.1 Governing structures and their functions**

#### **a) Executive Committee**

The executive committee is the main decision-making forum of CFUG. The members in the committee are selected through consensus during general assembly. The executive committee is responsible for making management decisions, and organising users for community forest management, livelihood improvement and community development by mobilizing CFUG resources. It maintains all the records of the CFUG, prepares documents, submits them on behalf of the CFUG to respective authorities, conducts regular EC meetings, conducts audit and organises the General Assembly. It coordinates and collaborates with external stakeholders and users for CF activities. EC leads the revision of the constitution and OPs, prepares annual plans and implement these CF plans and programs.

The first executive committee of Sansaridanda CFUG was formed in 2059 BS. In the past, the committee had decided to conduct regular monthly meetings on the 5<sup>th</sup> of each month, in order to discuss and make decisions on emerging CFUG-related issues and plans. But now there is no fixed day for the meeting of the executive committee. However, it is observed that frequent meetings, even three-four times a month, are conducted during the time of harvesting and selling timber. Otherwise, meetings are held once in a month or two months. About 8 meetings were conducted between the time of Jestha and Ashwin of 2075, to repeatedly publish the tender notice to sell timber. Also, meetings were more frequent during the site selection and orientation of EnLiFT (3 meetings between Magh and Falgun of 2075). Otherwise, it appears meeting are conducted intermittently. An 8 month of gap was observed between the regular meetings of EC during the time of the COVID-19 crisis (from Magh 2076 to Aswin 2077).

The ECs of all CFUGs in Nepal were required to feature 33% women members in the past. But now, the Community Forestry Guidelines (2014) has set a target of 50% participation of women in the CFUG executive committees. The existing executive committee which was formed by the general assembly of 2076 is composed of 11 members among which which 6 are men and 5 are women, accounting to 45.45% women members in the EC. Among women members, one is a treasurer in the EC and the remaining four are general members. In addition, the current committee consists of representatives from Chhetri (1 member), Janajati (9 members) and Dalit (1 member) communities. The previous executive committee formed in 2072 BS was composed of 7 men members and 4 women members. Though the participation of women in the EC has increased in comparison to the past, their active participation is still lacking because of household work, poor capacity and lack of trust from their family (husband or male members) in working with men in the executive committee.

*“It is difficult to find educated women in the village to work in the EC of the CFUG, to handle office work (paper procedures and documentation) properly. Educated women either go to urban areas to seek jobs or get married. We promote women inclusion in the EC but many of them are inactive, due to engagements with household work or due to restrictions from men members of their family. Household members doubt women members when they work in the forest with men EC members.”- Mr. Ramesh Tamang, current chairperson of Sansaridada CF.*

Women speak less during the meetings and other events, despite others appreciating their participation and encouraging them to speak. Also, decisions in most activities like timber selling, forest management, etc., seem to be men dominated in this CFUG. This is happening because women rarely put their voices forward during decision-making, mostly because they lack technical and market-related knowledge.

## b) General Assembly

The General Assembly is an important and more inclusive platform for decision-making. In Sansaridanda CFUG, the general assembly is generally conducted once a year. Generally, the General Assembly is held between September to December of each year. To conduct a General Assembly, the CFUG adopts the following steps and processes:

- a. **Audit report preparation:** Executive committee meet and decide to request the auditor for an audit. The auditor prepares an audit report which is again discussed and approved by the EC.
- b. **Fixing date of General Assembly:** Firstly, an EC meeting is held to decide the date, venue and agenda of the General Assembly. Then, the notice/letter is sent to the users through tole representative committees.
- c. **Planning or preparatory meeting:** Before the General Assembly, meetings are conducted among the representatives of each tole, intellectual persons and executive committee, in order to prepare the draft of decisions or plan of activities that is to proposed and potentially approved by the GA. The interest of users is collected informally by tole representatives and submitted to the EC. During the meeting, the available funds are allocated to prioritised activities that the users have shown interest in. If there are no or little funds available, then simple and less costly activities are planned in which the voluntary contribution of local users are expected, such as for road maintenance, clearance of bushes in the forest and fire management.
- d. **General Assembly:** The General assembly is conducted in the CFUG office premises every year. The General Assembly requires the representation of 51% of HHs, in order to be held and to approve major decisions. Stakeholders are invited such as S/DFO, local government officials, FECOFUN, EC representatives from neighbouring CFUGs, representatives from schools and other local organisations, local police officers etc. The General Assembly starts with formal programs such as seating and speeches from various stakeholders. After that, the audit report is presented and the income-expenditure status is made public. The EC ask users if they have any comments on the audit report. They discuss the issues raised by the users and provide clarifications. Then, the next year's plan is presented to the users. Sometimes, they make a formal written plan and sometimes they just present some activities to the users, discuss it and agree on it through consensus. If the OP has been revised, it is also presented and approved during the GA. Overall, the major decisions and plans such as audit report, revised OP and constitutions, harvest plan, annual plan, budget allocations are discussed during the program and approved by the GA.

Through the General Assembly of 2076, the CFUG allocated available funds to community forest development activities (25%), community infrastructures development (30%), pro-poor livelihood activities (35%) and institutional development (10%). But there was no detailed plan of specific activities and projects they will use

the funds on. However, the general assembly of 2077 could not come up with plans like that of last year, because most activities planned for 2076 were still pending due to COVID-19. The meeting of the executive committee before the general assembly was also rushed this time in 2077. However, the meeting came up with plans for activities like the construction of a building for the mother's group, construction of a fire-line from Chyandada to Jalidada and construction of three forest ponds. This is the simple plan proposed to, and duly approved by the General Assembly.

### **c) Tole Committee**

Sansaridanda CFUG also has tole committees to ensure easy and two-way regular communications between the executive forum and users' forum. Tole committees of Sansaridanda CFUG were first established in 2064 with 5 members from each tole. They were provided with meeting minute books and stamp pads to maintain notes on regular activities in the tole. But since the functioning and leadership of the tole committees were not satisfactory and regular, they have now been replaced with 3 representatives from each tole after the intervention from EnLiFT2. The Executive Committee (EC) selects these three representatives from each tole. These representatives are expected to participate in the regular meetings of the EC and come up with issues and demands of users from respective toles, if there are any. The tole committee has satisfactorily facilitated two-way communication between users and the EC, and also made CFUG planning and decision-making easy. However, the tole committee has become a loose forum that needs to be upgraded to an legitimate forum in order to decentralise the decision-making and planning of the CFUG.

## **6.2 CFUG planning process**

The CFUG has its own planning process, which starts with the OP preparation. The OP is the major planning document based on which the CFUG makes its' annual plans and designs various activities. Legally, the CFUG cannot implement any activities not written in OP. Detail planning of activities is expected to be written into the OP. Even if details cannot be made available, at the least the OP should contain provisions for such activities, which can be later elaborated on through a separate plan.

The OP of Sansaridanda was revised in 2073 BS. The revised OP is valid for 10 years from 2073/74 to 2082/83 BS, whereas in the past OPs were made for 5-year periods. The decision for an OP revision was taken by the EC, and later, the OP was approved by the General Assembly. The OP and Constitution of Sansaridanda CF was revised by a private consultancy named "NRM group for Social Development", for whose services the CFUG paid Rs. 100,000. The executive committee members engaged with the consultant forestry technician(s) during the boundary survey, the inventory, and most frequently, during the OP and Constitution revision. At the tole level, tole representatives collected the socio-economic information for the OP and Constitution, discussed the major provisions such as forest management, fines, and rates of forest products. Forest management activities such as bush cleaning, pruning, fire line maintenance and construction, timber harvest are clearly spelled out in the plan. Provisions are also made other minor products and activities such as leaf-

litter collection, fodder and grass collection, firewood collection, livelihood improvement and community development, but no details are mentioned. These provisions are developed into detailed plans during the preparation of annual plans, most commonly during the General Assembly.

Sansaridanda CFUG has not been preparing its annual plans in a systematic and formally written manner. Prior to the General Assembly, a meeting is conducted in which EC members, tole representatives, intellectual persons, and other relevant stakeholders sit together and discuss the planning of forest activities. They prepare a list of activities that are provisioned for by the OP, and allocate available funds for the planning process, without which plans are not developed. If they have no funds or income, then they propose urgent forest management activities that can be conducted with voluntary support from users. They actively allocate the budget and propose various activities if they have some income. For example, in 2019, they had income from timber sales and were able to make income of about Rs 2.2 million which they have allocated budget for various activities following the CFD guideline 2071 BS. They had allocated 25% of funds to community forest development activities, 30% to community development, 35% to pro-poor livelihood activities and 10% to institutional development. However, they didn't make any separate detail plan for these activities, rather this was only written as a decision in the GA minute. They also hadn't specified the activities under those headings. The allocation of budget was result of the orientation of EnLiFT conducted before the General Assembly. However, the plan was not implemented because of the prolonged lockdown because of COVID-19 pandemic. In short, the CFUG planning process is largely dependent on the availability of financial resources. If they have the funds, they conduct planning process, otherwise, they will simply conduct activities based what is detailed in the OP or through decisions made by the EC meeting or GA. In this case, there is no fixed schedule of planning, it is performed whenever necessary.

In 2019, the EnLiFT 2 project prepared a silviculture research and harvest plan which was annexed to the OP through an amendment. A meeting was organized with the EC and the EnLiFT team conducted an orientation on the research program. The EC of Sansari decided to collaborate with EnLiFT. The EC members and users were consulted at various steps during the preparation of this research plan. EC members and users were engaged during measurement, research plot establishment, boundary and tree marking. Finally, the research plan was endorsed by the GA and was approved by the DFO.

The CF rules, rates and activities are prepared by the EC in consultation with the users through tole meetings and EC meetings. This is presented at the General Assembly, then revised, finalized and approved based on users' consensus.

### **6.3 Stakeholders role in deliberative planning**

Sansaridanda CFUG conducts its' activities in collaboration with several stakeholders. Local Government or ward office, sub-division/division forest office (S/DFO), FECOFUN, Timber traders and some of the I/NGOs such as EnLiFT/ForestAction are currently the major

external stakeholders of the CFUG. Previously, various agencies such as UNDP, JICA, WFP and RED Cross supported this community in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake, with various reconstruction and livelihood programs. Now there are no such significant projects or organisations working in the area, other than EnLiFT.

Different stakeholders have different roles and have supported the CFUG in various activities. Generally, S/DFO have a role in monitoring and supervision as well as providing technical support during OP preparation, annual plan preparation, guiding them in forest management activities, providing nursery seedlings, providing or inviting them to trainings and orientations, etc. Likewise, the local government (ward office) has invited them to collaborate in development activities in the form of fund-matching. The Ward chairperson reiterated the same message at the General Assembly of Sansaridanda CFUG, and a ward level CFUG meeting too. FECOFUN support the the CFUG with advocacy of their CF rights, orientation on various forest related issues and networking. EnLiFT/FA has supported the CFUG on visioning and planning, forest management activities, capacity building for tree harvesting, improved governance and timber market linkage.

#### **a) Sub-division/Division Forest Office**

CFUG has coordinated with Sub-Division Forest Office during the revision of the Constitution and the preparation of the Operational Plan. The DFO has a role in the approval of the OP and Constitution. The annual plan, parts of the OP concerning ecotourism and timber harvest planning, are prepared by the CFUG with support from the Sub-division and are approved by the DFO. Generally, Forest Staffs guide them on what they can include in the OP and Constitution, what activities they can plan and what they can't in the CF. The CFUG plans its annual activities during the General Assembly based on the OP. S/DFO staff participate in this program and guide them in planning activities for that Fiscal Year.

#### **b) Local Government**

Most of the meetings and events of this CFUG have been conducted with the participation of representatives from the local government. However, their relationship is limited to participation in the programs but there is no meaningful cooperation in planning, budgeting and joint activities with the local government. The CFUG coordinates with the LG in limited areas only. The CFUG requested a recommendation letter from Ward office to harvest timber and paid 10% tax from the sale of the timber.

The local government has mentioned that it wants to collaborate with CFUGs. The Ward Chairperson is a CF leader as well. He had served as the Secretary in the Executive committee of another CFUGs of the Chautara-8. Therefore, he is positive towards CFUGs and wants to collaborate with CFUGs in community development activities. He said he had called all the CFUGs for the partnership, to prepare plans and submit the matching fund activities. However, he complained that no one has approached him and submitted such proposals to him yet. When CF leaders were asked about this issue, the Chairperson of

Sansaridanda CFUG said that the differences in planning cycles and the uncertainty of CFUG resources/funds limit their ability to plan jointly with the local government. The Local Government has a regular planning process and they finalize it before the end of the Fiscal Year (by mid-June). But, since the CF planning is based on funds generated through timber harvest and sale, it is not regular and, most of the times, it is uncertain. Generally, their planning takes place in Sept-Dec for that Fiscal Year. Secondly, the LG mobilizes funds for Janajati and women's development, poverty reduction and community development activities, while community forest development activities comes at the bottom of their priorities.

*Sansaridanda CFUG a said, "The planning of the CF can't be done in collaboration with the local government because of the resource uncertainty of our CF. If we could sell timber before Ashad, then we can have some funds in our account and can matching funds to Ward level planning. But we can't show the funds to them because of uncertainty and problems while selling timber. Therefore, we couldn't plan jointly with the local government".*

Having said this, both CFUG and LG admit that there is a huge potential in collaborating with the local government, such as in community and forest development activities, fire control and awareness raising, human-wildlife conflict management, ecotourism, livelihood and skill enhancement programs, and forest-based enterprise establishment.

#### **c) FECOFUN**

FECOFUN advocates for the rights of CFUGs and invites them to participate in various campaigns. Also, they invite them to celebrate FECOFUN day and sometimes to plantation campaigns or interaction programs, though this doesn't happen frequently. Sansaridanda CFUG invites FECOFUN regularly to the General Assembly but not regularly in other programs. In other occasion, they invite her in the capacity of Chairperson of neighbour CFUG; Shreechhap CFUG which is adjacent to the Sansari CFUG. There were no specific collaborations found with FECOFUN, in terms of joint project planning, design and implementation.

#### **d) EnLiFT project**

EnLiFT 2 has been supporting the CFUG in forest management, silvicultural plot establishment and measurements, harvest plan preparation, supporting the harvest process, documentation, visioning and planning of CFUG, various meetings, the General Assembly and orientations on forest-related agendas. EnLiFT has conducted tole meetings, orientation programs, visioning and planning workshop, EC level meetings and invited Executive members to local or district level workshops and meetings. EnLiFT has conducted two days visioning and planning workshop to prepare the strategic plan. The strategic plan has been drafted but is yet to be finalized due to COVID-19 crisis, limited mobility and transition of staffs. Likewise, EnLiFT has supported the CFUG with annual plan preparation and timber harvest plan preparation.

## **7. Women participation and voice in CF planning**

### **7.1 Participation in CF Management and decision-making process**

There have been several activities such as cleaning of shrubs and bushes, plantation, timber harvesting and regeneration promotion, thinning of the canopy and cleaning the forest floor. The participation of men and women users depends on the nature of work involved in the forest management activities. Mostly women participation is observed in activities like clearing of shrubs and bushes in the forest, plantation, clearing forest floor, cutting branches of felled trees and so on, while men participate in timber harvesting and transportation. In case of community development activities outside the CF, women participate more in relatively light and less skill requiring tasks, and men participate in heavy and skill demanding tasks. However, the participation of women in decision-making level is low.

The Executive Committee of Sansaridanda CFUG is composed of 11 members of which 5 members are women handling one vital post of treasurer and remaining as general members. Though, the Community Forestry Guidelines (2009) has set out the target of 50% participation of women in the CFUG executive committees, these opportunities are not properly understood by women themselves; and their participation in the executive committee appears to come more out of compulsion than desire. “Most of the women in the executive committee are kept without their full interest”, said the Chairperson of Executive Committee of Sansaridanda CFUG.

On the ground, the participation of women is seen as very important, because their dependency on and interaction with forest is very high. But they occupy less of a role in executive and decision-making positions. Though one of the vital posts has been reserved for women, their role in handling the responsibilities of these positions is very low. Similar is the case in Sansaridanda CFUG. Though, the committee consists of about 45% women members, they don't have control over their responsibilities despite their access to official documents and procedures, because of their illiteracy. “Since I cannot read and write properly, all the transactions details are maintained by vital men members (Dai haru) of this committee.”-said Dilmaya Shrestha, Treasurer of Sansaridanda CFUG. She was not even confident enough to explain the income and expenditure of the CF at the general assembly. To assist and to overtake the responsibility are different things.

The government of Nepal has put its effort into protecting women's right and promoting gender equality in the forestry sector through its national legal framework. Community forestry, in addition, has played a very important role in addressing gender equity in legal strategies governing the forestry sector (FAO and RECOFTC, 2015). Currently there are more than 1,000 CFUGs managed solely by women and showing progress in maintaining good governance in them. There has also been improvement in forest status and financial status of those CFUGs (Buchy and Rai, 2008; Jhaveri, 2013). On the other side, in CFUGs like Sansaridanda, gender inequality still exists in HHs level and there is a lack of leadership, knowledge, confidence and interest in most of the women users towards management of their CF and CFUG.

## **7.2 Autonomy in HH decisions in forest governance**

Though the out-migration of men members of the nuclear family has led to an increase the participation of women members in CF-related events due to greater autonomy in decision makings. But it has not increased their access to the executive committee of CFUGs because of increased workload and stress (Lama et al., 2017). There is a similar case in Sansaridada CFUG where the availability of both men and women members in a household shapes women's participation in different events of the CFUG like general assemblies, meetings, etc. The women members of EC attend meetings and general assembly after informing their family members. With regards to general users, if men members are available at home, men participate and if they are not available, then women participate after informing the family. "We from the committee invite at least one member from each HH, therefore it depends on availability of men and women member of HH. If we had invited at least two members, with one women members compulsory, to the events, then there might have been a greater participation of women"- Chairperson of EC. Also, the participation of both men and women members from the households depends on the season of work and workload of the house. If both men and women members are available at the house, and workload is more, then usually men members participate in the CFUG's activities. In the case that only women member is available, she needs to complete all the HH works before attending the activities.

When only men members participate, there is less of a discussion among family members about the events but if women member have participated, they discuss with their families because their husband or other family members ask about the events. From this aspect also, the participation of women in CFUG-related activities seem to be important. The support from the family members in household work, different orientations and trainings for women groups, *praudh sikshya* classes to teach illiterate women how to read and write could enhance women's participation in the CFUG.

## **7.3 Influence in Decision**

Women are key forest users with a major stake in forest governance but their engagement in decision making level is low. The effects of traditional gender norms, institutional requirements that privilege literacy, and men's greater networking skills can still be observed among the women of Sansaridada CFUG. Most of the women users and women general members of the CFUG don't want to be engaged in the executive committee as vital members because of the lack of self-confidence in handling the responsibilities. They believe the reason for this is their illiteracy. The Secretary said-"I am about to receive a pension from this post. It's been nearly 18 years that I have been handling the post of secretary in this EC. We want to replace myself with women member in this position but since the post requires a person who can read and write properly, no women wants to be in this post." When questioned, "Why don't you include educated daughters in the EC?" the Chairperson replied-"We educate our daughters here, but if they get married when they are in EC, then we need to search for other members in her place, which is difficult. But, daughter-in laws are permanently here in this place. Therefore, we have not given much priority to daughters for the EC. Also, even though the daughter-in-laws are quite educated than in the earlier days, they do not live in village."

#### **7.4 Access to and control over CF products (distribution and sale)**

Women are responsible for the collection and management of forest products essential to their daily household lives. Women collect leaf litter, firewood, fodder and grass from the Sansaridanda CF. They can collect grass and leaf litter on any day they require it whereas in the case of dried firewood, they can collect it only on Friday and Saturday of every week. There is no cost to collect any of these products. In addition, the core area of Sansaridanda CF is restricted for grazing. There are no any women-centric provision for access to specific forest products.

According to the EC, more than 75% of women users have received at least one of the trainings. Even the annual income of the CF was allocated to different skill development activities for women. In order to encourage women towards business, the EC supported them in making candy of Lapsi and juice of fruits and flowers (rhododendron). In addition, the EnLIFT project has also played a crucial role in increasing CF-related awareness at the user's level. But no women have tried to utilize forest products as an entrepreneurial opportunity. They are just collecting forest products for substantial needs of their households.

Despite this, women are often ignored at the decision-making process of community level natural resource management institutions (Leone, 2013). On the other side, the opportunities accessible to women through several gender-responsive policies and strategies are not implemented effectively in many CFUGs.

#### **7.5 Income**

The section 22 of Forest Act 2076 states that 25% of annual income of community forest, as per the operational plan, should be spend on forest development, conservation and management activities and 50% of remaining income should be spend on activities of poverty alleviation, women empowerment and enterprise development in collaboration with the local government. The annual income of Sansaridanda CFUG is around 8-9 lakhs and this income has been mobilized in activities like drinking water supply, forest management, goat rearing, women development activities, road construction, etc. There is less collaboration with local government while making decisions on fund mobilization because the decision making time on funds of local government and CFUG differs.

There is still less participation of women in the decision-making of fund mobilization. Though those women who are in the EC have direct access to decision making, they provide less inputs. If they keep their voice on the floor of forum, their issues and points are addressed by the committee. "The idea of supporting HHs for goat farming was provided by me which has been addressed in the committee's decision."-said Gyan Kumari Shahi Thakuri, member of the EC of Sansaridanda CFUG. But the women users don't even keep in mind the income and expenditure of CF. "The details are presented in GA but we forget the details before reaching home"- said Sanita Thakuri, user of Sansaridanda CF. However, they can put their issues forward at the gathering of tole committee. The tole committee representatives play a role of mediator between EC and the users.

## **7.6 Leadership**

It was found that women who are in the executive committee, though uneducated, are engaged in other groups as well, like the women's group, road development committee, school development committee, etc. This is because of gender-responsive rules while forming the committees. The general women users are less engaged in such groups because they think that they cannot perform their roles and responsibility properly as they are illiterate and also they cannot give proper time to those groups due to household workload. It is clear that those who are quite forward in the community, in spite of their education level, are selected by different forums including the EC of CFUG. But in most of the forums, women just attend the meetings and circulate information with the local users and beneficiaries. Their role in decision making level is still low despite their engagement in different social and economic groups. Some of them also want to leave these positions instead of upgrading it because of the burden of their household work and they think that they are uneducated and cannot handle any new leadership positions.

Though, such women are offered to speak at different public events, they only feel easy speaking in forums of the women's group and women health volunteers' group. Though they are appreciated when they speak in front of both women and mixed groups, in mixed group discussion, many women usually sit quiet and agree on what men members explain.

## **7.7 Time**

Most of the HHs of Sansaridada CFUG have had trees in their own land, since long ago. They used to depend on their private forest for their daily household lives. Therefore, women in the Sansaridanda CFUG have not realized any difference in workload due to the emergence of the CF. But the reduction in livestock rearing in HHs level has reduced some of their work burden. Whereas, those who don't have sufficient trees on their private lands have realized the reduction in workload after the formation of the CF and receiving access to it for its resources. The conversion of bare land into a forest area has facilitated women users with easy access to the resources they need in the daily lives of their household.

The conservation and management of the CF is directly related to the dependency of women in community forest. The higher the dependency, the more concerned they are towards CF matters. The forest management activities in Sansaridanda CF are carried out as per the plan made by executive committee. But some women participate in those activities and some do not. Those whose needs are fulfilled from private forests and are less dependent on the CF rarely participate in forest management activities of CF. However, those who are highly dependent on the CF for daily forest based needs, participate more in those activities.

The access for women to the CF has made the forest management work easier. The collection of leaf litter, dead/dried firewood, fodder and grasses from the floor, and so on are such activities which directly help in the management of forests. The conservation of forest has increased the availability of forest either in CF or PF while in the other hand the reduced dependency due to the changing livelihood has reduced the work load, effort and time of women.

## **8. Challenges and opportunities of CF planning and governance**

The major challenges and opportunities in the CFUG include:

- Time difference between local government planning and CF planning makes it difficult for joint planning and collaboration.
- Resource (fund) uncertainty of CFUG limits CFUG planning and the ability to gather matching funds to collaborate with local government planning.
- Migration and changing forest-people relation has decreased the interest of users in CF activities. Users unavailability due to migration, time poverty due to engagement in cash earning activities (opportunity costs are high) and decreasing forest dependency has weakened active forest management and governance (meeting and General Assembly) activities. The transaction costs, therefore, are high and CFD guidelines requirements are too demanding.
- The migration of users has also hampered inclusiveness in the EC.
- Changing contexts, migration and decreasing dependency has impacted the CFUG planning and decision-making process.
- Work load of women and poor capacity (in skill and education compared to men) has limited the role of women in CF forums.
- Patriarchal mentality of men members of the family and EC is another challenge to women inclusion, empowerment and participation in CF planning and decision making.