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# Kalapani CFUG

A case study of CFUG governance, planning and gender



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# **Kalapani CFUG**

## **A case study of CFUG governance, planning and gender**

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# List of Acronyms

CF	Community Forest
CFOP	Community Forest Operational Plan
CFUG	Community Forest User Group
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease
DFO	Division Forest Office
EC	Executive Committee
EnLiFT2	Enhancing Livelihood from Improved Forest Management
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GA	General Assembly
Ha	Hectare
HH	Household
I/NGO	International/Non-Governmental Organisation
KII	Key Informant Interview
LPG	Liquified Petroleum Gas
NTFP	Non-timber Forest Product
OP	Operational Plan
PF	Private Forest
SciFM	Scientific Forest Management
S-DFO	Sub-Division Forest Office

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## Executive Summary

Kalapani CF, is located at the range of 2000 to 3000m from the sea level and have an area of 220.9 hectares. The CF was handed over to the users group in 2053 BS. The forest is composed of tree species like *Quercus semecarpifolia*, *Pinus wallichiana*, *Abies pindrow*, *Garuga pinnata*, etc. and non-timber species like *Taxus baccataa*, *Daphne bhoola*, *Juglans regia*, etc. The CF benefits 396 HHs with a total population of 832 from different ethnic groups.

The existing OP of the CFUG has adopted selection system as the major silviculture system for sustainable forest management. Other tending operations like singling, thinning, pruning, bush cleaning and provision for NTFPs plantation, forest fire management activities and conservation of biodiversity and ecologically important species as well as conservation of water sources are also included in the OP. The removal of dead, dying, decaying and diseased (4D) trees and bushes is included as climate change mitigation activities. The income from the CF is allocated as: CF development (25%), pro-poor activities (35%) and community development activities (40%) as per the OP. Certain rules have been set by the EC for harvesting forest products. For example, unless natural disasters causes a demand for timber, they can be harvested only between the months of Kartik and Jestha. Green firewood can be collected once a year during thinning, while dry firewood can be collected 3 days a week during the months of Kartik-Jestha.

The major income source of the users are agriculture, livestock-rearing and sale of dairy products. The average annual income of a HH is, 50-60,000 (from selling livestock) and 60-70,000 (from selling milk). Food crops are being highly replaced by cash crops like potato, tomato, onion and other seasonal and off seasonal vegetables. However, the increasing impact of wildlife on agricultural crops has discouraged cultivation along the edges of the CF. The dependency of local people on forest resources has changed over the years. The increasing trend of feeding cattle with straw, availability of grass and fodders in the private land, and use of LP gas and biogas have gradually reduced their dependency on CF.

The current EC of Kalapani CFUG is composed of 7 women representatives and 4 men representatives. The previous EC whose composition was cent percent from Newar community has now representations from Newar, Brahmin, Janajati and Dalit groups. The EC remains well updated on its regular and other events. The regular meetings were conducted once every month by the EC to discuss and make decisions regarding emerging CFUG related issues and plans. The participation of representatives in the regular meetings were found to have increased after the provision of Rs. 500 incentive for attending meetings (as made by the EC). Similarly, GAs of the CFUG were conducted every year. The last GA was held on 2076 B.S. The GA of the CFUG was a large forum where users, stakeholders, S/DFO, LG officials, neighboring CFUGs, and such were invited. The CFUG prepares its annual plan, summarizes the annual income and expenditure and decides on forest management activities in the GA. Tole committee formation and well-being ranking were other major activities conducted by the Kalapani CFUG. However, tole committees were not found to be in function.

The Kalapani CFUG was found to have appreciative support from the DFO, Local Government, Provincial Government and the EnLiFT project. The CFUG has received subsidy for community development activities, community building construction where CFUG is now running its administrative activities, and seedlings support for plantation from the DFO. Similarly, LG and provincial government has supported the CFUG to construct a view tower in the CF to promote ecotourism activities. Likewise, EnLiFT project has assisted them in the preparation of the OP, separation of blocks in the forest, promoted gender friendly and inclusive CFUG, raised awareness on forest and its management and so on.

The previous EC with 61.5% representation of men and 38.5% representation of women has now become an inclusive EC of 63.64% women representatives and 36.36% men representatives since 2074 B.S. The increasing trust and leadership in women has achieved the progress. About 85% of women representatives were found to have an experience of working for more than 4 years, even up to 8 year in the community forest by being involved in the executive committee. Their engagement on forest management activities including some technical tasks like selection, marking, tagging and measurement of trees as well as monitoring the FM activities has increased. Other than this, women representatives were also found to have engaged in financial transaction handling activities like collecting payments from users, be it as charge for timber or firewood, transportation charge or renewal of the user's card cost, and so on. Along with this, the EC of Kalapani CFUG was found to be able to address women and poor HHs to increase their access to forest products. There was a 50% concession in timber and firewood for single women and poor HH.

A majority of the women representatives (70%) had support from their family for their leadership in EC. Similarly, around 85% of women representatives claimed their engagement in discussions and decision making. More than 85% of women representatives were found to have their affiliation in more than three social committees.

## Introduction

The case study has been prepared to provide information on community forestry planning and governance in Kalapani 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 based on various field visits, interaction with the Executive committee and CFUG users, observation of EC and General Assembly meetings, Key informant interviews (KIIs) with EC members, gender-study focused KIIs, EnLiFT's interventions, and formal/informal interviews with external stakeholders. We also reviewed secondary sources of data such as the Constitution, Operational Plan, audit reports and meeting minutes of the CFUG.

Kalapani CFUG is situated in Dhungkharka village, Ward no. 4 of Bethanchowk Rural Municipality, Kavre district. It is the largest CFUG of the municipality, occupying 220.96 hectares of forest, divided into 5 blocks for systematic management. It was officially handed over to the community in 2053 B.S., although the CFUG was formed in 2050 BS. Major tree species include Khasru (*Quercus semecarpifolia*), Gobre Salla (*Pinus wallichiana*), Talispatra (*Abies pindrow*), Lali Gurans (*Rhododendron arboreum*), Angeri (*Lyonia ovalifolia*), Thingre Salla (*Tsuga dumosa*), Uttis (*Alnus nepalensis*) and Dabdabe (*Garuga pinnata*). NTFPs are extracted from Satuwa (*Paris polyphylla*), Dhasinghre (*Gaultheria fragrantissima*), Lauth Sallo (*Taxus baccata*), Chiraito (*Swertia chirayita*), Sughandhawal (*Valeriana jatamansi*), Lokta (*Daphne bhoulia*), Sil Timur (*Lindera neesiana*), Pakhanbed (*Bergenia ciliata*), Jatamasi (*Nardostachys grandiflora*), Okhar (*Juglans regia*), Naghbeli (*Lycopodium clavatum*), Nighalo (*Drepanostachyum falcatum* or *Himalayacalamus spp.*), lichens and mushrooms.

The forest is located at a range of 2000 to 3000 meters from the sea level. Bandevi Kalika Temple and the Kalapani water source are important religious and cultural sites situated inside the forest, and are major attractions for religious pilgrimage and ecotourism.



Currently, there are 396 households (HHs) associated with the CF, with a total population of 832 individuals, among which 409 are women and 423 are men. Tamang, Newar (Shrestha) and Khas Brahmin (Jaisi, Guragain, Timilsina and Sapkota) are the major ethnic groups residing in the communities.

The village of Dhungharkha is about 25 km. away from the town of Dhulikhel and 55 km. from the national capital of Kathmandu. Basic facilities like school, college, bank, local market, health post and the office of rural municipality are situated within half an hour walking distance from the center of this community, while other services like hospital and district level government offices are located in Banepa, which is approximately 1.5 hours ride from the community.

## Historical background of the CFUG

Kalapani CF was a national forest until 2050 BS. During that time, haphazard collection of forest products and livestock grazing caused heavily degradation. Consequently, it featured no large trees and the area was substantially bare. During the Panchayat regime, the then District Forest Office had appointed a forest guard to conserve this forest. At that time, all users' HH had to provide 1 pathi of maize to the guard so that they could harvest timber, if required, to construct their houses.

In 2050, a team of 20 - 30 students from the Institute of Forestry (IOF) in Hetauda visited the forest for a research project, along with a representative from the local range post. They advised the locals to formally conserve the forest by forming a community forest (CF). The villagers heeded the advice and on Chaitra 25, the locals formed the "Kalapani Community Forest" on 86.5 ha of land, with an executive committee of 13 members. Prem Prasad Shrestha, who is the current chairperson of Kalapani CFUG, became the first secretary of the EC, on the condition that he receive government and local support to establish a nursery and plantation in the bare patches of the forest. The range post subsequently supported him with irrigation pipes, seed trays and water sprays, and Prem Prasad Shrestha worked on the nursery for three years. Pine and other species plantation activities were conducted in the forest in 2053/54.

After forming the CFUG, the committee started collecting Rs. 5 - 10 from each users' HH in order to provide an incentive for the forest guard. When the house of the guard's son was destroyed by fire on 19 Baisakh 2051, they EC held its first meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> in order to provide timber for the reconstruction of his house. They decided to conduct meetings regularly on the 15<sup>th</sup> of every month, which they have been doing till now. The EC also began identifying the users of the forest, collecting user's fees and requiring them to show payment receipts before entering the forest. Initially, there were only 50 - 60 registered users, which has now increased to 396 households. In the past, people used to come to collect firewood, fodder and timber even from Panauti, Malpi, Chaukot and Lalitpur. But after the CFUG formation and handover, the local users started to conserve it and the distant users of the forest were restricted. Now, it only belongs to the users incorporated into the CFUG. The government officially handed over the forest to the community in 2053 BS.

## Operational Plan and Constitution of the CFUG

The operational plan of the CFUG was revised with the technical assistance of Mr. Madan Basyal (EnLiFT team member) and was approved two years ago in 2076 B.S by the 14<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. The OP preparation was held in the village's community building where tole representatives discussed the issues to be addressed by the OP. The map of the CF area has been updated by using a GPS/GIS system, and the forest is divided into blocks for systematic forest management.

While preparing the operational plan, the meeting was held in the community building where tole-wise representatives were present; during the meeting, we discussed various issues and the final plan was passed by the General Assembly (GA).

The major objectives of the OP are:

- i) Increase production capacity through scientific management
- ii) easy supply of and income from forest products including NTFPs
- iii) livelihood improvement through agroforestry and income generation activities
- iv) soil conservation and promotion of biodiversity conservation and environmental services
- v) social and forest development

The OP has adopted selection as the major forest silviculture system for sustainable forest management. Singling, thinning, pruning and bush cleaning are the major tending operations while plantation of medicinal and fodder plants (NTFPs), forest fire management (fire line construction and leaf-litter removal) and conservation of endangered plants are also provisioned in the OP. Biodiversity conservation activities include protection of wildlife habitat through a ban in harvesting trees with nests, prohibition of grazing and collection of leaf-litter and firewood before the dry season, and plantation of native species. Water resources are to be protected by developing a plantation of green belt along water bodies, prohibition of harvesting/collecting forest products within 50m of water bodies, controlling erosion through the construction of biological dams in gullies, and the plantation of bamboo, broom grass and leguminous plants. Climate change mitigation activities, which are not already mentioned within regular forest tending, fire management or biodiversity/water source conservation, include the removal of dead, dying, decaying and diseased (4D) trees and bushes.

There is a provision in the OP for allocating 25% of funds on CF development, 35% on pro-poor activities and 40% on community development. The OP envisions the organization of trainings on forest management, skill development (furniture, briquette, tailoring, tourism, enterprise development: Babiyo (*Eulaliopsis binate*) and Bhorla (*Phanera vahlii*) production), collection and marketing of NTFPs, as well as orientation events on existing laws and policies, forest-fire and wildlife protection. Funds can also be used for income generation activities (goat farming), the construction of office buildings and ecotourism infrastructure (parks, view tower, conservation ponds, foot trails), maintenance of roads, scholarships to students, promotion of private forests and establishment of silvicultural plots (for research through EnLiFT 2).

There are certain provisions for subsidies to poor users in timber and Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs). Timber per cubic feet costs Rs. 50 for the highest ranked users ("Ka," meaning A-category), in terms of well-being, and Rs. 25 for the lowest rank ("Gha," meaning D-category). The rates for leaf-litter, grass, firewood and agricultural tools made from forest resources are decided seasonally by the executive committee. Along with the permission for the collection of medicinal herbs, the committee charges them not less than twice the government rate. The EC can provide up to three trees for purposes such as religious works or construction post-natural-calamity; whereas, the products needed during the funeral rites are given free of charge.

Users are allocated 100 cubic feet of timber per house for construction, and 50 cubic feet for maintenance activities, which can be harvested between the months of Kartik and Jestha. However, timber can be extracted any time of the year for reconstruction activities after natural disasters. Green firewood can be collected once a year during thinnings, while dry firewood can be collected 3 days-a-week during the months of Kartik - Jestha. Grass can be harvested twice a year in Kartik and Jestha, while fodder collection is dependent on the decisions made by the EC.

The OP also contains details of penalties for various infringements, including fines, confiscation of tools and even suspension from the CFUG.

Even though the CFUG has conducted a well-being ranking to assign HHs to the categories - "Ka", "Kha", "Ga" and "Gha" - on the basis of food sufficiency, livestock, property, job, income source and head of the family, they have not properly prepared and published the list yet.

The Constitution of the CFUG is similar to that of most other CFUGs. It includes the roles and responsibilities of the Executive Committee (EC), monthly meetings, annual General Assembly, dos and don'ts in the forest, fines and penalties, and detailed socio-economic information of users. Although the data for well-being ranking has been collected by the CFUG in the facilitation of EnLiFT project, their analysis and results remain to be incorporated in the constitution and OP of the CFUG.

## Livelihood of users

The major occupations of the local people are agriculture, livestock rearing and sale of dairy products. Maize, tomatoes, onions, potatoes and other green vegetables are intensively grown, although the productivity appears to have declined in the recent years due to delayed rainfall. Food crops are being increasingly replaced by cash crops like potato, onion, tomato and other vegetables (seasonal and off-seasonal). The area under cultivation in the village has declined because of the recent increase in wildlife numbers, which has discouraged the community from cultivating along the edges of the CF.

Almost every HH owns at least 1-2 buffaloes, 1-2 goats and some hens. The number of buffaloes and cattles per HH has increased because of the lucrative prospects in dairy sale. However, ox-keeping has declined due to the availability of tractors for ploughing. The average annual income per HH is Rs. 50 - 60,000 from selling livestock and Rs. 60 - 70,000 from selling milk. Poultry and eggs are primarily for household consumption and not usually kept for sale.

Few villagers have shops for daily consumer goods; some work as carpenters and drivers, while others are employed in private and government jobs. 60 - 70 out of almost 400 HHs have members that have migrated to Banepa, Kathmandu and abroad (such as, Malaysia) for employment. This trend is increasing in recent years. Very few people of the community own land outside the village.

## Forest and people relationship

The locals' dependence on the forest resources has changed over the years. For instance, in the past, they would rely only on grass (mostly from forests) to feed their livestock, but now they feed bran, corn flour and straw. In fact, less than 40% of the users even go to the forest nowadays. Along with grass, people also feed their cattle fodder - mostly leaves of Khasru, but also leaves of Paiyu (*Prunus cerasoides*), Dudhilo (*Ficus nemoralis*) and Banjh (*Quercus leucotricophora*), which encourages the production of sweet and thick milk. The ban on livestock grazing and provision of fodder collection promotes both forest protection and productivity. Many users also collect Nigalo bamboo (for wickerwork), leaf-litter (for compost in cultivated land) and edible ferns. In recent years, they have

created incense and walking sticks (distributed to the elderly) from forest products. Some users also collect firewood from large branches and remnant trunks. However, the availability of LPG gas in the markets and growth of trees on the private lands of most users has decreased the reliance on firewood from the forest. Some users prefer firewood for cooking because of the superior taste, but they rely on LPG (and even biogas) if they have to cook for a large number of guests. The forest is 2 - 3 hours away from the settlement; usually, women members travel in groups to collect fodder and leaf-litter, while men also travel into the forest for firewood collection. Users who live near the forest utilize forest products more frequently than those who dwell far away. Locals usually visit the forest 3 - 4 times per month during the dry/winter season, and once a month during other seasons.

The current chairperson, Prem Prasad Shrestha, claims that 95% of the users have been following the rules and regulations of the forest properly. Since he first became the chairperson in 2059 BS, the CFUG has given out two types of user's cards: yellow card to collect only a few products from the forest (like Nigalo and materials to make agricultural tools), and blue card to collect all available forest products as approved by the EC on the demands of the users. If any HH ignores the user's card system, they have to pay all the charges (users' registration charge and the renewal charge till date) in order to be a user of the forest. In case of separation from the HH, the new HH must pay Rs. 872 to receive a card. If they do not renew their user's card on time, they will no longer be considered as registered users of the forest.

Besides forest products, the locals are highly interested in developing the area for ecotourism. They have initiated activities such as: constructing a view tower, forest-trails and trekking/hiking routes to-and-from Lalitpur. They have also promoted the forest's Bandevi temple as a religious heritage to attract visitors. In addition, they have collaborated with EnLiFT to establish research plots and a nursery for Khasru management, and have consequently banned the lopping and harvesting of Khasru mother trees.

## Existing CFUG planning and governance: Issues and opportunities

The Executive committee and General Assembly are the major decision-making forums of Kalapani CFUG. Besides these, they have organized tole level committees in order to decentralize and ease the CFUG activities. The CF's Operational Plan, Constitution, Annual Plans, minutes of General Assembly and EC meetings are the documents related to CF Planning.

### Governing structures and their functions

#### Executive Committee

The executive committee is the main decision-making forum of the CFUG. The members in the committee are selected through consensus during the general assembly. The executive committee is responsible for making management decisions, and organizing 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 organizes 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 implements these CF plans and programs.

The first executive committee of Kalapani CFUG was formed on 2050 BS. Regular monthly meetings on the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month have been held since, in order to discuss and make decisions on emerging CFUG-related issues and plans. A total of 12 regular meetings and 5 emergency meetings have been conducted between 15 Mangsir 2076 and 15 Kartik 2077. Most of the EC members participated during the meetings. However, before that time period, attendance was quite low. In one case, we recorded the participation of only 4 (out of 11 total) EC members at a meeting, of which 2 were male and 2 were female. Meetings were held and decisions made regardless of the low number of participants. EC members may not show up for meetings if they are busy with household and farm work. However, some members did not have any interest in attending the meetings because there were no economic benefits in doing so. Some members even argued that they face abuse from users regardless of how hard they work in the EC. When EC members try to enforce rules, they are cursed by fellow villagers. Some EC members, including the Treasurer, did not attend any of the meetings of CF-related events at all. The CFUG has a rule that EC members who do not attend 3 consecutive meetings will be automatically dismissed and replaced. Thus, the current EC has removed and replaced these inactive members, while retaining all other members from the previous EC.

No one was interested in being an office bearer after the tenure of the previous EC had terminated. The youths are especially not interested, because they migrate away for education and work, and do not have any incentive to take on a position that requires so much administrative work, which they have little knowledge about. To solve this issue, the EC, following the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, now provides Rs. 500 to each EC member attending a regular meeting. After that, members have been managing their time to attend the EC meetings and other events of the CF. Regular users are invited as well, but mostly male users participate in the EC meetings.

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. In the current executive committee, the number of women is only 4 (out of 11). However, the committee comprises of different ethnic groups {7 Shresthas (janajati), 1 Timilsina (brahmin), 1 Nepali (dalit), 1 Ranamagar (janajati) and 1 Viswokarma (dalit)}.

Recent agendas discussed in the EC meetings include:

- a. Updates of previous monthly meeting
- b. Construction of Simshar (water retention) pond
- c. HH wood demands
- d. Ecotourism in the CFUG
- e. Visioning and planning workshop of CFUG and Khasru management (Objectives of Forest Action team visit)

## General Assembly

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

- a. **Audit report preparation:** Executive committee meets and decides to request the auditor for an audit. The auditor prepares an audit report which is again discussed and approved by the EC.

- b. **Fixing the date of the 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 GA meeting, the EC holds a meeting in which they develop an annual work plan. In that preparatory meeting, they share three reports. One is from the secretary, which briefs the participants on the outcomes of regular meetings, other meetings, events and participants' details. The second is from the treasurer, which details the overall incomes, income sources, expenditures, savings and further descriptions. The treasurer also shares the details of the savings. The activities for the coming year are planned by taking into account the remaining budget in the account of the CF. The last report comes from the chairperson who shares the possible activities to be conducted in the CF. If any other participants of the meeting have issues and activities to propose, they will also share them. The toles' representatives, if present, will also share the issues and concerns, collected from their tole. After all the activities are listed and discussed among the participants of the meeting, the EC selects the plans to be proposed to the General Assembly for their approval to implement for the next year.
- d. **General Assembly meeting:** The General assembly is usually conducted in the CFUG office premises every year. It is equipped with plastic chairs, and a functional sound and microphone system. However, the 14<sup>th</sup> GA (2076 BS) was held outdoors at the construction site of the view tower near the Bandevi Kalika temple. The General Assembly requires the representation of 51% of HHs, in order to be held and to approve major decisions. Besides all the users of the forest, other stakeholders are invited such as S/DFO, local government officials, parliamentarians, FECOFUN, EC representatives from neighboring CFUGs, representatives from schools and other local organisations, local police officers, etc.

The General Assembly starts with formal programs such as seating, lighting lamps, recital of the national anthem and welcome songs, and introductory speeches from various stakeholders. In the most recent 15<sup>th</sup> G.A. (9 November 2020), the organisers provided masks and sanitizers to all participants. CF users seemed to trickle in gradually and seat themselves through the opening ceremony, as EC members provided them their identity cards and took their signatures to record their attendance. The delayed arrival of users extended the meeting into a day-long affair, which generated complaints regarding how tiresome and wasteful the event was because there was little time devoted to discussing pertinent matters. The participation of the CFUG users was satisfactory, which was at about 240 individuals. However, the Joint Secretary, Treasurer and two other members of the Executive Committee were not present at the assembly for unknown reasons.

Most introductory speeches were limited to exchanging pleasantries and well-wishes. However, few external stakeholders requested that the assembly address the issues of raising concerns and giving suggestions. The chairperson of a neighboring CFUG expressed alarm over human-wildlife conflicts under the current forest management regime, including the phenomenon of wildlife-caused crop damage, which has caused farmers to migrate to urban centers. The coordinator of the CPN Bethanchowk Rural municipality encouraged the promotion of agro-tourism (Tea garden) and ecotourism (Jungle walks), while cautioning about the planning and construction of roads.

The opening ceremony was followed by the presentation of various reports by the EC members. In our observation, an EC member first presented the annual report detailing the major decisions taken by EC meetings. Then, the financial report containing total income and expenditure was presented by the secretary, due to the absence of the Treasurer. The secretary was clearly unprepared and unconfident. This was followed by a supervision report by the chairperson of the Kalapani CFUG. Next, the EC opened the floor for comments and questions after every

presentation; however, we observed that there was no participation from anyone, not even from the users, other EC members and the DFO.

Even after the subsequent proposal of activities to be implemented for the next year, there was no interest for a group-discussion from any of the participants. The activities proposed by the chairperson of the CFUG were:

- Boundary demarcation, either by constructing foot trail or painting around the trees
- Harvesting of forest products
- Aligning the schedule for forest products collection with adjoining CFUGs to stop illegally activity more effectively
- Museum to preserve traditional artifacts/tools
- Water sources conservation activities
- Ecotourism development: temple, walking trails, homestay, view tower
- Promotion of local products: wood and non-wood materials, agriculture products

There was a major focus on the construction of the view tower rather than in forest management. It is highly possibly that there had not been a broader consultation on the annual planning prior to the assembly event.

During our visit to the most recent G.A., the EnLiFT team member, Mr. Madan Basyal, who provided technical assistance for the revised OP, presented the amended provisions of the OP in the assembly. Finally, after this presentation, there was some discussion in the assembly. The AFO suggested mentioning the list of protected species such as Okhar (*Juglans regia*) and Lauth salla (*Taxus baccata*). Some EC members showed interest in the development of a martyr's memorial park and wanted it mentioned in the OP. The rest of the discussion was concentrated on ecotourism development and concerns regarding construction of physical infrastructure including the view tower and roads. This discussion was limited to the participants seated at the front rows (EC and guests) rather than among the wider group of users.

Other contents of the OP should have been discussed in detail but this could not occur due to the delayed start. In addition, there was little interest for further discussion from the EC and the users. We later discovered that the forest officials wanted the EC to make decisions on some of the issues, such as fixing the rates for the forest products according to the wellbeing ranking as provided by the of users, and deciding the fines and the penalties.

There was, however, a debate regarding the CFUG's executive committee's proposal to ban grazing due to an opposition by some users living nearby the forest. Everyone agreed to the ban after the AFO of Sub-division Office, Khopasi intervened and stated that there is no regulatory provision for grazing in the national forests (including CFs). He said, "if you want, you can harvest grass and fodder, but grazing is not allowed according to forest acts and regulations."

A committee of three EC members is formed to serve as a witness and write down the decisions. The GA ended without selecting of a new executive committee, following the termination of the tenure of the current one. There were not enough CFUG users present for this process, and neither much time left during the day. The EnLiFT team also had to leave, after suggesting the CFUG to extend the current tenure and to organise another assembly.

## **Tole Committee**

The CFUG has formed 17 tole committees (3 members in each: 1 coordinator and 2 general members). These committees have been provided with registers and a stamp pad to keep records of the tole meetings, but they have not been functioning well because they have not properly understood their roles and responsibilities. They were instated to collect concerns and ideas from each tole and convey them to the EC, relay decisions of the EC to their tole, as well as to monitor the forest-related activities of the users. After the formation of the tole committees, representatives from every committee attended the first meeting of the EC, but didn't attend any subsequent meetings. EC members suspect they might have expected some benefits, and were discouraged when that didn't materialize.

## **Stakeholders' roles in deliberative planning**

### **DFO**

The current chairperson, Prem Prasad Shrestha, claims to have a very good relation with the Divisional Forest Office (DFO). The DFO has helped the CFUG in many instances. For instance, in 2074/75, they provided the CFUG with Rs. 143,000 in order to conserve the drinking water source in this CF. They further bestowed Rs. 35,000 for the construction of a community building. They have distributed seedlings for plantation in the CF, as well as in the users' private forests. They have been providing support in the preparation of the CFUG's OPs.

The chairperson informs and consults with the DFO before conducting any activities in the CF. The DFO staff also attends their events when invited. In fact, since the formation of the first EC in 2050, all the Divisional Forest Officers have visited this CF, at least once, during their tenure in Kavrepalanchowk. The current DFO staff considers the CFUG to be very active, given their regularity of conducting audits and holding general assemblies. They have also expressed their interest in supporting the development of forest-based enterprises and ecotourism; although, they have asked to exercise caution in matters related to the construction of roads.

### **Local /Provincial Governments**

The chairperson also claims to have maintained a good cooperation with the local government. He stated that he can agree with the Ward-chairperson on many agendas, for the community and for forest development. The ward has helped the CFUG receive a fund of Rs. 3,000,000 from the Bagmati provincial government for tourism development activities. It provided Rs. 200,000 from its own budget for the construction of a truss in the forest. The truss was made for the protection of users and for conducting events in the CF. A park has also been constructed in the CF with the support of the ward.

The local and even the provincial governments have expressed their willingness to provide financial help for tourism development. The local government has allocated Rs. 3,000,000 already and further requested Rs. 7,000,000 from the Tourism Ministry, after submitting a DPR featuring a total budget of Rs. 47,500,000 submitted to the Federal Government for the construction of road and tourism infrastructure.

The provincial government has attempted to address some of the issues related to forest and users' rights through the Province Forest Act 2076.

## EnLiFT

EnLiFT has been conducting research on the management of the most demanded fodder tree – Khasru, and on the prospects of new Khasru plantations in the first phase of EnLiFT. Technicians from EnLiFT have also helped the CFUG prepare their revised OP, separate their forests into blocks, and held planning seminars for systematic management. Since the initiation of EnLiFT, many women users have been actively working in the forest – including in the measurement and tagging of trees. Users have stated that they have started to use organic manure and bio-char for agricultural production, and have kept nurseries on their lands, following advice from EnLiFT team members. They also report an increase in production in private forests due to the support from EnLiFT. Despite the huge time commitment, they have found the events supported by EnLiFT, like tole level orientations, to be useful and informative. EC members and users even report a general increase in awareness of CF related activities and an increasing realization of the importance of the CF, following engagement with EnLiFT. They are now aware of what kind of trees can be conserved as mother trees to promote regeneration, a skill they can implement on their private forests as well. Now, all EC members can reportedly conduct orientation programs in toles. Other external stakeholders have also acknowledged EnLiFT's contribution to forest management and livelihood enhancement of the local people.

## FECOFUN

Although the current chairperson has a personal relationship with the representatives of FECOFUN, the CFUG has not asked FECOFUN for any help.

## Women's Participation and voice in CF

### Participation in CF management and decision-making process

The Executive Committee (EC) of the Kalapani CFUG, which is the ultimate governing body of the CFUG, has increasingly included women representatives in it. The provision mentioned in the Community Forestry Guideline 2014, which states 50% representation of women at the decision-making level, has been fulfilled by this CFUG. What was previously their 13-membered EC, with a representation consisting of 8 men (61.5%) and 5 women (38.5%), has turned into an 11-membered EC, with a representation of 7 women (63.64%) and 4 men (36.36%), during the GA of 2074 BS.

The growing trust towards them and their performance has achieved this progress. The increased engagement of women in EC has ensured the increased participation of women during the regular events of the CFUG, such as meetings, GA and CF management activities, thus including them in the planning and decision-making processes. The Chairperson of the Kalapani CFUG said-

*"We want to make this EC of women only. They have become more capable to work in EC and make decision than in the past. It has been easy for us to work because of more women representatives. This is because women use forest more and go to forest regularly which has made easy in monitoring and other forest related activities as well as in decision making in women's welfare."*

The treasurer added-" *Women are disciplined and their dealings are transparent.*"

The specific task and responsibilities have been distributed among the EC representatives of the Kalapani CFUG, where women representatives are also handling technical tasks. Despite of informal

literacy, they are able to perform such task well because of their long experience of working in CF. About 85% of women representatives have an experience of working for more than 4 years, even up to 8 year in the community forest, by being involved in the executive committee.

*"When I was a vice chairperson, I used to go for marking and measuring the trees in the forest, before the harvest. I was also engaged during the preparation of the OP, have attended meetings at the DFO, and attended the general assemblies of the neighbor CFUGs."*—said Nanimaiya Shrestha, previous vice chairperson and current member of the EC.

Women representatives from the existing EC still go to the forest for marking and measurement of trees as well as post-harvest monitoring. In addition, they also collect payments and provide receipts to the users for transporting timber and firewood. However, the influence of women representatives as a leader seems to be distrusted. More than 55% of women respondents said-

*"Users don't obey us easily. If we provide them any notice, they ask us several questions like who said, why, etc."*

## **Autonomy in HH decision in forest governance**

The involvement of women from the area in different forums and events has enhanced their capacity to decide independently for their welfare. In addition, the support from their spouse and other family members have contributed in the active participation of women in the governing body.

*"My husband believes that working in CF is equally important as HH works."*—said Parbati Shrestha, vice chairperson of EC.

Along with this, the EC of Kalapani CFUG is not only connected with the sentiments of users but has also been the platform to empower them. More than 70% of women representatives have support from their spouse to participate in EC and CF related events. However, 29% of women representatives have participated in EC as they are single.

*"After the demise of my husband I had started to isolate myself and cry all the time. With the suggestion of neighbor and hope of diverting from mental stress, I started participating in different programs and committees of which EC of Kalapani CFUG is one."*—said Pabitra Nepali, a member of the EC.

Yet, more support from family, guidance, opportunity, compatible time management from the EC, and trust from the community is required to increase the interest of women users to engage at the decision-making level. Moreover, their pro-active interest to learn and understand, their realization on the bonding between CF and women, as well as their sense of service shapes the interest of women towards CF related matters.

## **Influence in Decision-making**

The higher composition of women representatives in the EC, their efficiency in CF activities, and their meaningful participation in every regular and necessary event demonstrates the significance of women inclusion while making decisions in the Kalapani CFUG. In addition to this, the equal opportunity provided for all participants to share their opinion and issues during the meetings has enhanced the ability of women to raise their voice in the forum. However, the distance between HH and forest, as well as the dependency on forest, seems to have a correlation on the expressive engagement of some women representatives in decision-making roles. About 29% of women representatives' HHs are far from the forest and their dependency on forest product is also very low.

According to the views of women representatives- *"the EC has received very less inputs from them during the decision-making as they have participated less in CF activities and know little about the issues of the forest."*

However, around 85% of women representatives claimed that they have been frequently providing their inputs while discussing on agendas and making decisions. Also, their inputs have contributed in deriving conclusions. Every respondent has realized that there is an equal treatment for the voice of all the respondents, be it from any spectrum of well-being or caste. However, there exists a contrast in the viewpoints about how much influence women can have in decision-making, between two groups of respondents, namely: "those who have received formal education" and "only literate".

*85% of women respondents who are only literate believe that educated women can influence more in decision-making, whereas the remaining respondents who are educated believe that even uneducated women can influence in decision-making if they speak on behalf of their practical knowledge and experience.*

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

Timber, firewood, grass and fodder are the major forest products collected by respondents from the Kalapani CF. According to them, users sometimes also collect nigalo (a kind of bamboo) and wild vegetables. However, no forest product has been commercially traded in the market. The accessibility to different types of forest products are controlled; the rates for them are decided by the EC and approved during the GA, where women representatives also provide their inputs frequently. Every woman representative was found to be aware of the rules set by the EC. They said-

*"Users have to pay Rs. 25 per cubic feet for harvesting timber for the first time in which they can harvest 75 to 80 cubic feet of timber. If the timber harvested for the first time is insufficient, users are allowed to cut for timber for the second and even the third time, for which the charges are Rs. 35 and Rs. 50 per cubic feet, respectively. For firewood, it is free of cost if the users collect them in bhari and carry it by themselves; but, they have to pay Rs. 1,500 (Rs. 300 as transportation charge and Rs. 1,200 for firewood) if they transport it in a vehicle, like a truck."*

Mostly women members from the HH collect grass, fodder and firewood whereas men members are involved in timber harvesting. The EC of the Kalapani CFUG has been able to address women and poor HHs to increase their access to forest products. There is a 50% concession in timber and firewood for single women and poor HH.

Despite this, the dependency of women on forest has decreased due to a change in the feeding patterns for livestock and an increase in the use of gas cylinders. Also, the demand for forest products are fulfilled from the private forests and from the trees in agricultural lands. Around 85% of women respondents use straw imported from other areas and mix that with grass in order to feed their livestock; doing so has reduced their dependency on grass from the forest.

*"We import straw of around Rs. 40 to 50 thousands in a year from Banepa."-said Muna Shrestha.*

## **Income**

The monthly income of the Kalapani CFUG was found to have mostly been mobilized for infrastructure development and CF management activities. However, in comparison to other CFUGs, they lacked a systematic allocation of funds as per the policy, due to their lesser income. The women representatives

of the EC of Kalapani CFUG were found to have access to the CFUG funds. They were directly involved in the income of the EC. Around 57% of women representatives were engaged in collecting payments from users from varying activities, such as: timber charge, firewood charge, transportation charge, cost for the renewal of the users' cards; they submitted the details of these every month to the EC. In addition, they were equally involved during the preparation of the annual work plan and the mobilization of the funds. Along with these, they also provided their inputs while planning.

The flexibility in mobilizing funds (by revolving the funds at a low interest rate) was found in the EC of the Kalapani CFUG. This has become an option for the EC representatives to overcome their financial crisis.

*"During COVID, I managed financial issues from cooperative and CFUG funds, as loan. From CF, we EC members can use money, if required, at a low interest rate (i.e. Rs. 10 per month)"*-said Nanimaiya Shrestha, a member of the EC.

## Leadership

The respondents were found to have their affiliation in different forums and committees, such as: road construction committee, cooperatives' committee, women awareness committee, school management committee, and so on. More than 85% of the women representatives have their affiliation in more than three committees. The appreciation of their leadership capacity can be understood from their engagement in different forums.

*"Although I have not attended events where new committees are to be formed, the other participants write my name in different positions and inform me later."*-said Yashodha Shrestha.

Along with their engagement in different groups, they have also received several opportunities to speak in public. However, not all respondents have fully utilized the opportunities due to their lack of confidence and fear of speaking in front of a mass of mixed groups (although they are appreciated for their courage to speak).

*"I feel easy to speak in the group of women. In front of men, I still feel fear when they all look at my face while speaking."*-said Nanimaiya Shrestha.

## Time

After the emergence of CF, the status of the forest has gradually improved with time and management activities. In addition, the reduced dependency of users on the forest has increased the supply of forest products. The use of gas cylinders for cooking and straw for feeding livestock has, respectively, reduced the dependency on firewood and grass from forest. Despite this, a majority of women respondents (85%) have actively participated in forest management activities. They have also felt it easier to partake in management activities nowadays, compared to the past.

*"In comparison to past, the effort on FM activities has reduced. In those days, we had to work for 15 days to even a month in bush-clearing activities. Nowadays, we complete it in 3 - 4 days, if all users participate."*-said Parbati Shrestha.

## Challenges and room for improvement

The CFUG is experiencing major difficulties with regards to encouraging the participation of its users. It is especially worrisome that educated villagers are not interested in the CF at all. The EC claims that many users do not value the forest highly. The tiresome schedule of the GA, which takes a whole day, also discourages users' participation. The EC appreciates the idea of discussing agendas and issues at every tole before conducting the GA, in order to shorten the event. However, this is difficult because of a lack of interest from the tole committees and the amount of time (a whole day) that needs to be spent at each tole. Furthermore, if agendas presented to the toles are not approved during the tole visits, then, there will be room for major confrontation during their announcement at the GA. This can be avoided only if decisions are made by the EC on the issues of toles during the tole visits. However, the EC is very positive towards the system of collecting consensus before making decisions, since this increases the ownership on CF activities.

Another major issue of the CFUG is the provision on incentives for the regular participation of the EC members during the meetings. Even though there is currently a stipend being provided for attending the meetings, the general users do not want income from timber sales to be utilized for that. The DFO has also stated that the EC may be punished for using income from timber. The EC also has difficulty in encouraging the users to work according to legal acts and rules. EC members receive threats (and bribes) from users when they are restricted from harvesting timber haphazardly. For example, when users want to collect timber from areas where it can be transported-out more easily, the EC has difficulties explaining that this is not ecologically sound. Users are especially less inclined to obey the enforcement of rules by female EC members. Sometimes, they can harvest three trees, when, in fact, they have only been allowed to harvest one. The EC members believe their knowledge and confidence would improve if exposure visits to other sites could be conducted.

Since the income source from timber sale is seasonal, this makes it hard to manage funds when there is a restriction on harvesting. The EC is thinking about constructing a storage warehouse for timber, so that there is a regular supply for users and an income source for the CFUG throughout the year. They are also facing a problem due to a lack of road infrastructure and equipment for timber harvesting and transport. The EC believes there is enough timber to make the establishment of a local saw mill economically feasible. They also see a possibility of establishing enterprises for making basketry from Nigalo (a kind of bamboo).

An issue related to forest management involves the encroachment of the forest by thorny bushes (seti kada, chutro, bhalukada, and others), which decreases the productivity of desired forest products. Another environmental problem is the scarcity of water during the dry season, for which they are seeking to dig ponds and conduct water source conservation activities.

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