Project Update: September 2012

Study site

The Balajhar community forest is situated in the Dhanusha district of the eastern part of Nepal. The study site is situated between 085059' 24.1 E and 26057' 24.5 N. The community forests have an area of 199 ha. *Shorea robusta*, *Dalbergia sissoo* and *Bombax* sp. were the major dominating tree species of this forest.

Primary data collection

The field survey was conducted in August 2012 for the collection of primary data. The field method consisted of: (a) focus group discussion; (b) household survey; and (c) interview with Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) members.

Focus group discussion

Focus group discussion was carried out among Community forest users group (CFUGs) to explain about the objectives of the study, to develop the basic understanding of the geography and to establish rapport with them. Key informants who have knowledge about the issues were requested to prepare a community participatory map. Prominent features of the landscape such as border of the forest, river ridge, trail and major area of resource collection, etc., were located in the map. The collected information will be later used for the categorisation of forest with different disturbance gradients. The result of the focus group showed that high caste and wealthy people influence the meeting and decision.

Household survey

Altogether 25% of the total households were selected for the questionnaire survey. The survey included documentation of the ecosystem services provided to household, forest products (fuelwood, fodder, litter and timber) needed and collected by each household in a year, participation of household for forest protection and management activities, participation in the decision making process for the management and utilisation of forest resources, etc. The selection of the household was made considering the caste, gender, wealth of the household and family size. The household survey indicated that the villagers collect major forest products like fallen branches and twigs; big sized branches and boles (which comes after harvesting operation during forest management activities) as fuelwood, grass as fodder, leaf litter for fertiliser, *Shorea robusta* leaf for the preparation of plates (locally: Tapari and Duna), agricultural tools and non timber forest products (lemon grass, citronella, etc.). The mean annual fuelwood collection per household fluctuates according to household and the village. The requirement increases during the winter season and decreases in summer season. The result revealed that the average annual air dried fuelwood consumption rate per household was 3300 kg-1 hh-1 a-1.

Interview with CFUGs members

CFUGs were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaire. The interview was carried out to know the quantity of forest products distributed in a year and to compare the provision made in the management plan. The outcome of the result will help to find out the reality for the implementation of the management plan. Furthermore, the interview data helped to find out the

involvement of various groups (gender, caste, wealth, etc.) of people in decision-making process and forest management and utilisation activities. The result showed that CFUGs have the set of forest management plan (FMP) for the protection, management and utilization of forest resources. The forest management plan works under several major topics: (a) formation of CFUGs; (b) conservation of wildlife; (c) fines against violation of constitution; (d) sales and distribution of forest resources; (e) fund mobilisation for the management of forest; and (f) identification of duties and responsibilities of CFUGs. According to the FMP, the collection of grass, leaf litter and dry twigs are free of cost. However, the members have to pay for firewood from big branches, timber and agricultural tools. Similarly, grazing and hunting is prohibited in the forest. Illegal harvesting of the trees and sign of grazing in the forest was observed during the field survey.