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Community Forestry and Local Level Planning for Food Security and Livelihoods

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Key messages

- Planning of community forestry (CF) and local governments (LG), currently in silo, should be integrated for food security, livelihoods and sustainable development.
- Lack of institutional mandate, compartmentalized thinking, reluctance in resource sharing, and the absence of elected local governments have contributed to the parallel functioning of CF and LG.
- There is a good prospect of integrating these planning processes in the context of empowered local government under the new Constitution.

Introduction

The objectives of CF management today largely resemble to that of LG aimed at food security, livelihoods and sustainable development. Currently, community forest user groups (CFUGs) contribute to diverse benefits: environmental, economic, social, and institutional to local communities, and the society at large, which are also the areas that LG focuses on. However, despite these overlapping objectives, CF and LG largely operate in isolation. In this context, this study was conducted as part of EnLiFT component in understanding prospects of collaboration and cooperation between CF and LG planning to synergize the above mentioned objectives. The study is based on evidence

from ENLiFT research sites¹ in Kavre and Lamjung districts during 2013–2017 (see Figure 1). Key methods used include: i) interviews with key informants, and ii) analysis of Village Development Committee (VDC) plan and CF operational plan (OP).

Why collaborative planning between community forestry and local government?

Collaborative planning of CF and LG is preferred because:

- LG and CF function in the same geographical region(s) that have the same priorities, challenges and needs for development and livelihood enhancement.

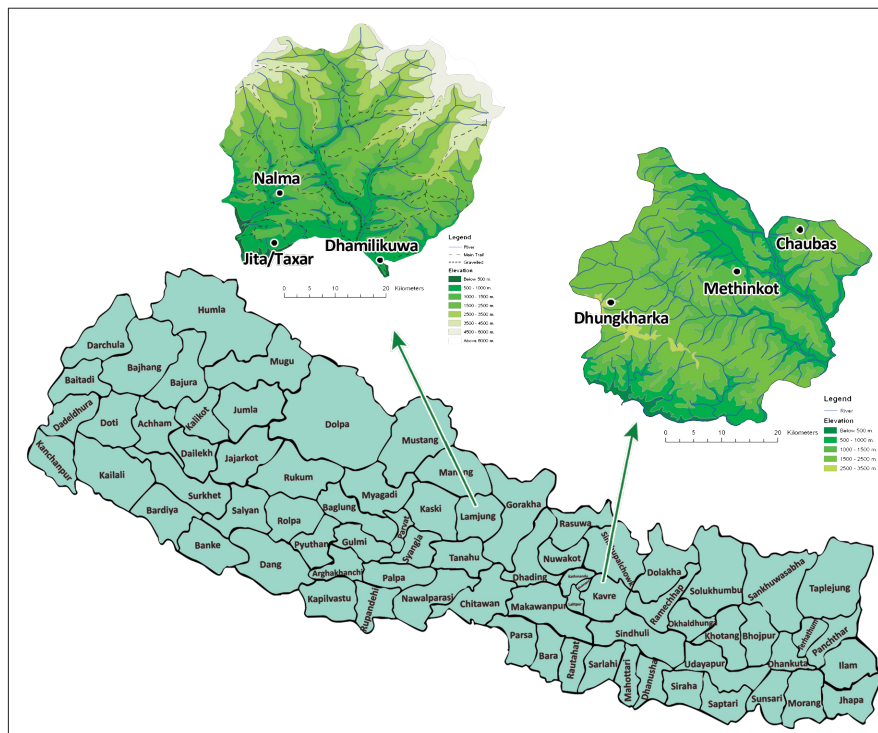


Figure 1: Study sites

- Because of the overlap in the objectives of CF and LG today, these two entities need to have a symbiotic relationship and collaborate in order to achieve the common goals.

- Holistic and integrated planning by CF and LG is imperative to achieve sustainability since this will help to draw together social, economic, environmental, cultural and institutional conditions and cross-linkages.

- The implementation of plans- CF or LG- eventually affects the livelihood of the same local communities. Hence, they ought to collaborate to come up with complimentary plans.

Despite the aforesaid overlaps, CF and LG disregard one another's plans and function in isolation. The repercussions are multiple but the solution is only one (Figure 2).

¹ EnLiFT research sites includes Fagarkhola, Kalopani and Sagarupa CFUGs in Kavre district and Lampata, Dhamilikuwa and Nalma CFUGs in Lamjung district.



Figure 2. Why is LG-CF collaboration desirable?

Improved and increased cooperation and collaboration between CF and LG in the long-run has the potential to lead to a win-win situation for both these entities. Such an integration of plans and joint implementation of activities by CF and LG is definitely desirable in the long-run.

Windows of integration between local government and community forestry planning

The development of plans of both CF and LG with regard to infrastructure development, forest-related activities, food security, and overall livelihood enhancement are mostly carried out without one another's full participation and consent. As Figure 3 depicts, the planning processes at CF and LG are different but not mutually exclusive.

The arrows between these two planning processes indicate the possible areas of overlap between the two processes. Despite areas of overlap, it was found that the no representatives from either CF or LG had participated in one another's general assemblies and/or meetings in all six study sites from years 2012 to 2016.

Why do they operate in parallel?

Ambiguities and fissures pertaining to the regulations and institutional mechanisms concerning LG and CF planning have contributed to parallel nature of planning at LG and CF levels.

- **Lack of a legal mandate**

Planning of the LG and CF take place under different regulatory and institutional regimes and there is no legal mandate for them to plan collaboratively (see Table 1).

Table 1. Regulatory mechanisms of LG and CF: Overlaps and contradictions

LG planning	CF planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA) (1999) provides the key legal foundation for local level planning. • As per the Local Body Resource Mobilization and Management Guidelines (2013), local bodies ought to integrate programs related to the environment, including environment protection and pollution control while preparing local plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CF planning is primarily guided by Forest Act (1993), Forest Rule (1995) and CF Guidelines 2009. • Some other important regulatory instruments are the CF Products Harvesting and Sale Guidelines (2014) and Financial Procedures Rules (2007) among others.



There is no legal provision that requires CFUGs to share their plan(s) to the VDC assembly, and vice versa. Naturally, because there is no functional collaboration between VDC/municipality and CF, this has resulted in duplication of many plans and activities. CFUG leaders usually have a better knowledge about LG plans but the VDC/municipality is kept in the dark about CF plans and activities.

- VDC Secretary – Chaubas, Kavre 

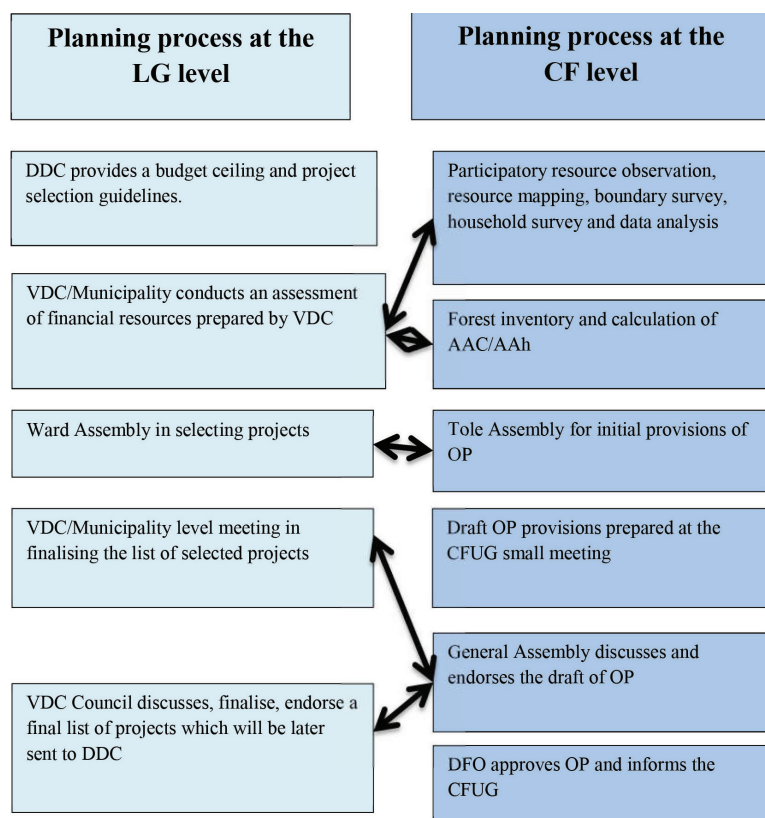


Figure 3. Comparison of planning steps at LG and CF levels

It can be inferred from Table 1 that planning at CF and LG levels are guided by different policies. However, there are **no** regulatory and/or institutional provisions that prohibits CF from planning and carrying out activities that normally fall within the jurisdiction of VDCs and/or municipalities.

Parallel nature of planning is also exacerbated by the fact that CF and LG operate in different planning cycles. The LG plans operate in an annual cycle within the budget ceiling and guidelines provided by the National Planning Commission for a specific fiscal year. The CF activities, on the other hand, are guided as per their respective OPs that are valid for a period of 5 to 10 years. OPs play a significant role in controlling the activities of the general CFUG users and in legitimizing the decisions made by the CFUGs' executive committees. Because of this multi-year validity of OPs, rigorous planning and revision of activities are not done regularly at the CF level. Subsequently, this has contributed to CF and LG functioning in a parallel mode.

• **Difference in planning cultures**

The manner in which CF and LG evolved and the cultures they embodied over time is one of the contributing factors to them functioning in a parallel mode today. The focus of LG has always been on development whilst elements pertaining to the environment and forests have generally been put on the back

burner. On the other hand, CF, since its inception, was more focused toward forest protection and management. It hasn't been very long since CF broadened its objectives to incorporate food security, livelihoods and sustainable development. This difference in cultures has contributed to development of different approaches to planning. Consequently, LG and CF are planning separately today.

Community forestry and local government planning can go together

It is of utter importance that CF and LG collaborate so that their plans complement each other and jointly fulfill the needs of the local communities. Such collaboration ensures that list of activities being planned are efficient, responsive, accountable, non-redundant and equitable – qualities that are guaranteed through participatory, inclusive, and transparent mechanisms aimed at building communication and collaboration linkages among stakeholders with (and without) common interests. Against this backdrop and in the context of empowered local government under the new Constitution, the prospect of integrating CF and LG plans looks more likely today than ever.

Evidences collected from the study sites also support the prospect of CF and LG planning together. Out of the six sites, Lampata CFUG received an amount of NRs. 115,000/- from for the purpose of capacity development (NRs. 100,000) and account management training (NRs. 15,000). These were provided for by the LG entity operating in the region. Similarly, a total of NRs. 255,000/- was invested by three CFUGs (Lampata (35,000), Aanpchaur (20,000) and Langdi Hariyali (200,000) mainly in development-related activities such as construction of roads and temples. Moreover, a comparison of the annual plan of Madhyamarga municipality and the OP of Lampata CFUG show existing overlaps and possible areas of integration in activities such as construction of roads, drinking water facilities, schools, temples, walking trails, and skill development. A similar finding was found when comparing and analyzing the OP of Aanpchaur CFUG and plan of its respective VDC

(Dhamilikuwa). Therefore, given the nature of activities in which both VDCs/municipalities and CFUGs have invested their funds in (*mainly development and capacity development*), it can be inferred that there is a scope for these two entities to work together in the long-run.

EnLIFT has identified four distinct pathways which CF is contributing to food security in the country, viz. i) income and employment; ii) forest-farm interface; iii) direct food; and iv) energy. In this context, the contribution of CF to food security is supported by evidence collected from the study sites too. For instance, forests have been vital means of income and employment for the locals in the six study areas. Investment in capacity development related activities by both CF and LG has been fundamental in fostering entrepreneurship and other varied forms of employment. Investment of LG and CF funds in activities related to bio-gas and improved cooking stoves is another example of forests contributing to the aforementioned food security pathway. In addition, CF has also contributed a great deal to supporting and improving agricultural and livestock practices. Plantation of fodder and grass species has dwindled the pressure on forests- the most significant being reduced uncontrolled grazing in public lands and community forests. Moreover, the usage of biomass collected from forests has undoubtedly had a positive impact on agricultural production and productivity. Even though CF and LG support activities that aim at improving food security and livelihoods, such activities are limited to a few cases and sites. This is because these are still low priority agenda for both CF and LG. The narrow conceptualization of forests as timber and fuelwood producer (not energy or construction

materials) can be another reason for the lack of integrated planning. Furthermore, gaps in expertise and orientation of facilitators – representatives from the VDC hardly appreciate environmental agenda whilst on the other hand, foresters do not adequately appreciate food security and livelihoods- may be another detrimental factor in facilitating cooperation between CF and LG. It is also important to note that historically, public planning did not set out to support individual households, and was limited to infrastructure development. Therefore, that practice might be getting continuity from the LG.

Recommendations

- Existing legislations ought to be revised to make communication and collaborative planning between CF and LG mandatory.
- The planning cycles of CF and LG have to be synchronized in order to promote cost effectiveness and avoid redundancy of the prevalent planning process.
- Capacity building, campaigns and dialogues between CF and LG need to be conducted in order to address the existing gaps in understanding and attitudes of CF towards LG's agenda, and vice versa.
- The contribution of CF to food security and nutrition has to be acknowledged if these agenda are to be formally integrated into both LG and CF planning.
- Reconcile local government and community forestry regulations to allow more inclusive and integrative planning of forest, livelihoods and food security related matters.

