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# Chapani Gadidanda CFUG

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



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**Our Cover:** Community meeting conducted at Pokhari tole of Chapani Gadidanda CFUG, photo by Sarada Tiwari.

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# **Chapani Gadidanda 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

Chapani Gadidanda CFUG located in Bhumlu Rural Municipality, Ward-4 includes around 83.50ha of pine (*Pinus patula*) plantation forest benefiting 803 users from 117 HHs. The forest handed over to the group in 2046 B.S (1989 A.D) has an effective area of 77.5ha. It has an average stock of 460 trees per ha, 198 poles per ha, and 671,875 seedlings per ha with an annual allowable cut (AAC) of 7,850 cubic feet per year (5,916 cubic feet from trees and 1,934 cubic feet from pole). The annual harvest in the CFs as per the Operational Plan (OP) is based on the annual increment rate.

The OP of the CFUG, having the aim to enhance the forest status as well as livelihoods, has been prepared following the methods like boundary survey and inventory, interviews with local elites, elderly, and intellectuals, focused group discussions, the survey of socio-economic status, and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). It has been renewed four times and the existing plan is valid until 2079/80 BS (2023/24 AD). The OP has clearly incorporated the annual action plans for forest management. However, along with the increasing outmigration and adoption of alternative energy sources like Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG), the dependency on forest products is being gradually reduced thus weakening the forest-people relationship and reducing users' participation in forest management. As a consequence, there exists a gap in the traditional forest management practices like bush cleaning, thinning, weeding, etc in the forest. However, the CFUG has been able to earn huge income from timber selling outside the CFUG. The OP has also mentioned fund mobilization as 25% in forest conservation, promotion, and development, 10% in institutional development, 30% in community development, and the remaining 35% in poverty reduction activities for pro-poor users. In practice, most of the income has been spent on forest development and institutional activities, and community development activities.

The CFUG consists of 11 membered (5 women and 6 men) executive committee which is responsible for decision-making and planning through regular meetings, general assembly, annual audit of the CFUG, and also through collaboration and coordination. The CFUG, after the COVID-pandemic, has been conducting meetings on a need basis. Regarding general assembly and audit, the CFUG has conducted them annually except for two post-COVID years (2020 and 2021). There is no defined procedure for conducting general assembly in the CFUG. The CFUG has lately started adopting the practice of conducting tole meetings prior to planning meetings and general assemblies. This has made executives easy to understand the issues and expectations of users from the forest before making plans and decisions. However, the impact has not been so significant due to the elites' control in decision-making.

Despite having opportunities to collaborate with Local Government (LG), it has not been effective as anticipated as they have been affected by the difference in the LG- CFUG's planning periods, ethnic conflict in leadership positions, and lack of transparency in financial transactions. The CFUG has also been collaborating with other stakeholders such as S-DFO, FECOFUN, and EnLiFT project as well for forest management and institutional activities. Both the supportive and opposing behaviors of forest officials have been faced by the CF executive. The less supportive attitude of forest officials has been found to have particularly discouraged the women leadership in the CFUG. Their leadership has also been affected by the token selection of elites.



## Introduction

This case study has been prepared with an aim to provide information about the status and challenges existing in planning and governance of Chapani Gadidanda CFUG. 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 has been drawn on the basis of information collected during field visits, interaction with Executive Committee (EC), women and mixed groups, ethnographic reflections of several events like planning meeting, general assembly and such held by CFUG, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with EC members, and formal and informal interviews with several stakeholders. It includes information reviewed from the Constitution and the Operational Plan of the CFUG, the audit reports and meeting minutes, as secondary sources.

Chapani Gadidanda CFUG lies in Ward number 4 of Bhumlu Rural Municipality at an altitude of 2,200 meters from the sea level. It occupies 83.50 hectares of forest, benefiting 117 households (with a population of 803). The effective area of the CFUG is 77.50ha. The forest was handed over to the group in 2046 B.S (1989 A.D). It is surrounded by Chapani Khola and Bhalukhop danda in the East, Ratuwa Khola and Bhumlu Khola in the West, Gadidanda in the North and Salle Bhumlu and Pokhari danda in the South. The forest is the plantation forest of *Pinus patula* (Pate salla). Other major tree species of the forest are Gobre Salla (*P. wallichiana*), Kafal (*Myrica esculenta*) and Chilaune (*Schima wallichii*). More than 80% of the all blocks of this forest is occupied by pole to tree-sized *P. patula* with abundant regeneration. Similarly, animal species such as leopard, fox, monkey, porcupine, and birds species such as parrot (*Psittacula krameri*), maina (*Gracula religiosa*), kalij (*Lophura leucomelanos*), mayur (*Pavo cristatus*), dhukur (*Streptopelia chinensis*), koili (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*), titra (*Francolinus francolinus*), and such, are also found in this forest. The average stock of tree in the forest is 460 per hectare, pole is 198 and seedling is 6,71,875 with annual allowable cut (AAC) as 7,850 cubic feet per year (5,916 cubic feet from tree and 1,934 cubic feet from pole).

Basic facilities like primary school, local market and highway, are available within a minute of walking distance from the center of this community while other services like college, hospital, bank and district level government offices are located approximately 30 kilometers away in Dhulikhel, which is the headquarter of the district.

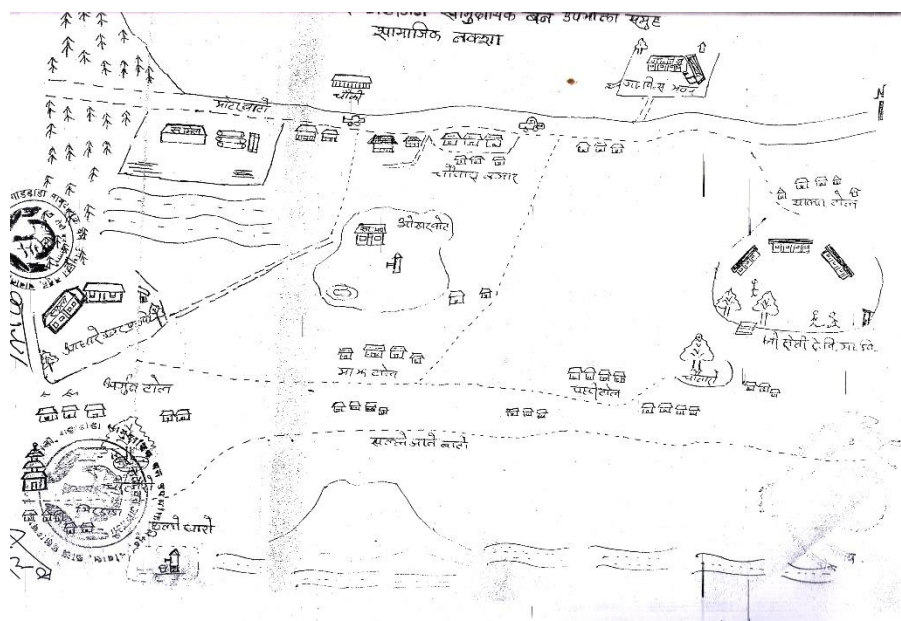


Figure 1: Map of Chapani Gadidanda CFUG

## Historical background of the CFUG

Five decades ago, the current forest area used to be a barren land. The Government of Nepal (GoN) nationalized the forest of Nepal in 2013 BS (1957 AD). After the nationalization of the forest, people started criticizing the forest rules and regulations. People started ignoring the forest with the preconception that forest conservation is the responsibility of the government, and its staffs started occupying the mind of the local people. This led to the haphazard felling of trees. The effort of the government officials alone to conserve the forest went unsuccessful even after the increment in DFO staffs. After that, in 2035 B.S. (1979 AD), the GoN implemented the Panchayati Forest and Panchayat Conservation Regulation. In the same year, the nursery was established with support from Australian Community Forest Development Project and plantation of pate salla (*Pinus patula*), gobre salla (*P. wallichiana*), and Chanp (*Michelia champaka*) was done from 2038 to 2039 BS (1982 to 1983 AD) with the support of the then District Forest Office, Kavrepalanchok. Later on, the group was registered and the forest was handed over to the group in 2046 BS (1990 AD).

## Operational Plan and the Constitution of the CFUG

The existing Operational Plan (OP) of the CFUG with the duration of five years has been renewed, with a validity until 2079/80 B.S. (2023/24 AD). This was the fourth renewal of the OP. The OP of the CFUG has been prepared following methods like interview with the elderly and the elites of the committee, focused group discussion with several groups (women, dalits, forest dependent groups, and others) among the users. Survey of socio-economic status of the group, PRA, discussion on specific points of OPs in the GA of the group, etc have been conducted before endorsing the OP. The OP has clearly incorporated the annual action plans for forest management. The annual harvest in the CFs as per the OP is based on the annual increment rate. The annual allowable cut of the CFUG as per the OP is 7,850 cubic feet (hereafter, cft), which includes 5916 cft from tree and 1934 cft from pole. Several silviculture treatments like cleaning, singling, pruning, pole stage thinning, and such, have been included in the OP. The forest is divided into eight blocks. The OP of the CFUG has been prepared with the following objectives of forest management:

- Enhance the forest status through forest conservation, promotion and management activities.
- Contribute in health, education and community development sectors through the proper utilization of income generated from the sale and distribution of forest products.

In addition, forest management activities in the OP are categorized into forest conservation and forest development activities. Forest Conservation activities involve regular monitoring and patrolling, forest fire control, control of boundary encroachment, grazing control and management, soil conservation, wildlife conservation, control of illegal extract of forest products and conservation of water resources. Whereas, forest development activities involve nursery establishment and management, plantation, activities to control soil erosion, forest road, fire line construction, and such.

According to the plan, following things must be considered while harvesting forest products

- The first priority to be given to dry, standing, fallen, and natural calamities affected trees
- The second priority should be given to dying, over-matured, diseased, green-hollow trees, and trees with a broken crown.
- If the above mentioned trees are not available, the harvesting of matured trees can be done with the technical guidance of forest technicians.
- Maximum 80% of Annual Allowable Harvest (AAH) is allowed to be collected.
- Tree harvesting is restricted between mid-June and mid-October.

- Tree harvesting is restricted within a distance of 20m from rivers, stream sides and water sources.
- Harvesting is restricted in steep terrains, erosion prone areas, road side trees and trees at or around religious places.
- Fruiting and endangered species must be protected to maintain the biological and genetic diversity.

While harvesting, thinning in case of poles and retaining the mother tree to promote regeneration has been recommended in the harvested areas. It has adopted selection 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 and water source protection activities are also provisioned in the OP.

Regarding fund mobilization, the OP includes provisions for spending around 25% of the annual income on forest conservation, promotion and development; 10% on institutional development of users group; 30% on community development activities; and 35% on poverty reduction activities for pro-poor users. It has also envisioned the provision of subsidy and loan (at 3 to 5% interest) for women, Dalit and pro-poor households to invest on vegetable farming, goat farming, pig farming, poultry, and other sectors if they have the necessary skills. However, in practice, most of the income has been spent on timber harvest, forest management, and institutional activities. The CFUG has spent 4 lakh rupees on drinking water support for Yakpa tole. Although drinking water project is linked with the livelihood of users, there has not been any such support for the livelihood improvement activities targeting pro-poor, women, Dalit, and marginalized groups for their livelihood.

According to the OP, users can collect subsistence products like leaf litter, grass, dry fuelwood, and such, at free-of-cost; whereas, they have to pay Rs. 500 per bhari for coal, Rs. 25 per cft for pine timber, Rs. 15 per cft for broad-leaved species like Chilaune and poles, and Rs. 10 per cft for other species' timber. Users from pro-poor and marginalized, if required, can get upto 30 cft timber and 5 quintals of fuelwood free of cost endorsing from the general assembly of the CFUG. However, during the post-earthquake recovery phase, every household received upto 50 cft of timber free of cost.

Regarding the Constitution, the document is not available with the CFUGs as it was lost during the earthquake. However, a copy is available at the Division Forest Office (DFO), Dhulikhel. According to the CF leaders, 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'ts in the forest, fines and penalties, and detailed socio-economic information of the users. But it lacks the segregation of well-being ranking by household.

## Livelihood of the users

A majority of the households of the CFUG depends on agriculture and livestock rearing as part of their livelihoods accounting 95% as per their OP, followed by wage, business and jobs (5%). Maize, mustard, wheat, barley and millet are the major food crops grown by the users. Local businesses like tea shops, tailors, grocery stores, and such are also found in the village. However, the increasing trend of outmigration for remittance-based income is evident in the area. Consequently, migration of the family members to cities like Banepa, Kathmandu and others, for better facilities and good-quality education has also increased, thus leaving the elderly people in the village. Although market access to centres like Dolalghat, Dhulikhel, Banepa and such have improved with good road and transportation access, commercial farming practices are rarely observed due to a lack in workforce at the household. Moreover,

the abandonment of farming lands are increasing as a consequence of both the lack of labour and increase in human-wildlife conflicts. Even some youths living in the village are engaged in transportation/travel sector as drivers or helpers while some are also involved in timber marketing as local traders.

Similarly, the OP also mentions that around 75% of the people are literate.

## Forest and people relationship

According to the OP of the CFUG, the annual average demand among the users is 16,141 bharis of fuelwood, 1,511 cft of timber, 15,602 bharis of grass and 14,052 bharis of leaf litter. Considering 117 households (HHs) of the CFUG, the average annual demand per HH is 138 bharis of fuelwood, 12.9cft of timber, 133 bharis of grass and 120 bharis of leaf litter. Although the data reveals a dependency of the users on forest resources, the scenario is gradually changing. This case does not apply to all the households, but to a majority of them. *"People from our CFUG don't collect grass from our forest much. However, users from the neighboring CFUG often come for grass here."*- said Mr. Kumar Lama, the chairperson of the CFUG.

Similar to other CFUGs like Shreechhap and Sansaridanda, the use of LPGs have increased among the users. As a consequence of increased outmigration, the family size residing in the village has reduced the workforce in the family. In addition, remittance-based income has made peoples' lives more convenient, as their purchasing capacity has increased. As such, the use of LPGs instead of fuelwood to cook for small-sized families has increased. However, the use of fuelwood is limited to cooking for the livestock, the consumption of which has also decreased with the reduction in livestock size (number) in the HHs. One of the users from the CFUG, who has one son abroad and another in Kathmandu stated-

*"I don't have any working men in my family. I have to pay Rs. 1,000 per day for labor to prepare firewood. In a day, he can prepare just 4 bharis of firewood, which works hardly for one month. Instead, I would rather buy one cylinder of LP Gas which costs Rs. 1,500. It is sufficient for at least 3 months. Why to worry about collecting firewood?"*

In such a context of weakening forest-people relationship, the frequency of traditional forest management practices such as bush cleaning, thinning and weeding has reduced due to a reduced interest among the users to participate in them. Even forest hazards (such as forest fire) have been prominent issues in the CF lately. A lowered participation among the users has very often made the situation out of control. The subsequent forest fire of 2021 and 2023 in the CF was a very bad experience for the executives, where no users supported them in containing the fire. An ex-chairperson of the CFUG mentioned-

*"Since the dependency of the users on the forest has reduced, they nowadays think that CF-management is the committee's responsibility. They also think that executives are only responsible for controlling forest fire and any hazard in the forest."*

In addition, the increasing human-wildlife conflict has also weakened the forest-people relationship in the CFUG. However, the harvest and selling of timber outside the CFUG is ongoing, though happening very slowly.

## Existing CFUG planning and governance: Issues and opportunities

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

### Governing structures and their functions

#### a) Executive Committee

The executive committee is the main decision-making forum of the CFUG. The members for the committee are selected through a consensus during the 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 audits 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 the OPs, prepares annual plans and implements these CF plans and programs.

The first executive committee of the Chapani Gadidanda CFUG was formed in 2046 BS (1990 AD). The committee had decided to conduct regular monthly meetings on the 5th of every month, in order to discuss and make decisions on emerging CFUG-related issues and plans. As decided, the executives were conducting their regular meeting once a month till 2075/76 (2019AD), however was not confined to one during timber harvesting time. They have conducted even upto more than three meetings a month during harvesting and timber selling process. But when the Covid-pandemic started, the CFUG didn't conduct meetings for almost a year. After a long gap, the meeting was conducted in March 2021 when the CFUGs including Chapani prepared their plan for the planning meetings, general assembly, and audits under the leadership of the ward chair. However, after the 28th GA (see Annex 1) of the CFUG, 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, have been conducted during the time of harvesting and timber selling.

The Forest Regulation 2022 has set a target of 50% representation of women in the CFUG executive committees. The existing executive committee which was formed by the general assembly of 2078 is composed of 11 members among which 6 are men and 5 are women, accounting to 45.45% women members in the EC (with a woman as the treasurer, and remaining four women as general members). In addition, the current committee consists of representatives from Janajati (8 members) and Dalit (3 members) communities only, while the CFUG comprises users from Brahmin/Chhetri as well. The previous executive committee formed in 2076 BS was composed of 6 men and 3 women members with women as the Chairperson and the Treasurer. Although the participation of women in the EC has increased, in comparison to the past, their active participation is still lacking because of their burdened household chores.

## b) General Assembly

The General Assembly is an important and more inclusive platform for decision-making. In the Chapani Gadidanda CFUG, the general assembly used to be conducted once a year; however, the general assembly was halted in 2020 and 2021. The main reason behind it was the Covid-pandemic and time management by the executives. More than 50% of the ex-executives used to live away from the village.

To conduct a General Assembly, the CFUG adopts the following steps and processes:

- i. **Tole meetings:** Tole meetings are conducted prior to the general assembly in order to collect the users' demands and understand their issues and expectations from the CF and executives. For this, there is a trend that the CFUGs will form a few-membered (normally, three-membered) tole-committee, which will be responsible for conducting such meetings. However, the Chapani CFUG has not formed any such committee yet, although it has three distinct toles. Even such meetings were not conducted before the GA of 2078 (2022 AD). The CFUG, for the first time, conducted such meetings before the GA in November 2078 (see Annex 3) in support of the project team. However, the demands of the users collected through tole meetings were not properly addressed by the CF's ECs. Tole meetings just became a formality for the ECs.
- ii. **Planning or preparatory meeting:** Before the General Assembly, meetings are conducted among the representatives of each tole, intellectual persons, and the executive committee, in order to prepare the draft of decisions or plan-of-activities that are to be endorsed by the GA. The interest of the users as collected from tole meetings are prioritized and included in the annual plan of the CFUG. If there are no or little funds available, then, simple and less costly activities are planned in which the voluntary contribution of the local users is expected, such as road maintenance, clearance of bushes in the forest, and fire management. After collecting demands from the tole meetings, the planning meeting was conducted at the Chapani CFUG in November 2022 (see Annex 4), where the executives prioritized the demand collected and decided to endorse from the GA. However, the meeting didn't decide on the date, venue and agendas of general assembly and audit although they should have been the major agendas of the planning meeting.
- iii. **Audit report preparation:** The CFUGs which have an annual income less than NPR 50,000 can conduct social audit; whereas, the CFUGs which have an annual income more than NPR 50,000 must conduct an audit with the help of a registered auditor. Chapani CFUG, which has an annual income of more than NPR 50,000, have been conducting their audit by employing a registered auditor for the past six-seven years. The executive committee selects an auditor for a period of three years; the renewal for the auditor happens every three years.
- iv. **Inform users on General Assembly:** As per the constitution of the CFUG, the executive committee has to inform the users about the date and venue of the event a week to 15 days prior. As mentioned, users were found to have been informed a week prior to the event through written notices for all HHs.
- v. **General Assembly:** The General Assembly is often conducted in the office yard of Ward-4 in Chaubas. The General Assembly is proceeded when 51% HHs' participation is ensured by the executives. Stakeholders such as S/DFO, local government officials, FECOFUN, EC representatives from neighbouring CFUGs, representatives from schools and other local organisations, and others, are invited for the assembly. 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 publicly shared. As per our observation, users were not satisfied with the financial transactions done by the executives. Next, the annual plans are shared among the users and endorsed. (The details of assemblies are provided in Annex 1 and 2). In general, the major decisions and plans such as audit reports, revised OP and constitutions, harvest plan, annual plan, budget allocations and such are discussed during the program and endorsed by the GA. However, the decisions often seem to be captured by the elite groups (see Annex 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 activity that is not written in the OP. A detailed plan of activities is expected to be written in the OP. Even if details cannot be made available, at the least, the OP should contain provisions for such activities, which can later be elaborated through a separate plan.

The OP of the Chapani Gadidanda was revised in 2075 BS. The revised OP is valid for 5 years from 2075/76 to 2079/80 BS. The decision for an OP revision was taken by the EC, and later, the OP was endorsed by the General Assembly. The executive committee members engaged with the consultant forestry technician(s) during the boundary survey, the inventory, and most frequently, during the OP and the Constitution revision.

The executives collected the socio-economic information for the OP and the Constitution, discussed the major provisions such as forest management, fines, and rates of forest products during the assembly. Forest management activities such as bush cleaning, pruning, fire line maintenance and construction, and timber harvest are clearly spelled out in the plan. Provisions are also made on 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. 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, which is then revised, finalized, and approved based on the users' consensus. However, the Chapani Gadidanda CFUG has not been preparing its annual plans in a systematic and formally written manner.

## Stakeholders' roles in deliberative planning

The Chapani Gadidanda 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 I/NGOs such as EnLiFT/Forest Action Nepal (FAN) are currently the major external stakeholders of the CFUG. Now, there are no such significant projects or organisations working in the area, other than the EnLiFT project.

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 the preparation of the OP and the annual plan, guiding them in forest management activities, providing nursery seedlings, providing or inviting them to trainings and orientations, and so on. Likewise, the local government (ward office) has invited them to collaborate in the development of their plans. The Ward chairperson reiterated the message of collaboration at the General Assembly of the Chapani Gadidanda CFUG, and also at the ward-level CFUG meeting. FECOFUN supports the CFUG through advocacy of their rights, orientation on various forest-related issues, and networking. EnLiFT/FAN 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

The CFUG has coordinated with the Sub-Division Forest Office (Chaubas) and the sector office (Budole) during the revision of the Constitution, the preparation of the Operational Plan and assistance during timber harvest and sale. The DFO has a role in the approval of the OP and the Constitution. The annual plan, parts of the OP concerning ecotourism, and timber harvest planning are prepared by the CFUG with support from the S-DFO and are approved by the DFO. Generally, Forest Staffs guide them on what they can include in the OP and the Constitution, what activities they can and can't plan in the CF. S/DFO

staff participate in this program and guide them in planning activities for that Fiscal Year. However, the CF executives have not been facilitated much, especially during the timber harvest and selling process. The officials either have halted the documents for unofficial payments or have not provided their efficient services in the field during the process. The secretary of the CFUG stated- "*During the time of tree measurement in our CF, the forest officials were too busy. If we would have relied on them, the work would have been more delayed. Therefore, I took my own team from the executives and the users in order to conduct the measurement and numbering.*" On the other hand, the forest officials also have realized the gap created due to their overburden.

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

Most of the meetings and events of this CFUG have been conducted with the participation of representatives from the local government. The municipality chair and the ward chair have been supporting and facilitating the assemblies of the CFUG as well. The ex-chairperson of the rural municipality and the current ward chairperson are the CF leaders as well; they have a long experience of working as CF executives and decision makers. Therefore, they are positive towards the CFUGs and want to collaborate with the CFUGs in community development activities. However, the variation in the planning period of the LGs and the CFUG have been challenging for doing a collaboration. The ward chairperson is also concerned regarding the weakening CF governance in recent years. He has even asked for justification, calling an emergency meeting on March 2022, for not conducting the GA of the CFUG as planned on time.

Having said this, both the CFUG and the 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. The Chapani Gadidanda CFUG invites FECOFUN regularly to the General Assembly. There were no specific collaborations found with FECOFUN, in terms of joint project planning, design, and implementation. FECOFUN representatives had once supported the CF executives in delegation to the DFO, when the forest officials had halted the timber selling for unofficial payments. However, other users having PF-CF boundary conflict often blame the ex-chair of FECOFUN for including their private lands in the CF. The boundary issue has been a very serious challenge recently.

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

EnLiFT has been working in Chaubas for 8 - 9 years. EnLiFT (phase 1) 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 the CFUG, various meetings, the General Assembly and orientations on forest-related agendas. EnLiFT has conducted tole meetings, orientation programs, visioning and planning workshops, EC level meetings, and invited executive members to local or district level workshops and meetings.

# Women's participation and voice in CF-planning

## 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, and such. However, the frequency of such traditional events have reduced. Also, tree harvest and sale has become a major priority of the CFUG recently.

The participation of men and women users depends on the nature of the work involved in the forest management activities. Mostly, women participation are 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 are observed participating in timber harvesting, selling process and transportation.

Even in case of other development activities, 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. Even though the CFUG was once led by a woman chairperson, her journey as a decision-maker was not easy as per her story. As shared by her, she neither experienced a comfortable environment to work from the forest officials, nor received trust and support from the users and other executives.

*"If there was a man instead of me, they would have behaved in a supportive way but I think since I am a woman, they thought that underestimated my leadership and I saw their domination in communication and behaviour," she shared.*

However, she has often been questioned during the assembly by users for financial embezzlement. Also, regarding other women users, most of the women in the executive committee are kept without their full interest, just to fill the quota (see Annex 1). There is a lack of leadership, knowledge, confidence, and interest in most of the women users regarding the management of their CF and the CFUG. Regarding participation in events, the women members of the EC attend meetings and the general assembly after informing their family members. With regards to the general users, if men members are available at home, men participate; and if they are not available, then women participate after informing the family. Also, the participation of both men and women members from the households depends on the season of the work and the workload of the house. If both men and women members are available in the house, and the workload is more, then, usually men members participate in the CFUG's activities. In case only women members are available, they need to complete all the HH work before attending the activities.

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

## 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 dried fuel wood, grass, and leaf litter on any day that they require it. There is no cost to collect any of these products. But, no woman has tried to utilize these forest products as an entrepreneurial opportunity. They are just collecting forest products for subsistence needs of their households. In addition, the core area of the Chapani CF is restricted for grazing. The CFUGs have also allocated a watcher to control the grazing. On the other hand, the opportunities accessible to women through several gender-responsive policies and strategies are not implemented effectively in the CFUGs. The women's demand during the GA of 2079 was easily ignored by the executives over the decision of elite men from the same community.

## Income

The CFUG has earned millions of rupees from timber sale outside the CFUG. However, the income has not been mobilized as per the regulatory provisions. A majority of the income has been spent on forest management, institutional and community development activities; however, very less and, in fact, no expenditure is seen in the livelihood improvement activities targeting pro-poor, marginalized and women. Although, several demands of women and other users were collected from the tole meetings, they were not implemented later on. Also, there is less collaboration with the local government while making decisions on fund mobilization because the decision-making time on funds of the local government and the CFUG differs.

In addition, there is still less participation of women in the decision-making of fund mobilization. In the past, with the women-led EC, (since both the chairperson and the treasurer were women), they had certain control over the decision on fund mobilization. However, their decision could not give justice to the poor and marginalized women of the society.

## Leadership

It was found that women who are in the executive committee are engaged in other groups as well, like the women's group, road development committee, school development committee, and others. 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 responsibilities properly as they are illiterate, and because they are too occupied with their household chores and cannot give the needed time to the CFUG activities. Although, 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. Regarding women's leadership, women speak less during meetings and other events, despite others appreciating their participation and encouraging them to speak. Also, decisions in most activities like timber selling, forest management, and such seem to be men dominated in this CFUG. This is happening because women rarely put their voices forward during decision-making as they assume that they lack technical and market-related knowledge.

## Time

Most of the HHs of Chapani CFUG have had trees in their own land, since long ago. Nowadays, they fulfil their basic forest product demands from the private forest for their daily household lives. However, the reduction in livestock rearing in HHs 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 households.

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 conservation of forest has increased the availability of forest products both in CF or PF; while, on the other hand, the reduced dependency on forest resources due to the changing livelihood has reduced the work load, effort and time of women.

## Challenges and opportunities of CF planning and governance

The major challenges and opportunities in the CFUG include:

- The time difference between the local government planning and the CF planning makes it difficult for conducting joint planning and collaboration.
- Resource (fund) uncertainty of the CFUG limits its planning and its ability to gather matching funds to collaborate with the local government planning.
- Migration and changing forest-people relation has decreased the interest among the users in CF activities. Users' unavailability due to migration, time poverty due to engagement in cash-earning activities (opportunity costs are high), and a decline in forest dependency have weakened active forest management and governance (meeting and General Assembly) activities. The transaction costs, therefore, are high and the CFD guidelines' requirements are too demanding.
- Governance issues within the CFUGs, especially in financial transparency and participation
- The migration of the users has also hampered inclusiveness in the EC.
- Changing contexts, migration, and decreasing dependency have impacted the CFUG planning and decision-making process.
- Workload of women and poor capacity (in skills 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's inclusion, empowerment, and participation in CF planning and decision-making.

## Acknowledgement

We would like to express our deepest appreciation to all those who have contributed, from all their possible ways, to shape this case study report. We are grateful to Mrs. Binda Kharel, the ex-chairperson of Chapani Gadidanda CFUG and other executives of the committee who provided us the information to prepare this report.

## Annexes

### Annex 1: 28th General Assembly of Chapani Gadidanda Community Forests Users Group

#### A reflection report

##### Context

General assembly of the CFUGs is the key indicator for analyzing their governance status. As a major and compulsory event, it has been described in operational plans and constitutions of every CFUGs. However, in recent years, conducting such events timely and effectively have been challenging. The CFUGs of Bhumlu-4, Chaubas are a clear illustration of such a complexity. The EnLiFT2 project has been a part of several ward level CFUGs' meetings that local governments (LGs) had organized to plan the general assemblies of the CFUGs on time. The first meeting was conducted on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2021 where all the CFUGs of the ward planned for their assemblies. Chapani Gadidanda, an income generating CFUG was also part of the meeting and scheduled its general assembly for 5<sup>th</sup> October 2022. However, the general assembly could not be conducted on time, the reason being that the audit was not done due to the festivities. The meeting was again called for 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2021, where one of the agendas was to follow up on the progress of the plan prepared on 3<sup>rd</sup> September. During the meeting, the CFUGs reworked their plan, where the Chapani CFUG made a decision to organize its general assembly on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2021. Unfortunately, the event has still not been conducted in most of the income-generating CFUGs, of which Chapani was one.

During the time, the Sub-Division Office (S-DFO) had forwarded two letters on separate dates<sup>1</sup> to the CFUGs mentioning the deadlines to conduct the general assembly. All the efforts to conduct the assembly of the Chapani CFUG went in vain, despite the fact that there was prior estimation done for fallen and dried timbers, and tole meetings of the CFUG for its planning on community-level activities were organized. The delay in organizing the general assembly stood as a barrier for the timely implementation of planned activities in the CFUG. The most common excuse from the CFUG chairperson would be about the availability of committee members or representatives of the local government. As a final attempt, the local government and S-DFO called an urgent meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2022, where the chairperson of the Chapani CFUG was questioned for not holding the general assembly on time. Following the meeting, the chairperson expressed his commitment to conducting the event within a week. Finally, a decision was made to hold the assembly on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2022. The GA was planned to take place in the ward office premises.

Following the invitation, I moved on the very first bus heading to Chaubas on the same day of the event, where I arrived by 12:00 pm. When I reached the venue, many people were already gathered around the venue and some were still coming to attend the event. The chairperson of the CFUG was taking the attendance of the participants. Most interestingly, the community members, mainly youths, who had migrated and had been living in Kathmandu, also participated in the event.

In order to start the event, the organizing team ensured the attendance of at least 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total household members (80 out of 117 HHs). During the time, Assistant Forest Officer (AFO) from Sub-Divisional Forest Officer was helping the committee to prepare the agenda for the meeting and the treasurer from the FECOFUN was supporting in preparing the list of guests to address, and the sequence

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<sup>1</sup> One letter mentioning mid-January and another letter mentioning mid-February as deadline

of the speakers for the formal session. After the quorum was fulfilled, the event started at around 12:30 pm. Mrs. Binda Kharel, chairperson of the Chapani Gadidanda CFUG, chaired the assembly, while Mr. Lok Bahadur Kunwar, chairperson of Bhumlu-4, was the chief guest. Likewise, other guests included the AFO from the S-DFO Chaubas, representatives from FECOFUN Bhumlu, EnLiFT project team members and social workers. The program was hosted by Ms. Mina Pahari, a young lady who had very less experience on conducting the event. She was frequently assisted by the chief guest and other guests throughout the program.

Men dominated the event in terms of the participation where their number was almost three times that of women. Likewise, women participants were seated towards the back, under the shadow of a building. Some of the women participants came drunk to the event.

## Formal Session

The general assembly commenced with a formal setting, with a brief welcome remarks from Mr. Man Bahadur Pahari, vice-chairperson of the CFUG executive committee. Subsequently, the organizer invited all the guests for their remarks, starting from the representative of EnLiFT 2, followed by neighbouring CFUG, FECOFUN, S-DFO, Chairperson of Bhumlu-4 (Chief Guest) and the chair of the event. Ms. Sarada Tiwari, from EnLiFT 2 and also a FECOFUN representative, briefly shared about the project, the organization, and the ongoing efforts to manage the forests situated in ward 4 and 5 in a collective approach i.e. through Salle Chaubas Forest Management Committee (SCFMC).



*Figure 2: Chief Guest of the assembly and Chairperson of Ward 4 giving his speech*

One of the speakers from the neighbouring CFUG expressed his frustrations towards the legal procedures and authoritative nature of the government officials. In response, one of the AFOs explained that it was their responsibility and institutional mandate to carry out such a service. The AFO also highlighted the existing policy provisions related to community forestry and also requested the users not to underestimate the intangible benefits of the forest. Along with this, he requested the users to realize the practical complications on CFUG's governance due to unaccountable executives (often named as tourist executives by local people) before selecting the new ones. However, some users were not satisfied with the claim as they had been living in Kathmandu and were still willing to engage as new executives.

*"You can't say like that. Where has it been written that only a person who lives in village can be in the executive committee?"*- said Raju Tamang, a user living in Kathmandu.

The chief guest of the assembly, on the other hand, expressed his dissatisfaction regarding the governance of the CFUGs, despite multiple efforts laid by the local government to improve them. He also emphasized the role of the users to resolve the existing issues within the CFUG through their problem solving attitude rather than exacerbating the situation.

It was observed that at instance, there were personal egos among the participants which were reflected clearly on the basis of their institutional affiliations. Some speakers became the target of such ego in the assembly. During the speech of Mr. Khadga Kharel, of Chaubas FECOFUN, participants of the assembly started a side-talk, saying, "The general assembly of the Chapani CF happened at the end of the year. Where was FECOFUN? Why could it not conduct the assembly on time?" Later on, it was found out that Mr. Kharel was being blamed for merging the private lands of the users within the CF boundary, and was intentionally questioned in the name of the organization despite the joint effort made by FECOFUN and other stakeholders to make the assembly happen on time.

### **Financial Status of the Chapani Gadidanda CFUG**

In the absence of the treasurer, the chairperson herself decided to share the financial report of the CFUG. She also explained that the GA was delayed as other executives could not manage their time. In the meantime, users started raising question on her role as the executive. Despite of having the authority to replace the executives under several conditions, the committee could not implement it.

*"There is a provision that if any executive member is not able to attend three regular meetings of the EC, the committee can decide to replace him/her. But why such a right has not been implemented by the committee? Why time management issue of the executives has become the reason for a delayed GA?"*- said Ashok Lama, user of the CFUG. Showing his frustration, he added, *"Not any development have happened from the CF. There is very much negligence happening in the committee."*

However, she managed to share the details of the income and expenditure of the CFUG. During the time, the Chairperson of the ward also requested to listen to the report first and question later.

As timber is the major source of income of the CFUG, its contribution accounted for more than 98% of the total income in the fiscal year 2077/78. In fact, it has been the only source of income of the year. Similarly, it was found out that out of the total expenditure, 60% was spent on forest management activities like tree harvesting, tagging, estimation of fallen timbers, and so on; 33% on community development activities like drinking water; and the remaining 7% on institutional development activities like audit, and other costs incurred during the general assembly. Currently, there is a fund of NRs. 12 lakhs and 24 thousand available and stocked in the bank account of the CFUG (see Annex I).

It was found out that some users were not satisfied with the selection of the community development project. Apparently, there has been a mismatch in terms of constructing infrastructure in the community. *"There is a drinking water tank in the area where there is no water and no water tank in the area where water is available,"* said a user.

## Planning

The chairperson of the CFUG shared the plan for the upcoming year. The plan has addressed the demands of the users collected during the tole meetings. However, the plan appeared to merely list the activities without any budget division and categorization as per the existing Forest Act 2019. The list included activities like support for goat keeping, allocating forest guard, nursery management to promote high value crops, initiate mobile fund service for small-scale loans, allowance for users who support controlling forest fire, skill-development trainings, allocating treatment cost for those who get injured while controlling forest fire, and the collection of fallen timbers.

Out of these activities, there were also some other demands from the community which the committee had received:

1. Demand application from school for supporting the annual salary of one teacher, i.e. 5 lakhs 40 thousands to initiate an intermediate level class.
2. Net support in the landslide at Chhordelmane construction site - Rs. 5 lakhs
3. Karmako Dhara drinking water - Rs. 2 lakhs
4. Technical person for Salle Chaubas Forest Management Committee – Rs. 25 thousands

## Users' attitude and responses

Since new faces were seen in the event, FECOFUN representatives suspected whether they were participating only to hamper the event. When the users started raising questions, the situation started to get out of control as there was a lot of noise from the participants. Mr. Khadga Kharel from FECOFUN requested anyone who had an issue, to appear in the front of forum and ask questions along with their introduction in a peaceful manner; but, it was not followed by all. Users were questioning the executive members for not being able to share the progress of the year, tenure period of the executives, financial issues of past executives and boundary issues between private forests and community forests (see Annex II). Some users were sceptical towards the executives regarding financial transaction and audit report (see figure 2) and were asking to share the bills and receipts of the financial expenditures as well.



Figure 3: Users studying audit report

Some women participants who were drunk, on the other hand, were complaining about the committee for not supporting them on goat farming.

It is very true that one should always walk on the other's shoes before judging them. A user who is in a leadership position of the neighbouring CFUG was defending the complaints against the executive of Chapani. "*The problem during one's tenure should be solved within his/her tenure. The burden should not be handed over along with tenure which hamper the progress of other executives too. Now, we are discussing on the financial issue of the previous EC. How logical are we at this point?*"-said Karna Bahadur Tamang, executive of the Lakuri Rukh Bhulbhule CFUG and user of Chapani as well.

## Local Government's role in the assembly

After the situation at the event became heated, the chairperson of the ward and the chief guest of the event intervened and facilitated the sessions. The chief guest floated some points as a way out in resolving the contested issues:

- a. The three membered sub-committee with the compulsory representation of one woman was formed to investigate the financial transaction of the committee and the sub-committee was asked to submit the report within a week. The report of the investigation was also asked to explain and approve conducting another GA soon.
- b. To resolve the boundary issue between the private forest and the CF, users who claim their land encroached by the CF boundary have been asked to submit their application along with a map, land ownership document, and citizenship of the claimer within a month to EC. After all the applications are received, the EC has been asked to approach LG and S-DFO for further proceedings.
- c. The chairperson also facilitated preparing a plan of activities that can be completed by the end of the current fiscal year. The plan includes:
  - Since the estimation of fallen timbers has already been completed, its approval and harvesting procedures will be conducted after this assembly.
  - "*Michelia champaka*" seedlings will be planted in the CF for which seedling and technical support will be requested with the EnLiFT project.
  - As per the application request, Rs. 5 lakhs 40 thousand will be allocated for salary of one teacher to start an intermediate level education in the school nearby
  - As per the request of the Salle Chaubas Forest Management Committee, Rs. 25,000 will be supported for its operation.
  - Another plan of activity possible to be conducted within this fiscal year (before June/July 2022) will be decided in collaboration with the LG, FECOFUN, S-DFO and EnLiFT.
- d. The three membered sub-committee out of the EC were appointed at last to write the minute of the assembly. Such a sub-committee would have been formed earlier so that the representatives would have observed and listened to the discussion sincerely, so that manipulation in the decision would not happen.

The chairperson also facilitated the formation of a new executive committee of the CFUG.

## Selection of new executives

### A. Gender Representation

The new executives' selection process should have been open to all participants to make it more participatory and inclusive. However, the process went so narrow that neither was there any space for

voice nor any chance for consideration. While the chairperson was asking the participants to select the new executives, Mr. Raju Tamang came with the written name list of the executives and submitted it to the chairperson. While opening the folded paper, the chairperson asked-"Have your committee included the representatives from all the toles? Have your committee included 50% women's representation?" Later on, it was found out that the name list of 11 representatives was submitted, of which only 2 were women. After knowing this, the chairperson asked them to ensure the representation of 50% women representatives.

He said- "*You have proposed an 11-membered committee, of which 50% means 5.5. It doesn't matter if one less woman representative is on the committee. It means that out of 11, 5 women representatives would be fine.*"



Figure 4: Ward chairperson welcoming the new executives

No matter how much the male leaders encourage for women's representation and participation at the decision making level, such statements still proves that the space for women's participation still is under the control and decision of elites, primarily men. The situation gets more controlling when women themselves remain silent and agree with the voice of the elites. Later on, the eleven-membered executives were selected where 6 were women. Knowing this, when the chairperson said-"*Here are more women representatives now* (oFxf t dlxf k|ltglw w|} eP5g\ lg t !)", the committee immediately replaced the name of Dhanapati Lama, with her husband's name Jayaram Lama not to exceed 50% women's representation. At last eleven membered executives with six men and five women were finalized.

## B. Inclusiveness

During the time, the internal conflict among ethnic groups was clearly visible. The representatives from the Tamang community were trying to exclude members from the Brahmin/Chhetri community. They were personally selecting representatives and referring their names despite of making the forum open to participate. Despite the fact that the chairperson of the Ward (Mr. Lok Bahadur Kunwar) himself read

the list of proposed executives, he didn't respond on the exclusion of Brahmin/Chhetri groups from the committee. Other several guests like Mr. Khadga Kharel from FECOFUN, Mr. Dek Bahadur Kunwar as a social worker, Ms. Binda Kharel from the EC, who were also users of the CFUG and local residents, were watching the crowd in front of the assembly. But not one of them raised their voice for including Brahmin/Chhetri in the committee. However, the committee has included the Dalit representation, despite the fact that they were chosen irrespective of their interest.

Few users on the other side of the crowd, overlooking the exclusion, were saying - "*the one who can actively participate in controlling forest fire should be in the executives*".

### **C. Interest**

More than an interest on sustainable management of forest resources and institutional development to ensure equitable benefit sharing, personal motive had driven few users to be in the leadership position. Some of the newly appointed CF executives have the main motive of resolving the existing boundary issue between private lands and CF. The current vice-chairperson of the EC said- "*I don't have other interests for being in the EC. I am just here because my land has been encroached by the CF.*"

### **Status of women leaders in CFUG (How challenging is it to be a woman leader?)**

While women are trusted more for their honesty at the beginning, women leaders are later treated sceptically throughout their tenure in leadership positions of financially rich institutions. Such an attitude makes her job challenging, especially when she alone, despite having a team, has to bear the overall responsibility of the communal resources. In the absence of a treasurer, when the chairperson herself prepared and presented the financial report, several participants were skeptic and questioned her on several aspects. Users were also questioning the audit report prepared by a registered auditor and were demanding clarification from the auditor. In addition, she was blamed for the EC being unmanaged and superficial.

However, the chairperson tried to address the dissatisfaction expressed by the users and explained her struggles as a woman executive. The trust lacking among users and other executives, dissuading attitude of the government officials towards women executives in the past, the overall workload of the CFUG in the single-arm, and such, had all made it difficult for her to manage the institutional and CF activities on time.

*"I have been requesting all the executives several times to be regular in the CF events. I have also been explaining all the details of the CF's transactions to them. Still, they don't give their time. This CFUG is not only the responsibility of the chairperson."*-said Binda Kharel, Chairperson of the CFUG. She added- "*While I became the chairperson of this CFUG, I also thought of making things better as I believed that I have a team. But I realized that the committee was formed only to fulfill the quorum and individual effort is not enough. The upcoming team will realize how challenging being a leader is. In addition, everyone had thought, even I had thought, that women's leadership could improve the forest and governance situation of the CFUG, but I didn't receive sufficient support from the committee as well as from the DFO.*"

The lack of trust and support towards her, as she explained, seemed realistic when the situation went clamorous. Users started side talks ignoring her words and her struggle. "*An auditor should have been presented here along with bills and receipts. We, otherwise, will not accept it.*"- Comment passed by a user. Several times, she requested the users to be calm. However, it was hard for her to manage the situation alone. Lately, the chairperson of the ward had to handle the assembly to control the situation.

## Annex 2: 29th General Assembly of Chapani Gadidanda CFUG- A Reflection Report- 3rd Sep 2022

### Background (including about the current chairperson)

The 29th General Assembly (GA) of the Chapani Gadidanda CFUG was conducted in the Ward office of Bhumlu 4, Chaubas on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2022. This was the first GA of the reformed EC (EC that was reformed in 28th GA of March 2022). The EC seemed active towards improving the forest management and governance since their formation. They were doing these all somehow to show to Brahmin/Chhetri (especially Kunwar) that Tamang can lead the CFUG better than them. Even after the reformation of EC in previous (28th) GA, that excluded Kunwars, the executives were found to be happily saying -" *Finally we seized the forest from Kunwars.*" Whatever the reason, at the end the institution was active. The meetings of the CFUG were happening regularly, the GA and audit was happening on time, the CFUG was also gaining income from the timber sale, they also did plantation in the forest, and so on.

As per the invitation of the CF chairperson, I (from EnLiFT) participated the 29<sup>th</sup> GA of the CFUG. The assembly was participated by the LG representatives, FECOFUN chair, local elites, and other users. The ward chairperson who used to attend the GAs of this CFUG was absent in this one due to his compulsion to attend other events, or maybe, we can say, the existing EC didn't comply to the event in accordance to the time of the ward chair, as the previous EC used to do. Comparatively, less participants participated in the assembly than before. A majority (almost all) of the users were from the Tamang and Dalit groups. However, a few were from the Brahmin/Chhetri group, who were either representing the LG or FECOFUN. There was no one from the S-DFO. It was found that the CF chair had officially invited the AFO and foresters from the S-DFO, but no one was present. Even 8 executives (4 men and 4 women) out of 11 (6 men and 5 women) were present in the assembly. The event started at around 12:00 pm and was hosted by a young lady, who was an internee in the ward office as a junior veterinary technician. The secretary of the CFUG supported her to host the event.

### Formal Session/Speeches

The chairperson of the CFUG chaired the assembly. All the guests of the event were seated in the front row facing the users. The formal session started with the national anthem, followed by the speeches of the guests. In case of speech, it was not as before where all the guest spoke before the closing of the formal session. Important sharing like financial reports, progress reports, users demand, and such were



included in between the speeches of the guest within this session. The event maintained the system that users who have questions should provide their name to the organizer committee (executives) before raising the questions. The person who provides her or his name was also announced as a speaker at the event. I must say that this system reduced the noisy environment in the assembly. However, it affected those users, especially women, who used to speak even through the side talks - some issues which might have been related to CF and CFUG. They remained silent all the time in the assembly.

The speech of the guest started with the FECOFUN chair (Mr. Khadga Kharel), who congratulated the CFUG for timely conducting the GA and wished for the effective functioning of them in the coming days. Also, as a user of the CFUG, he requested the executive to support in sanitation program around water spring fencing the historical stone "nagdhunga" *"Beside FECOFUN chair, I am also a user of this CFUG. I have already consulted with the chairperson and also provided my written application. I request you to consider my application as well."*-he said. After the speech of the LG representative (Mr. Dhruba Kunwar), the chief guest of the event also wished for the successful completion of the GA and also expected that the CF's income would be mobilized effectively. *"I hope the CF's income will fulfill the demand of the local users. I request you to learn from our neighboring CFs and set an example in front of them."*- said Mr. Kunwar.

## Progress of Reformed EC

After the speech, the secretary presented the progress report of the CFUG where plantation in the support of EnLiFT (seedling support), collection of fallen trees and their sale, and such were the major activities conducted after their tenure started. It was sounding like they were requesting users to compare themselves with the previous EC and praise them for their performance. The chair on the side whispered with the FECOFUN chair - *"Previous EC could not do these and we did in such a short time."*

The CFUG harvested 4,832.5 cft of timber and sold them at Rs. 121 per cft of timber and Rs. 150 per cft as harvesting cost. Meanwhile a user from the group (he had drunk alcohol) was shouting *"People received just Rs. 35 per cft while harvesting the timber. But here you are mentioning Rs. 111 per cft. Who took the remaining money?"* The secretary ignored his question and continued sharing the progress report. After he finished his report, he shared the financial report too since the treasurer was absent at the assembly. One of the users, Mr. Ashok Lama had submitted his name to ask a question. He was asked by the host to provide his inquiry; he responded - *"In the last GA, a decision was made and a sub-committee was formed to investigate the financial transactions of the previous EC, the findings of which would be shared conducting a special assembly (bishesh sabha). When was that investigation done? What were the findings and when was the special assembly conducted? We need its answer now."* After this question, the chairperson came in front and said - *"We did the investigation and we have kept the documents that we received from the previous EC here (showing the desk) in the table. You can check it."* After that, the questioner took and checked the financial documents in detail. Few interested users (no women) came and surrounded him to observe the documents. He found that the previous EC had spent money using the fake signature of the recipient. He, showing the signature of Netra Kunwar, said *"I have worked with Netra uncle for many years. Haven't I known how his signature looks like? I am sure that this is not his signature. Also, while I was in EC, I myself have collected more than mentioned here from the distribution of tender application. Where is the money gone?"* Some users on the side were saying-*"Now, we should file the case."*

## Elite capture on decision making

On the other side, the executives were requesting users to concentrate on the planning of income mobilization while few were looking after the documents. Accordingly, the secretary of the CFUG started reading the demand applications received from users one by one. He also said that the CFUG have to allocate Rs. 25,000 for the cluster mechanism. The demand of the users were: drinking water supply pipe, drinking water tank, trail, cleanliness program around traditional tap (dhunge dhara), maintenance of historical stone, and so on. Applicants were both men and women as listed in the application. After reading all the applications, the chairperson tried to convince the users on allocating the CF's income for the community building/CF building, whatever the demand is. He said- "*I have been coordinating with other agencies and political leaders to allocate funds for the building. If we also could allocate certain money from our side, it would be nice.*" One of the elite (Mr. Ramesh Ghimire- who used to be appointed as acting chairperson in the absence of the chairperson of the CFUG) stood up, came in front and stepped aside the applications of the users and asked the secretary to allocate all the CF's fund (Rs. 25 lakhs) to the CF building. "*Currently, nothing is more important than the CF building here. Allocate Rs. 25 lakhs in it.*" During that time, even those who had submitted the applications didn't raise their voices. It became like "finding eyes by the blinds (*k khojchas kano aakho bhanejhai bhayo*)" to the secretary and the chairperson. They immediately agreed without taking the consent of the users present in the assembly. Meanwhile, the users were frequently raising the questions regarding the CF-PF boundary conflict.

## Timber governance

After that, they started sharing about the transportation of timber. They shared that the release permit has been provided by the DFO, so that the contractors will be transporting those timbers soon. During that time, Mr. Ashok Lama shared that he had seen the contractors felling some trees two/three days earlier and when he was passing by the forest to attend the GA, he saw the piled logs of freshly felled trees. When he asked the contractor, they said that those timber trees which were affecting the road for transportation were felled. But, in reality, those trees were not in the space that could affect the road. In fact, the timbers were quite far from the road. "*What is all this happening? Who will answer it? The transportation of the timber should be stopped unless the one involved in fresh harvesting is punished as per the law.*" The executives behaved as if they didn't know anything. The secretary said- "*I was not in the forest for the last few days due to my personal work. I don't know what has happened there. We will visit there after this event and discuss on what to do.*"

The closing remarks was then provided by the chairperson of the CFUG and every participant was provided Rs. 200 for participating in the GA, as snacks cost. After the completion of the GA, the chairperson of the CFUG shared with a few users- "*We didn't receive release permit from the DFO until we paid them 20%. They directly asked us for the payment.*"

I waited there a long while to observe what the executives will do for the case happening in the field. They were waiting for all the participants of the GA to return and finally, few executives went to the forest. I with the forest technician of the cluster also went to the forest. We saw that trees that would not affect the transportation were also felled. It was said that even tagging has been done in the logs, but they were not distinct as timbers were very freshly harvested. Even the person who engaged in tagging was not an authentic person. He was an intern at the S-DFO. According to him, he has tagged those fresh timbers too. A total of 132 logs were prepared and piled nearby the piling of the collected fallen timber. After that, it made some noise in the forest. Few were asking to file the case against the executive who was responsible for the monitoring during harvesting. What surprised me the most was

the person who complained about it in the GA and was asking for the punishment, later on was asking for compensation and was in favor of transportation of those timber with the consent. During their discussion, what I closely observed is the ethnic disparity. The person who complained was a Tamang and an executive who took the responsibility to monitor the harvesting was also a Tamang. When the discussion went on behalf of legal action by the Brahmin/Chhetri elite, the complainer changed his voice to manage things at the local level.

### **About the chairperson of the CFUG**

The current chairperson of the CFUG used to live abroad (UK) since several years. Few months before the previous GA of the CFUG, he came to Nepal to establish himself in the political spaces of the LG. He started maintaining his image in the village first by personally investing in community activities like temple- construction. Then, he put his candidacy for the chairperson of the CFUG which was highly supported by the economic elites of his ethnic groups (youths living in Kathmandu). During the 28<sup>th</sup> GA, those elites were present, in front of which other users could not cross their proposal on the new executives. It was found that in order to become the chairperson of the CFUG, he was influencing the users by showing the temptation to give away the private lands that have been incorporated currently in the community forests. After he became the chairperson of the CFUG, he tried to give his candidacy for the chairperson of the palika (Bhumlu rural municipality) in the local election but didn't receive the ticket. It has also been heard that he is now targeting for candidacy in the federal election.

After becoming the chairperson, he often used to live in Kathmandu but has handed over the responsibility to the secretary and one of his neighbors (local elite but not a CF executive). He was also frustrated since his expectation regarding the CF activities and users' support was not fulfilled. In one meeting at Baneshwor (The Bakery Cafe), he said- *"I am now frustrated regarding the CF. I had thought this thing would be easy when I would come to a leadership position. But, the reality was far different. Users only participate to support if there is some incentive. No one wants to voluntarily engage these days. Even forest officials are not flexible as I have thought. I am desperate to leave this committee."*

## Annex 3: Community meeting at the Chapani CFUG

The committee organized three tole level meetings on the same day. As planned, all three tole meetings (Pokhari tole, Pindanda tole and Bazar tole) were successfully conducted. Like in Dharapani, the chairperson of the Chapani CFUG also led all three meetings with the support of EnLiFT's representatives in facilitation. The main aim of conducting the tole meetings was explained by the chairperson. EnLiFT representatives also explained the provisions mentioned in the OPs regarding CF's fund mobilization. Participants were asked individually to share the issues their community was facing and how they can be addressed by the CFUG's fund. There was a total of 19 lakhs in funds saved in the name of the CFUGs.



### Pokhari tole

The tole meeting of Pokhari tole was conducted with 23 participants (19 men and 4 women). The meeting was called for 8:00am. However, it started at around 9:00am. Participants suggested the EC to maintain transparency while mobilizing CF's funds. The chairperson committed to conduct periodic tole meetings of the CFUG, where updates on CF activities, CF's income and further plans can be discussed.

Individual participants were asked to share their expectations from the CF and the CFUG's income, and following demands were raised by the participants:

- Support for goat farming
- Manage forest watcher to control the risk of forest fire and grazing
- Support for nursery establishment and management
- Support for turkeys farming
- Road construction
- Bachal Devi temple construction
- Support for vegetables farming
- Support for incomplete irrigation work
- Support for electric pole

## Pindanda tole

The meeting of pindanda tole was conducted after completing the meeting of pokhari tole. A total of 25 participants (17 men and 8 women) were present during the meeting. The meeting was called for 11 am. However, since the meeting of pokhari tole started late and accomplished lately, the meeting at Pindanda took time to start. It was found that some users returned back to their work due to the delay in conducting the meeting.

Like in previous tole meetings, participants were asked to share their expectation individually and following demands were collected from the meeting:

- Construction of drinking water tank (Karmadhara)
- Devasthan maintenance
- Pipeline in Gahiritole
- Revolving fund support for agriculture and livestock based livelihood activities
- Incentive for forest fire controllers from users group
- Incense stick preparation training

## Bazar tole

The tole meeting of Bazar tole was conducted on the same day. The meeting was called for 3 pm for the users of Bazar tole. However, it started at around 3:30pm due to late arrival of the users. After the chairperson of the CFUG described the motive of conducting the tole meeting, the discussion on issues of the users started, and the participants shared their issues turn by turn.

Following were the demands collected from the meeting:

- Drinking water pipeline from Dharapani to Bazartole and Bazartole to Padidanda
- Drinking water tank construction in Hiledanda and pipeline supply to the users of Yakpatole
- Support for goat farming (Yakpatole)
- Skills development training for women like candle making, tailoring, and so on
- Forest watcher allocation to control grazing. (Forest watcher was allocated by the CFUG since three-four months but it was found that he was allowing users of the Chapani CFUG to graze their livestock, while restricting the users of other CFUGs. While asking this question to the chairperson, she replied "We have not asked him to do so. His responsibility is to restrict every user for grazing. Maybe, he is considering the practicality too." Later on, it was found that the forest watcher is the representative of the EC of Chapani.)
- First aid and treatment costs for users who engage in forest fire control

### ***Overall Key Observations from the tole meetings of the Chapani-CFUG***

- It was found that such tole meetings were conducted for the first time by the committee.
- The chairperson was found to be happy and satisfied with the support from the EnLiFT project on conducting the tole meetings. At the same time, the chairperson was in a hurry to complete the meeting as three meetings were organized on the same day.
- Several questions were raised by the participants regarding the performance of the ECs. They showed their dissatisfaction with the performance of the EC. "We have not found the EC

conducting any meetings. We don't know what the EC has done till today."-said a user. Another user added- "I have seen people randomly harvesting timber for HHs' purposes; but, despite having trees in my own land, I still have not been able to harvest them yet" (PF\_CF boundary issue). What is the EC looking after? (|dlt s] x]/ al;/fv]sf] 5?)"

- The most surprising part of the meeting was that even the other executive members were raising questions to the chairperson. (It was found that users perceive CF and CFUG as the responsibility of the EC, whereas the representatives perceive it as the responsibility of the chairperson only.) Mr. Janak Lama, a member of the EC asked- "I have also seen people harvesting trees from the forest. But I cannot say the name here. What is the EC looking after?" Then, the EnLiFT representatives said- "You are also an executive of the committee and it is your responsibility too to control such illegal activities. Your committee might have some rules and a system of punishment. You can also act accordingly. In fact, all members should be aware of it." He easily replied- "I don't know any such rule. I am saying what I have seen (v} cfkm"nfO{ To:tf s'/f yxf 5]g, d)n] t b]v]sf] s'/f eGb]sf] xf] .) The chairperson replied- "You should have brought such issues at the committee meeting, but you never shared such things there."
- Participants from all the tole have built a perception that CF is only the responsibility of the executive committee and the committee should act upon every issue of the CF. (While discussing on forest fire issues, the representatives from EnLiFT asked a question, "What is your response during forest fire?" One participant replied, "We don't go to control it because no EC member asks us to participate to control the forest fire. First, they have to call us. Then, only we will go." However, the EnLiFT representatives tried to convince the participants that the forest does not only belong to the EC members and until and unless the users participate proactively in forest resource conservation and management, the EC only cannot make it better. For such a statement from EnLiFT, the chairperson realized the supportive attitude of the project (according to the response of the chairperson herself).
- We observed more complain regarding boundary issues between CF and PFs. This issue, if not resolved on time, can be serious in CF management in the coming days.
- Women participation was very low in Pokhari tole and Pindanda tole (both in number and voice). They remained silent all the time, even in asking about their issues individually during the meeting.
- The meetings' minute of all tole meetings was written by the chairperson herself. She was in a hurry to complete the minute than to engage deeply, so as to explore the issues of the users. She didn't explain the current capacity of the CFUG's fund to address the issues, such as, what kind of issues of the users can be addressed, what sort of issues will be less prioritized, and how they will be addressed in the future. This may raise the expectation of all the users. As such, the representatives from EnLiFT have also explained the users not to be highly optimistic with all the issues they have shared, since they will be prioritized by the EC according to the financial capacity of the CFUG and the place to coordinate (such as with the local government). But, less prioritized issues will eventually be addressed from the CF's income of next year. However, optimism should not be reduced to achieve sustainable annual cycle of forest product harvest, income generation, income mobilization, and user's active participation in CF management.

## **Annex 4: Planning meeting of EC (Chapani CFUG)**

As per the communication with the chairperson, Binda Kharel, a planning meeting was set from 8am in morning on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021. Two of the Executive members (treasurer and member) had already signed in an attendance register book and gone for their personal work before we discussed the tole-level issues and demands at the meeting. We started a planning meeting with five EC member participants where everyone was in a hurry for his or her personal household works. We listed out community-level demands according to the OP guidelines and shared among the present EC participants. There was no further discussion on community-level demands, finalization of audits, and the general assembly.